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## EDITORIAL

# Celebrating the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Ostrom's *Governing the Commons: Traditions and Trends in the Study of the Commons, Revisited*

Frank van Laerhoven<sup>1</sup>, Michael Schoon<sup>2</sup> and Sergio Villamayor-Tomas<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development, Utrecht University, NL

<sup>2</sup> School of Sustainability, Arizona State University, US

<sup>3</sup> Institute of Environmental Science and Technology (ICTA-UAB), Autonomous University of Barcelona, ES

Corresponding author: Frank van Laerhoven ([f.s.j.vanlaerhoven@uu.nl](mailto:f.s.j.vanlaerhoven@uu.nl))

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In this editorial we assess 50 years' worth of peer-reviewed publications to establish traditions and trends in the study of the commons. Based on this assessment, we provide a sketch of how IJC and its editors can continue to contribute to the development of the field.

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**Keywords:** International Journal of the Commons; Commons; Common Pool Resources; Bibliographic analysis; scholarship; editorial policy

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## Introduction

The very first contribution to the International Journal of the Commons (IJC) provided a bibliometric analysis of traditions and trends in the study of the commons (van Laerhoven & Ostrom, 2007). In this paper, we revisit and expand that endeavor and ask ourselves: Where do we stand as a scholarly community, thirteen years later, in the year that we are celebrating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ostrom's *Governing the Commons* (1990)?

The above question is relevant for several reasons. In 2009, two years after the first bibliometric analysis, Elinor Ostrom was awarded the Nobel Prize in economics for her institutional analyses on community-based natural resource management. This event put the study of commons on the spot and has seemingly driven a new wave of both enthusiasts and critics of the institutional approach likely affecting its boundaries.

The start of commons scholarship can be understood as growing out of a rejection of Hardin's prediction of natural resource degradation unless managed by governments or through private property rights (Poteete et al. 2010). Over time, however the approach appears to have been evolving. That was clear from the 2007 assessment. How have we fared since then?

At the time of van Laerhoven & Ostrom's (2007) review, applications to forests, fisheries, irrigation systems, rangeland and water resources (i.e. the *Big Five*) clearly dominated the field, but at the same time an interest in framing novel topics, such as biodiversity, climate change or knowledge in terms of commons appeared to be emerging, as well. Has what we all study changed and evolved since then?

Although institutional analysis was the approach of choice in a majority of the studies back in 2007, it appeared that the dominance of economics, legal and political science studies was increasingly – albeit modestly – being challenged by a growing number of interdisciplinary, environmental studies. Has this trend substantiated since 2007?

An important observation derived from the 2007 review was the scattered nature of journals that contained publications on the commons. While positive, such dispersion potentially hindered knowledge accumulation and learning. One of the stated objectives of the *International Journal of the Commons* was to facilitate such accumulation and learning. Compared to the 2007 review, we can now assess whether IJC has managed to consolidate its niche over the last 13 years of its existence.

