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Front cover photography: Common lands, like the pastures around Čadrg, reflect socio-economic change in the landscape. Their conservation and successful management are crucial for preserving local culture and biodiversity and supporting sustainable development (photograph: Jure Tičar).

Fotografija na naslovnici: Skupna zemljišča, kot so pašniki v okolici Čadrga, so odsev družbeno-gospodarskih sprememb v pokrajini. Njihovo vzdrževanje in uspešno upravljanje sta nujni za ohranjanje lokalne kulture ter biotske raznovrstnosti in zagotavljanje trajnostnega razvoja (fotografija: Jure Tičar).

COMMONS, COLLECTIVE ACTIONS AND LANDSCAPES: A SHORT INTRODUCTION

Mimi Urbanc, Keiko Hori, Mateja Šmid Hribar



MIMI URBANC

The Tegošče Pasture in the Karawanks in NW Slovenia is an example of food commons.

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Mimi Urbanc¹, Keiko Hori², Mateja Šmid Hribar¹

Commons, collective actions and landscapes: A short introduction

ABSTRACT: In the face of worldwide population growth, increasingly intensive agriculture, depopulation of marginal and less favoured areas, and growing rural-urban migration, two contrasting trends are becoming more pronounced: land abandonment on one hand and intensification of agricultural land on the other hand. Considering the complexity of mentioned issues, which result in landscape impoverishment, biodiversity loss, and a decline in crucial ecosystem services, it is essential to prioritise sustainable governance and management of landscapes and natural resources. Alternative approaches are needed to address these challenges. In this special issue, we focus on the potentials of commons and collective actions in sustaining landscape management and natural resource governance. The term »commons« refers to the way communities collectively manage local resources. Collective action refers to the coordinated efforts and cooperation of a community.

KEY WORDS: sustainable governance, management, landscapes, natural resources, alternative approaches, commons, collective actions

Skupno, skupnostne prakse in pokrajine: kratek uvod

POVZETEK: Zaradi rasti prebivalstva na globalni ravni, vse bolj intenzivnega kmetijstva, praznjenja obrobnih in za življenje manj ugodnih območij ter naraščajočih selitev s podeželja v mesta sta vse bolj izrazita dva nasprotujoča si trenda: opuščanje zemljišč na eni strani in povečanje intenzivnosti kmetijstva na drugi strani. Upoštevač kompleksnost omenjenih problemov, ki vodijo v siromašenje pokrajine, izgubo biotske raznovrstnosti in upadanje bistvenih ekosistemskih storitev, je jasno, da sta trajnostno upravljanje ter gospodarjenje s pokrajinami in naravnimi viri nujna. Za reševanje omenjenih izzivov so potrebni alternativni pristopi. V tej posebni številki se osredotočamo na možnosti, ki jih nudijo skupno in skupnostne prakse pri trajnostnem upravljanju pokrajin in naravnih virov. Izraz »skupno« se nanaša na način, kako skupnosti družno upravljajo z lokalnimi viri. Kolektivni ukrepi pa se nanašajo na usklajena prizadevanja in sodelovanje skupnosti.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: trajnostno upravljanje, gospodarjenje, pokrajina, naravni viri, alternativni pristopi, skupno, kolektivni ukrepi

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1 Introduction to the commons, collective actions and landscapes

In the face of population growth on the global level, increasingly intensive agriculture, land abandonment, depopulation of marginal and less favoured areas and growing rural-urban migration, the sustainable governance and management of landscapes and natural resources has become an urgent priority (Šmid Hribar et al. 2023). Especially, because mentioned development leads to two contrasting trends: land abandonment on one hand and intensification of agricultural land on the other hand. Both processes result in landscape impoverishment, biodiversity loss and a decline in essential ecosystem services (Hashimoto et al. 2018; Williams et al. 2020; Ribeiro and Šmid Hribar 2019). Alternative approaches are needed to address these challenges (Landis 2017). In this special issue, we focus on the significance of commons and collective actions in sustaining landscape management and natural resource governance.

