

Didier Boisseuil, Ulrike Krampl, Marie-Pierre Lefeuvre, José Serrano (dir.), Espaces à saisir: interstices et communs urbains. La ville à l'épreuve de l'interdisciplinarité, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles et al. (Peter Lang) 2024, 472 p., 6 tabl., 56 en coul., 25 ill. en n/b (Dynamiques citoyennes en Europe, 9), ISBN 978-3-0343-4863-8, DOI [10.3726/b21653](https://doi.org/10.3726/b21653), EUR 60,95.

rezensiert von | compte rendu rédigé par
Austin Collins, Tübingen

The study of urban spaces has been a growing field across multiple academic disciplines over the last few decades. History, geography, politics, and other subjects have devoted their own approaches to understanding the development and functionality of urban spaces through their specific and theoretical insights. These respective approaches have proved beneficial to their fields of study and have enabled very specific and localised research. However, very few interdisciplinary investigations have been conducted to gain a deeper understanding of testing space and urban studies.

In this volume, Didier Boisseuil, Ulrike Krampl, Marie-Pierre Lefeuvre, and José Serrano uniquely combine an immersive interdisciplinary study that focusses on how the urban *commun* can be analysed through various academic disciplines in a manner that creates a new empirical understanding of the *commun*. Through a well-organised and systematic approach that traces the problematisation of the *commun* set forth in the introduction, the volume features seventeen chapters and an introduction that traces the chosen and interesting set of perspectives that help to identify how the *commun* can be viewed and analysed through an interdisciplinary lens.

The book opens with an environmental chapter which is followed by a chapter encompassing the sociological approach, before shifting the focus to urban geography, economics, history, literature, ecology, and geographical appropriation whilst featuring case studies in France, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Belgium, Russia, and Italy. Through a variety of academic disciplines and a wide geographical focus area, the volume has given a new focus and allowed for a combination of multiple perspectives on reimagining and reinvigorating how urban space and geography can be examined in an increasingly interconnected world.

The introduction written by Boisseuil, Krampl, Lefeuvre, and Serrano emphasises academic connections how combined processes gave birth to the premise of the *commun*. However, the authors then shift their focus on how to define urban intersections as they set forth the layout in three parts that concentrate on knowledge, transformation, and appropriation. In doing so they



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen
Historischen Institut Paris |
publiée par l'Institut historique
allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

aim to redefine how urban space and geography, the *commun*, can be studied through enlarged horizons.

Émeline Bailly and Sylvie Laroche open the first case study chapter through their investigation of peripheral green spaces and urban areas in Grand Genève. Mickaël Chelal then offers a sociological case study by following a group of fourteen young men as they operate, function, and appropriate Parisian neighbourhoods to meet their needs and create an urban fabric. Marie Lécuyer provides an economic and urban comparison between Le Havre and Felixstowe as the two grew in prominence as port cities.

Public and private space in post-1945 Orléans is discussed by Florence Cornilleau, while debates concerning the importance of green spaces in Tours and Blois is analysed by Francesca Di Pietro and Marion Brun, whereas Christine Dupouy offers a literature analysis of the poetry of Jacques Réda in relation to the *banlieue*. These articles conclude the first part of the edited volume.

The second part begins with Stéphane Tonnelat analysing the local fight to protect farmland from the development of EuropaCity outside of Paris through a political and legal perspective. The next four chapters serve as a more traditional approach to analysing urban and spatial academic perspectives. Paul Lecat traces how the history and urban fabric of Charonne changed over time as the *commun* was absorbed by Paris in the second-half of the eighteenth century. Lucie Gaugain analyses the transformation of buildings and the urban fabric of a specific neighbourhood of Tours in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Claire Bourguignon tests the myths and realities of mendicant spatiality and temporality of medieval Auvergne. Adrien Pitor analyses building enclosures in eighteenth-century Paris. The second part then concludes with Isabelle Backouche analysing the modern urban developments of Paris.

The final part of the edited volume begins with a text by Daniela Festa which provides a theoretical framework for tracing the history and modernity of the *commun* in contemporary cities. Aurélien Hucq then examines Belgian law regarding urban vegetated spaces. The strategies of appropriating space in Soviet Moscow are analysed by Guénola Inizan and Daria Volkova. Georges-Henry Laffont and Romeo Carabelli explore developing new urban *communs* in the modern-day Loire Valley. Finally, Riccardo Rao concludes the third and last part of the volume by delving into the relationship between the peripheral environment and political centres of medieval Italy.

Whilst the book is very well-organised, the reader might feel a bit frustrated as the progression of the chapters become seemingly displaced towards the end of the volume, losing the innovative momentum at the beginning of the book. Whilst the superb interdisciplinary approach might be appealing to a big audience, the wide array of disciplines could prove too vast to truly grasp the book's content. However, despite the vastness of topics, the reader

Frühe Neuzeit – Revolution –
Empire (1500–1815)

DOI:
[10.11588/frrec.2025.4.114138](https://doi.org/10.11588/frrec.2025.4.114138)

Seite | page 2



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen
Historischen Institut Paris |
publiée par l'Institut historique
allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

still might wonder whether some non-European case studies could have added to the new horizons set forth in the introduction. Additionally, the volume features uneven chapter lengths, some peculiar and awkward image placement in some chapters which creates large blank spaces on some pages, and lacks a standalone conclusion that could have brought the various disciplines together to bookend the challenges and perspectives that the volume attempts to answer.

Overall, *Espaces à saisir* is a delight to read as the numerous disciplines, geographic zones, and time periods provide a gripping lure. The courage to produce such a wide-scoping academic publication with specific case studies has not gone unnoticed thus far and should be further applauded by peers. This volume challenges how the *commun* and urban spaces should be analysed and explored and offers an important number of perspectives that can add to our understanding of the *commun*.

Frühe Neuzeit – Revolution –
Empire (1500–1815)

DOI:
[10.11588/frrec.2025.4.114138](https://doi.org/10.11588/frrec.2025.4.114138)

Seite | page 3



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen
Historischen Institut Paris |
publiée par l'Institut historique
allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)