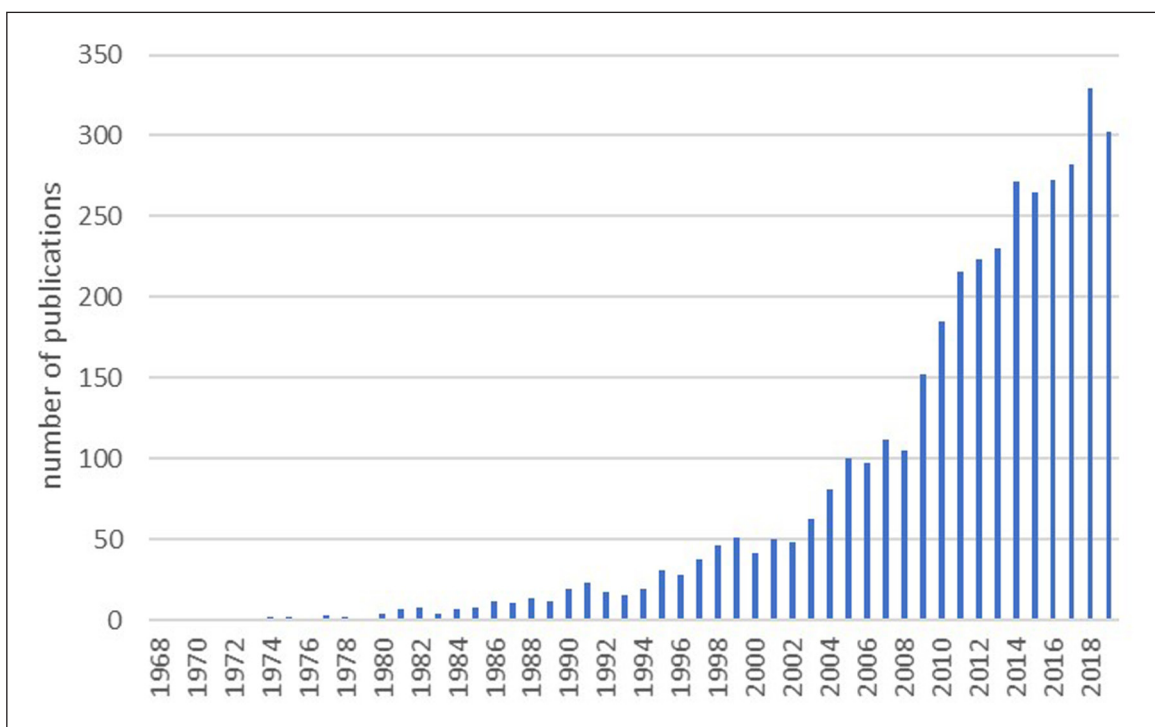
Advances and changes in depositories and search facilities allowed us to expand our key word search and be more specific regarding the sources than in the 2007 study. That study used Google Scholar. For our analysis, we used Scopus, to identify relevant documents published between the appearance of Hardin's *The tragedy of the commons* in 1968, and the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ostrom's *Governing the Commons* in 2020. Scopus is much more rigorous regarding allowing peer reviewed academic publications into its data base than Google Scholar. We hold that although the number of hits in Scopus is lower, the relevance of the articles will be significantly higher due to the fact that only peer-reviewed papers are included. We set the search terms to: {common pool resource} OR {common pool resources} OR {the commons}. These terms were applied to the title, abstract and/or key words associated with the article. The range was set from 1968 to 2020. From the source (i.e. journal) titles we excluded Parliamentary history; Parliamentary affairs; Parliaments estates and representation. We then proceeded to manually remove all titles for which no author name was available. We also manually removed all titles related with the House of Commons (by using ctrl+f, 'parliament' AND 'house of'). These proceedings resulted in a list of 3,819 titles, that were downloaded as a spreadsheet. For all titles we collected information on subject area, author, title, year, journal, times cited, author affiliation data, and the abstract.