The term »commons« originates from mediaeval Europe as a legal term for shared property. It refers to the way communities and »commoners« collectively managed local resources collectively. The meaning of commons has evolved to encompass a wide range of shared natural and cultural resources (Anderies and Janssen 2013). Other related terms are »common property regime« and »common-pool resources« (McKean 2000; Hirokawa 2013). The latter are natural resources that are vulnerable to degradation and where it is difficult to exclude individuals or groups from accessing or using the resource. These two characteristics require prudent governance and management. Collective action, in the context of common land governance, refers to the coordinated efforts and cooperation of community members who have a stake in the management and decision-making processes related to the common land (Dowding 2013).

Commons based on community-based resource management and collective actions, offer a promising avenue for addressing the complex interplay between landscapes, natural resources and socio-economic processes (Šmid Hribar, Bole and Urbanc 2015; Šmid Hribar et al. 2023; Tucker et al. 2023). In this context, commons stand for the shared access, use and stewardship of natural resources by specific communities or user groups (Šmid Hribar et al. 2023). The inclusion of traditional and transforming commons opens up new opportunities. Moreover, the emergence of new commons in both rural and urban areas provides a fresh perspective on community-based resource management (Šmid Hribar, Urbanc and Zorn 2023). These new commons may emerge from grassroots initiatives, citizen movements or collaborative governance structures that recognise the importance of local engagement, participatory decision-making and the integration of diverse perspectives. Exploring the characteristics and outcomes of various forms of commons offers insights into their potential as effective tools for sustaining landscape management.

Effective natural resource governance is a crucial aspect of sustainable landscape management (Martin and Williams 2016). Understanding the relationship between people, commons and natural resource governance can shed light on the institutional arrangements, policies, and frameworks needed to support and scale up successful practices. By examining the governance structures and processes that underpin successful commons, we can identify strategies to overcome governance challenges and promote inclusive, participatory, and sustainable approaches to landscape management.

Finally, exploring the role of commons and collective actions in building community resilience is of utmost importance. Resilience to environmental and socio-economic shocks is critical to the long-term sustainability of landscapes and the well-being of local communities (Klein et al. 2019). By delving into the ways in which commons and collective actions contribute to community resilience, we can uncover strategies and practices that enhance adaptive capacity, social cohesion, and sustainable livelihoods.

2 Special issue contribution to the field of commons, collective actions and landscapes

Despite the potential of commons and collective actions, their implementation faces challenges related to governance, policy frameworks, and power dynamics (Laerhoven 2010). This requires a deeper understanding of the framework, institutional arrangements, and social processes that facilitate their effectiveness and sustainability (Ombogoh et al. 2018). By examining case studies, theoretical frameworks, and practical experiences, we can further explore the significance of commons and collective actions in the context of sustainable landscape management and natural resource governance. This is precisely the aim of this special issue – to explore the concept of commons and collective action as a basis for sustainable landscape

management and as a potential governance strategy. We have sought contributions that explore and highlight different forms and practices within the field of commons and collective action, particularly in relation to landscapes.

The articles in this special issue focus on different aspects of commons in rural and urban areas, drawing on a wide range of case studies from various countries and resource systems. Through these diverse examples, we aim to shed light on the effectiveness and applicability of commons and collective actions in different contexts.

The contributions include a variety of case studies and offer insights from Slovenia, Portugal, Slovakia, and a cross-national comparative analysis covering ten countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovakia, and Spain). These case studies provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with commons and collective actions across different sociocultural, economic, and environmental contexts. The examined case studies primarily focus on rural areas, highlighting the importance of sustainable land use and resource management. The resource systems explored encompass various elements/land uses of landscapes, such as pastures, forests, and urban greeneries. Additionally, the articles address the role of commons and collective actions in governing and managing water resources, recognizing the critical significance of sustainable water management.

The study by Šumrada and Erjavec (2023) examines farmers' preferences for cooperation in agri-environmental policies in Slovenian agriculture. It highlights the challenges posed by low willingness to cooperate and limited research on access to agricultural policy funds. The importance of spatial coordination and engagement at the individual level is highlighted, with the potential involvement of third-party organizations. While the collective bonus is seen as less important, knowledge transfer and Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) cooperation measures to promote farmer cooperation are recommended.

