Experimenting with Commons: Management of Semi-Public Urban Spaces

There is a global trend going on, of people willing to work for their own happiness without waiting for god or the governments to serve it fresh on a plate. That may represent a drive for people to reclaim what belongs to them, all together, the streets in which they live. And second, a new sense or desire to build a community. We have gone so far in individualism that we have forgotten our true human nature to live in community. New generations of today sense that and they build and do things accordingly. We can say that the willingness of people to cooperate within a group in order to reach common benefits is a trend describing today's society.

Empirical evidence (Poklembová, 2013) has outlined that the effectiveness of public space management proportionally depends on the degree of community involvement. Semi-public spaces represent a subcategory of public spaces. While public spaces are in the commons theory regarded as common-pool resources, semi-public spaces as shared resources present a very specific combination of private and common property regimes, resulting into a social dilemma. Users have stronger relations and demands towards these spaces. However, they face similar problems of resource degradation, overuse, free-riders or conflicts between actors. Decision-making is confronted by the clash of individual and collective interests. This shows that the ability of actors to cooperate within smaller groups has to be supported by new tools. Since the degree of self-management is generally higher and actors are provided by stronger competences, the need for rule-establishment more emergent. Institutional arrangements are in this context crucial for collective action.

Current management systems require multi-level solutions, involving all relevant stakeholders into the creation, management and maintenance of the shared space. Due to a very specific institutional environment in CEE countries, caused by dramatic changes of regimes within the past decades, applications of self-governing bottom-up approaches are a challenging issue. Actors tend to promote individual interests, since collectiveness was enforced during the past regime. As a result, people still do not perceive collective action as an approach towards better life in the cities. It is hard to identify a comprehensive framework that would guide all self-governing groups to work efficiently and correctly (Dietz, 2003). The theory of CPRs – exploring all that we share - offers several ideas and a comprehensive set of design principles for robust governance, developed by Ostrom (1990), which describe groups that are able to organize and govern their behavior successfully. These principles measure the effectiveness of regimes and provide a tool for analyzing self-governing groups in real cases. Collective action within semi-public spaces is fundamental and to some extent it is possible to apply common-pool resource (CPR) principles to the management of these spaces.

Behavioural approaches aim to determine and model empirically how individuals and groups make choices. They attempt to examine how

incentives and institutions affect decisions. The significance of game theory in social sciences has also been recognised by being awarded Nobel Prize for Economics in 1994, 2005 and 2009. The importance of behavioural approaches is dramatically increasing in the present complex and globalised world as they are capable of addressing issues under the uncertainty and multiple agent arenas of choice facing conflicts of interests (Mc Ginnis et al. 2000). Studies of typical problems of social dilemmas associated with public goods and common pool resources can find direct application in resource and environmental governance (Ostrom, Gardner and Walker 1994). The compelling reason for the application of the experimental approach to environmental and natural resource problems is the interdependence of agents, their actions and strategies (Dinar et al. 2008).

The main objective of the paper is to demonstrate if and how behavioural approaches based on experimental techniques could substantially contribute to the governance of the natural and urban commons and to the design of effective management strategies under the given complexity, multiple actors and decision-making levels. We are focusing on sustainable management models of shared semi-public spaces, applying CPR principles, using experimental approaches to examine how incentives and institutions affect decisions. We consider experiments as a reliable way to test these new ideas for effective self-governance across the scale. An experimental model will be developed, in which members of the community as users of the shared space represent actors, and semi-public space represents the action arena. Relationships between actors, awareness and responsibilities towards the space are key variables. The experiment should primarily examine the contribution of an individual (actor) to something, which is collective (shared space). Ostrom's (1990) eight design principles will create the internal framework of the management model, while the effect of externalities will test its robustness in terms of urban environment. The experimental approach explores the behavior of local actors in simulated situations, when they share a common resource, from which they obtain individual and collective benefits. The role of rule creation and communication is examined from the perspective how it affects the decisions of actors and the quality of the resource. To understand the motivations of actors in these simulated situations under certain changing rules should provide a complex view on the design of management models.

Studies of typical problems of social dilemmas associated with public goods and common pool resources can find direct application in resource and environmental governance. An experimental design of common-pool resource game follows the common-pool resource experiment developed in pen and paper and lab version (Janssen et al. 2013). Members of the community as users of the shared space represent actors, and semi-public space represents the action arena. Key research questions whether communication improves group performance and a good "governing of urban commons"? In what way can spatial and ecological dynamics affect outcomes of decision-making and the co-evolution of ecosystems and institutions across the scale? The experiment should primarily examine conflicts of individual and collective

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