### Publish or perish?

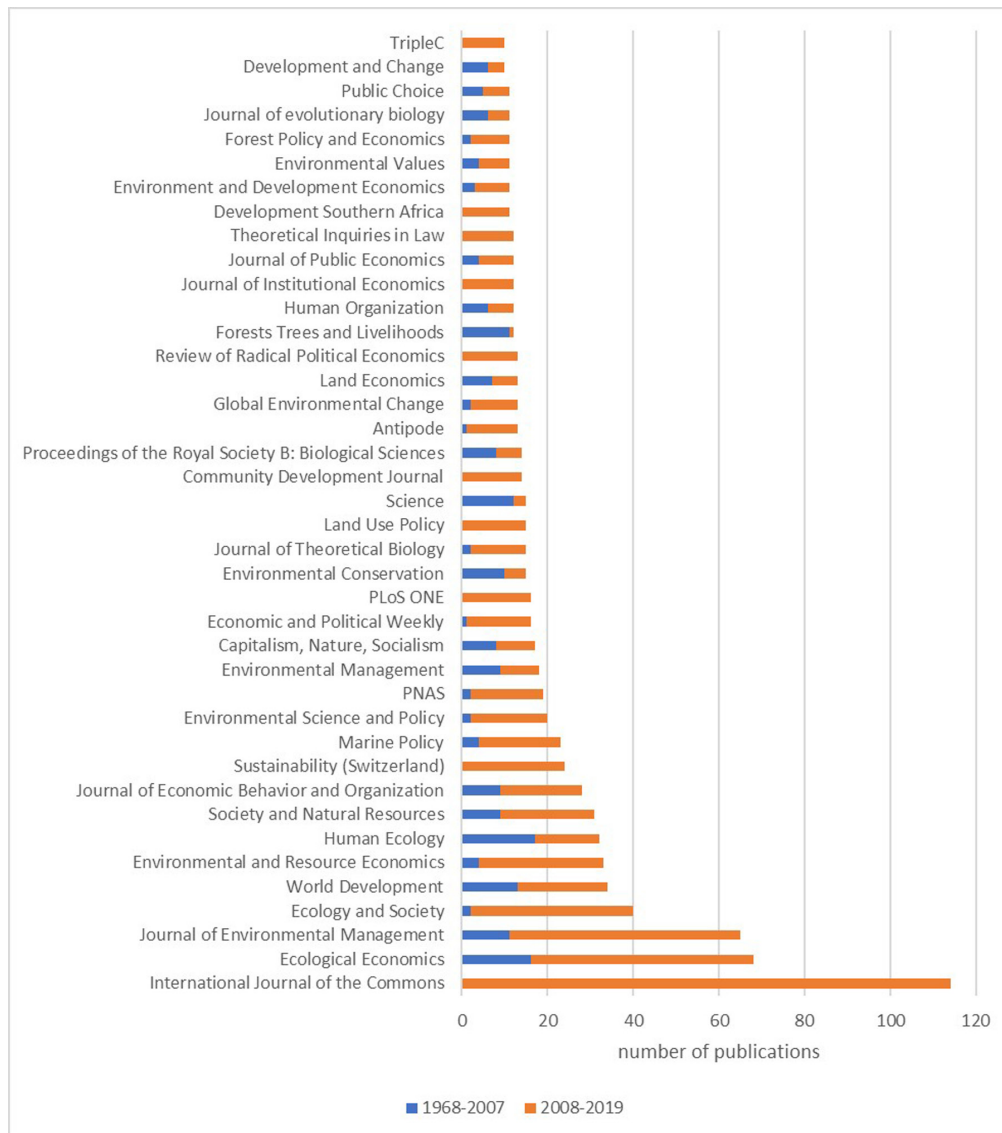
How vibrant is the scholarly branch of the commons community? How does the current stock-taking effort compare to the 2007 measurement of publication trends? Firstly, there are many of us! Our data base contains roughly 6,500 unique names. We observe that all of us manage to get word on the commons out in great numbers. Additionally, 74% of all publications on the commons that appeared between 1968–2019 were published *after* the 2007 study. **Figure 1** gives an overview of the number of commons publication per year between 1968–2019.

During the last 50 years commons scholars have published their work in 1,900+ (!) different journals, although only 40 published 10 or more articles on the commons (see **Figure 2**). Since our first issue in 2007, IJC has become the most popular platform for commons studies. The objective of the founders of the journal to create a focal journal on the commons has been clearly achieved.

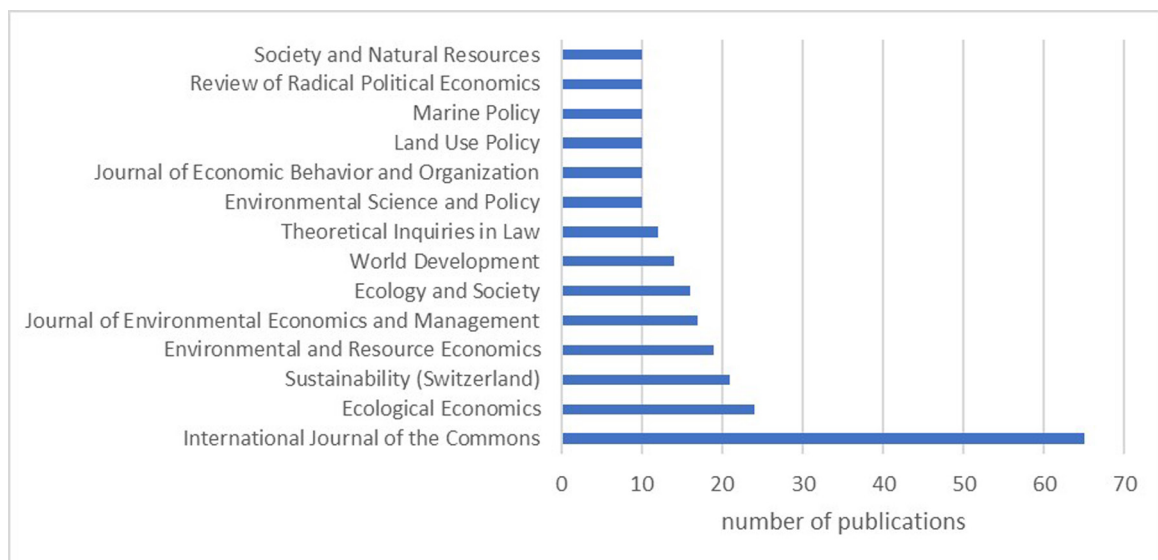
The position of the International Journal of the Commons in terms of publications is even more obvious from **Figure 3**. In the last 5 years (i.e. between 2015–2019), 14 journals published 10 or more articles on the commons. We hope that our initial wish to remedy the fragmentation of commons scholarship hasn't led to undermining the diversity that is essential to the progress in our debates.