The study by Nogueira et al. (2023) examines the role of Portuguese common lands (pt. *baldios*) as traditional commons in landscape and resource governance. The restoration of communal rights has empowered local communities, ensuring the continuity of agroecosystems in certain villages. However, rural depopulation and land abandonment have led to the decline of commoner's organisations and ecosystem service losses in other contexts. The study highlights the need for innovative practices and improved rules to adapt to changing conditions, with a focus on community-building and non-individual benefits. Collaborative networks and learning among communities and local managers, facilitated by regional governance actors, are critical to resilience and success.

The research by Bogataj and Krč (2023) examines the response of private forest owners to large-scale forest damage in a karst region of Slovenia between 2014 and 2016. Using a quantitative and qualitative analysis of management data, the study shows that forest commons exhibit rapid and efficient response times and harvesting practices. The significance of local norms and forest management competences is highlighted as a key factor in the response. The study contributes to filling a knowledge gap regarding the adaptation of socio-ecological systems to climate change. It highlights the potential of forest commons for active forest management and calls for cooperation between private and public institutions that combines economies of scale with traditional knowledge and local social norms.

The study by Renes, Kruse and Potthoff (2023) explores the relationship between transhumance and commons in rural and urban areas. Commons play a central role in access to land for transhumance, both in rural and urban contexts. The article highlights the significance of commons for transhumance through the provision of grazing resources and discusses the need for increased efforts to support transhumance. The study demonstrates the adaptability of transhumance in the 21st century, including landscape management and urban transhumance. The role of commons in facilitating access to land and the call for sustainable land governance to address the challenges of climate change are expressed. Efforts to improve economic conditions, raise awareness and educate are essential for the future of transhumance.

The contribution by Palšová and Machničová (2023) examines the role of land associations as a form of collective action contributing to community resilience in Slovakia. The study assesses the transformation processes of common lands and investigates whether land associations effectively address land conflicts. The results show that collective actions have the potential to maintain landscape resilience, but there are two hindering factors: legal frameworks, which are often barriers, and lack of motivation among land association founders and owners to use common land. Concrete government measures are proposed to unify and streamline activities: the creation of a functional Land Associations Register, the introduction of economic instruments such as subsidies, and the clarification of legal provisions and members' rights and

obligations. Despite their anachronistic legal form, land associations, demonstrate significant potential to promote activities in the public interest and build community resilience.

The study by Šmid Hribar, Urbanc and Zorn (2023) investigates the role of commons and collective actions in sustaining cultural landscapes in Slovenia. Using a questionnaire, 21 collective actions related to cultural landscapes were analysed. The results show that traditional and transforming commons are primarily focused on forests and pastures, while new commons include more diverse land uses, but on a smaller scale. New commons point to potential future mechanisms, but currently have limited impact on cultural landscapes. The main benefits of commons are social, followed by non-material and regulative benefits, with material benefits in second place. Urban commons face challenges in obtaining land resources and therefore need the support of decision-makers. The findings can help policy makers to develop initiatives and incentives to manage and sustain cultural landscapes, nature reserves and urban green areas, and to preserve biodiversity.

The study by Pipan, Šmid Hribar and Urbanc (2023) examines the governance, robustness and benefits of water commons, specifically focusing on small-scale drinking water supply systems. Based on Ostrom's Design Principles and Social-Ecological Systems Framework, two water commons in Slovenia are analysed to identify drivers and motivations for successful water governance, assess the robustness of water commons in the face of challenges, and identify material, non-material, regulative, and social benefits. The findings highlight that shared interests and strong commitment are key elements for effective water management. In addition to material benefits such as water supply, non-material benefits such as community building and identity are also important. Policy implications include promoting local collective actions and creating interdependencies between the local and municipal levels.

In this special issue, we aim to delve into the multiple aspects of commons and collective actions, and their implications for sustaining landscape management and natural resource governance. By analysing the strengths, limitations and potential synergies between traditional self-governing systems, local practices, and modern approaches, we sought to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on this topic. Through this contribution, we hoped to provide insights and recommendations for policy makers, practitioners and researchers concerned with sustaining landscape management and natural resource governance.

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