**Figure 1:** Number of publication per year (1968–2019).



**Figure 2:** Number of publications per journal (only journals with 10 or more publications) – 1968–2007 and 2008–2019 compared.



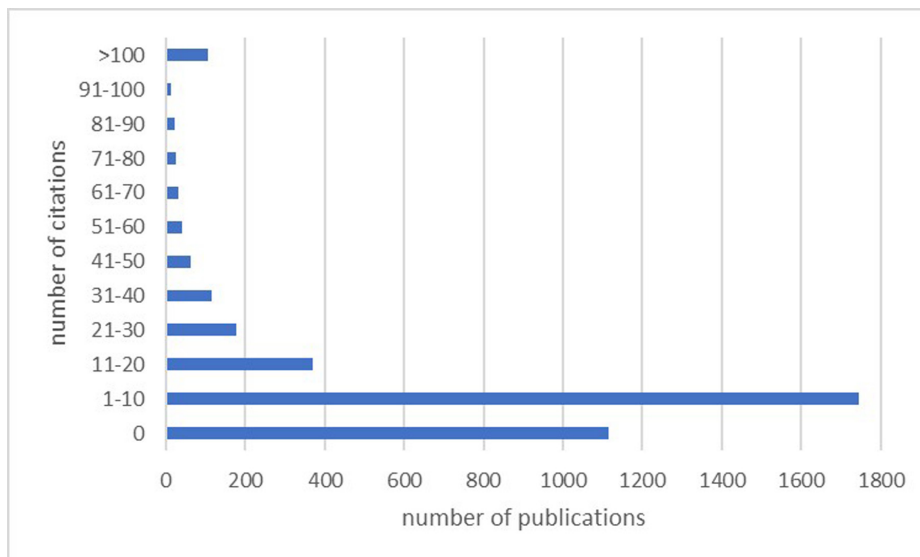
**Figure 3:** Number of publications per journal since 2015.

The take-away point for us editors is that we need to make sure that our journal is widely and undeniably considered as a safe place for all stances, and all views on, and approaches to the commons.

Does anyone take notice? We answer this question by looking at the number of citations for the articles in our data base, to date. We find that the average number of citations amounts to 21. The median lays at 3. **Figure 4** gives an overview of the distribution of citations over the publications in our data base. We can safely conclude that what we write has had and continues to have relevance.

The distribution of the observations is heavily skewed to the lower numbers (i.e., 0 to 20). There are 1,114 publications in our data set (i.e. about a third of all publications analyzed) that had no citations at all. The number of citations accumulated in the spectrum ranging from 1 to 20 citations is 2,116. On the other hand, there is also a number of publications with more than 100 citations (106 in total). Of the articles in IJC, 15 were cited over 20 times, above the average of the other journals represented in spite of being a new entrant to academic publishing. Since IJC's inclusion in Scopus in 2011, it's articles have been cited 8.4 times on average. For all other articles in our data base published since 2011 this average lays at 6.

**Figure 5** lists the most prolific authors – they all have 10 or more publications that appear in our data base. All authors are white, all but one are male, and all but one are or were affiliated with Universities in the USA or Europe. (All but two have a beard.) Through our editorial policies, we have attempted to mitigate such challenges of diversity through our explicit support of authors in developing contexts. It does not resolve them, but we can address them as a community of scholars. And we would like to congratulate these wonderful contributors to the field.



**Figure 4:** Number of citations (1968–2019).



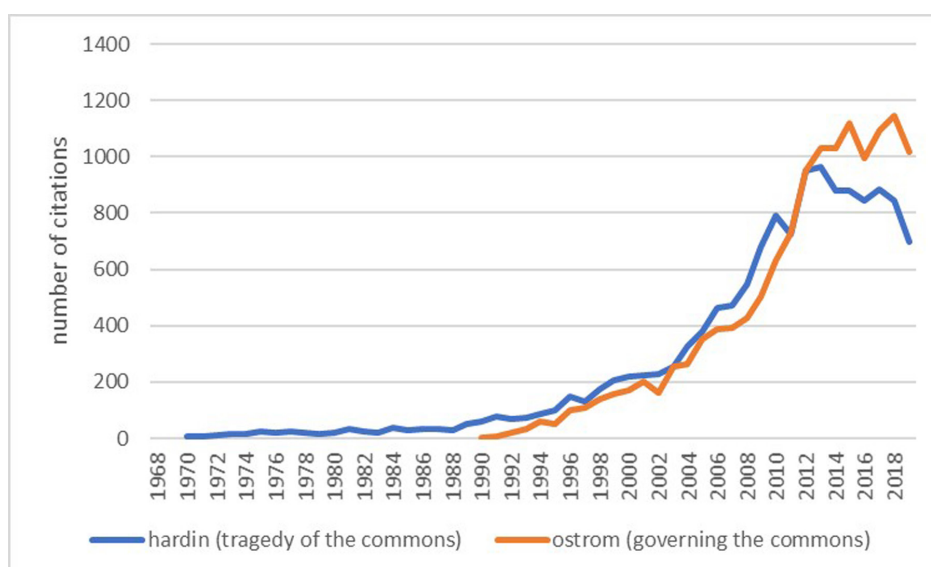
**Figure 5:** Most prolific authors.

**Table 1** lists all publications in our data set that collected 500 or more citations.

Elinor Ostrom is listed with no less than 5 titles. We suspect that among the 12,514 citations accumulated by Hardin – the #1 in this list – there will be a significant number that cites the source for disagreeing with it. **Figure 6** shows the trends in citations for Hardin’s *Tragedy of the commons* and Ostrom’s *Governing the commons*, respectively. Both titles appear to be at the very core of the scholarly debate, still.

**Table 1:** Articles that accumulated 500 or more citations.

Author(s)	Title	Year	Source	Citations
Hardin G.	The tragedy of the commons	1968	Science	12,514
Ostrom E.	Governing the commons: the evolution of institutions for collective action	1990	Book	8,414
Heller M.A., Eisenberg R.S.	Can patents deter innovation? The anticommons in biomedical research	1998	Science	1,355
Ostrom E., et al.	Revisiting the commons: Local lessons, global challenges	1999	Science	1,195
Costanza R., et al.	Changes in the global value of ecosystem services	2014	Global Environmental Change	918
Ostrom E., et al.	Covenants with and without a Sword: Self-Governance Is Possible	1992	American Political Science Review	893
Agrawal A.	Common property institutions and sustainable governance of resources	2001	World Development	860
Milinski M., et al.	Reputation helps solve the ‘tragedy of the commons’	2002	Nature	652
Brewer M.B., Kramer R.M.	Choice Behavior in Social Dilemmas. Effects of Social Identity, Group Size, and Decision Framing	1986	Journal of Personality and Social Psychology	643
Feeny D., et al.	The Tragedy of the Commons: Twenty-two years later	1990	Human Ecology	545
Gutiérrez N.L., et al.	Leadership, social capital and incentives promote successful fisheries	2011	Nature	534
Heller M.A.	The Tragedy of the Anticommons: Property in the Transition from Marx to Markets	1998	Harvard Law Review	524
Ostrom E.	Coping with tragedies of the commons	1999	Annual Review of Political Science	505
Carlsson L., Berkes F.	Co-management: Concepts and methodological implications	2005	Journal of Environmental Management	502



**Figure 6:** Hardin and Ostrom – number of citations per year (1968–2019).

A field dominated by a comparatively low number of highly cited publications might prevent the emergence of new ideas and/or facilitate the ideologization of research. What we editors learn here is that these observations point to the continued need to improve the circulation of ideas and findings among the commons community. This would not only increase the visibility of new methods and make theoretical progress, but also avoid redundancy in our research endeavors (i.e. questions that have been already addressed).

### What are our disciplines?

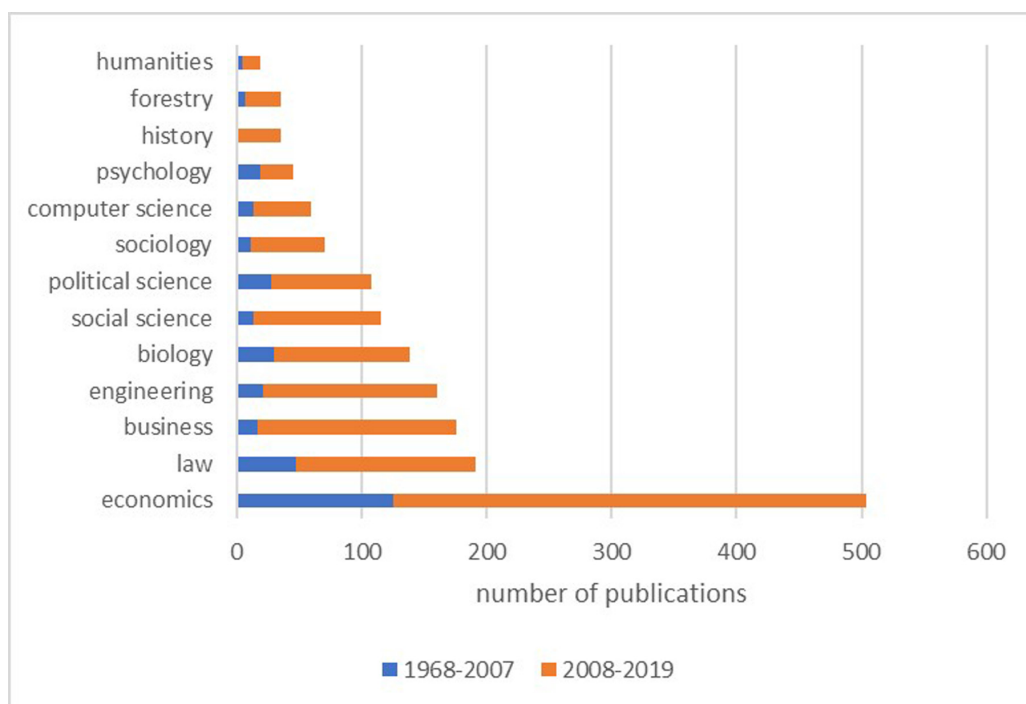
Based on the disciplinary affinity of the journals that attracted most of the commons studies between 1985–2005, the 2007 study revealed that at the time the study of the commons appeared mostly a social sciences affair. With better search facilities, and with the search period expanded to 1968–2019, what do we find in our analysis? **Figure 7** depicts a trend that is based on the university departments that are mentioned under the affiliation data of authors and co-authors. **Figure 8** is based on the subject areas that an article belongs to, as recorded by Scopus. Both figures confirm but also detail what the 2007 study established by cruder means. While our object of study is often a natural resource system, surprisingly few colleagues from the natural sciences frame their topic of study as a commons.

An editorial policy resulting from this observation is to pay more attention to submissions coming from authors with an explicit natural science background or to accommodate special issues that bundle natural science contributions that frame their object of study in commons terms.

### Working together?

The 2007 study stated that “...researchers who studied specific commons before the mid-1980s were [...] less likely than their contemporary colleagues to be well informed about the work of scholars in other disciplines, about other sectors in their own region of interest, or in other regions of the world.” (van Laerhoven & Ostrom, 2007, p.3). With means that are a little bit more sophisticated than what the authors in 2007 had at their disposal, we assessed the validity of this statement. Are we any good – and did we become better – at collaboration, in the sense that we reach out to other disciplines, other sectors and other geographic regions?

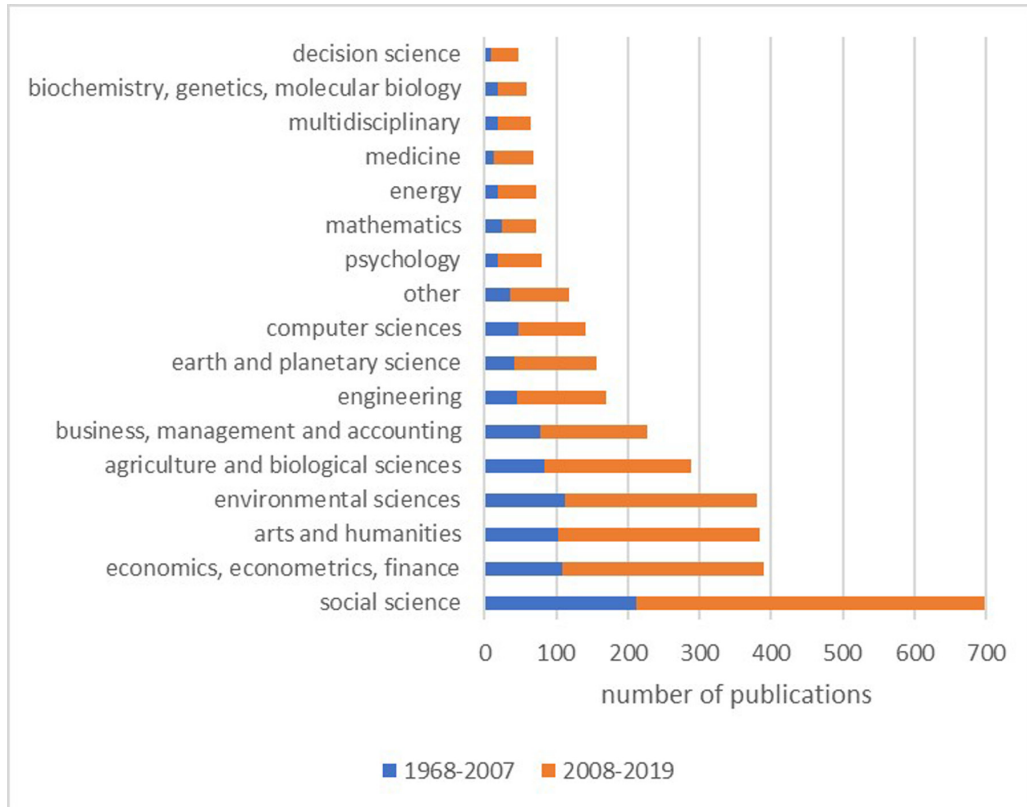
**Figure 9** shows the number of commons publications per year that are produced by authors from different types of departments. **Figure 10** zooms in on trends in collaboration between authors from the social and



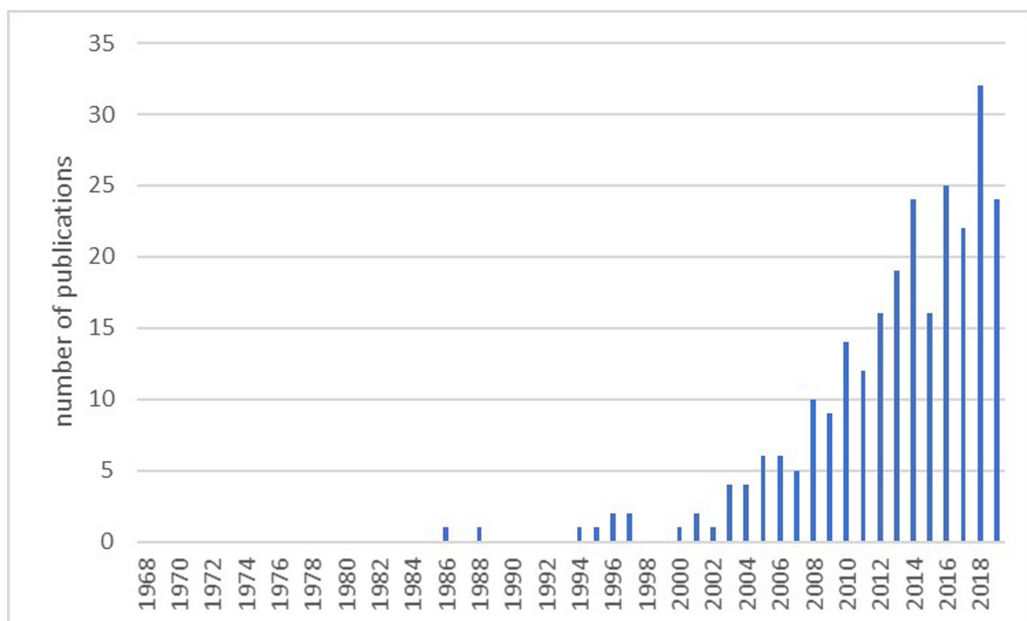
**Figure 7:** Number of publications per discipline – 1968–2007 and 2008–2019 compared.

the natural sciences, respectively. **Figure 11** depicts the number publications per year that are the result of collaborations between authors working for universities in different countries.

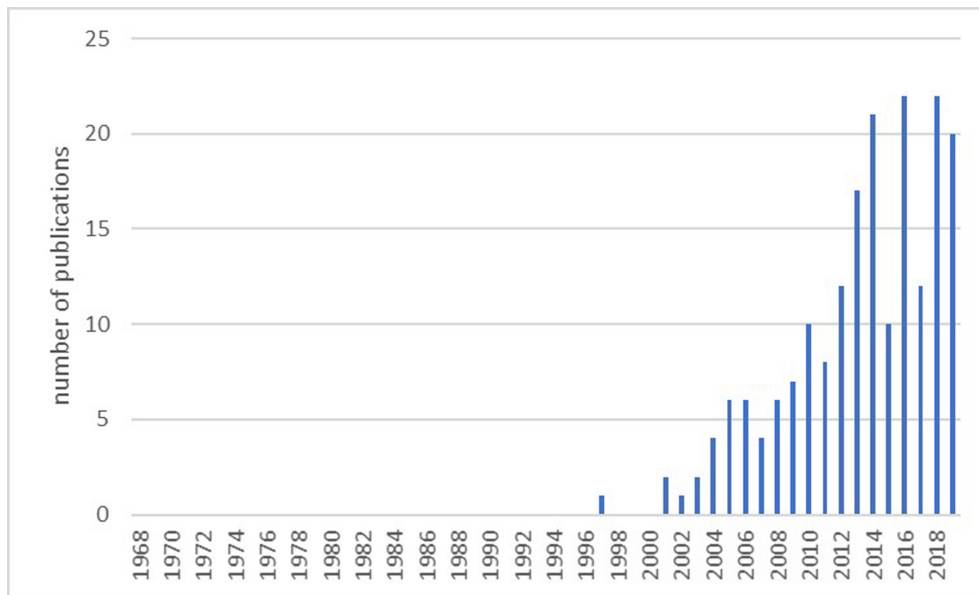
Despite the increasing trends, we think the absolute numbers are rather embarrassing for a community that pays so much lip service to and prominently studies collaboration and collective action. We believe collaboration cannot only facilitate the circulation of new ideas and make theory progress, but also facilitate



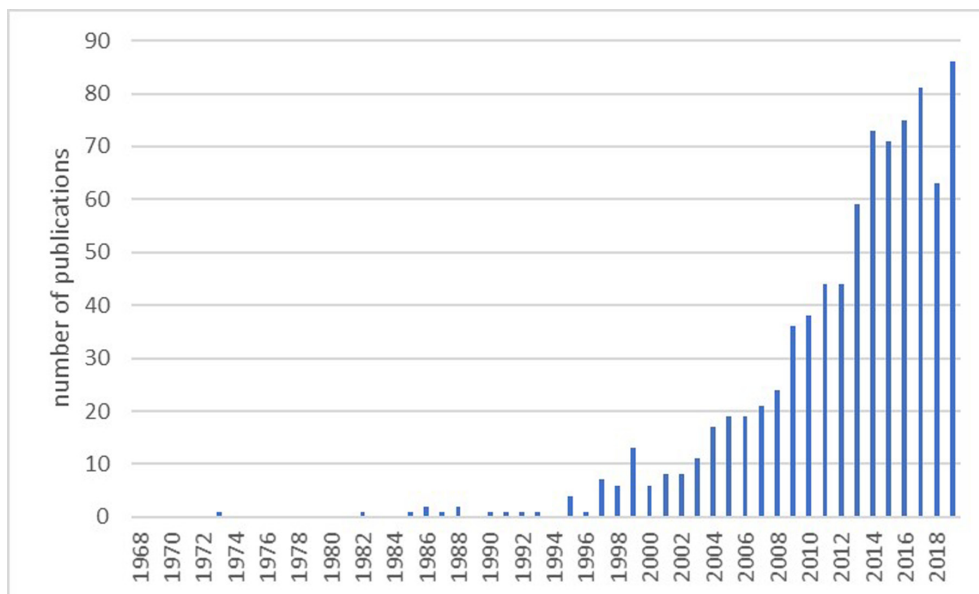
**Figure 8:** Number of publications per subject area – 1968–2007 and 2008–2019 compared.



**Figure 9:** Number of publications per year resulting from collaboration between different types of university departments (1968–2019).



**Figure 10:** Number of publications per year resulting from collaboration between the natural and the social sciences (1968–2019).



**Figure 11:** Number of publications per year resulting from collaboration between universities in different countries (1968–2019).

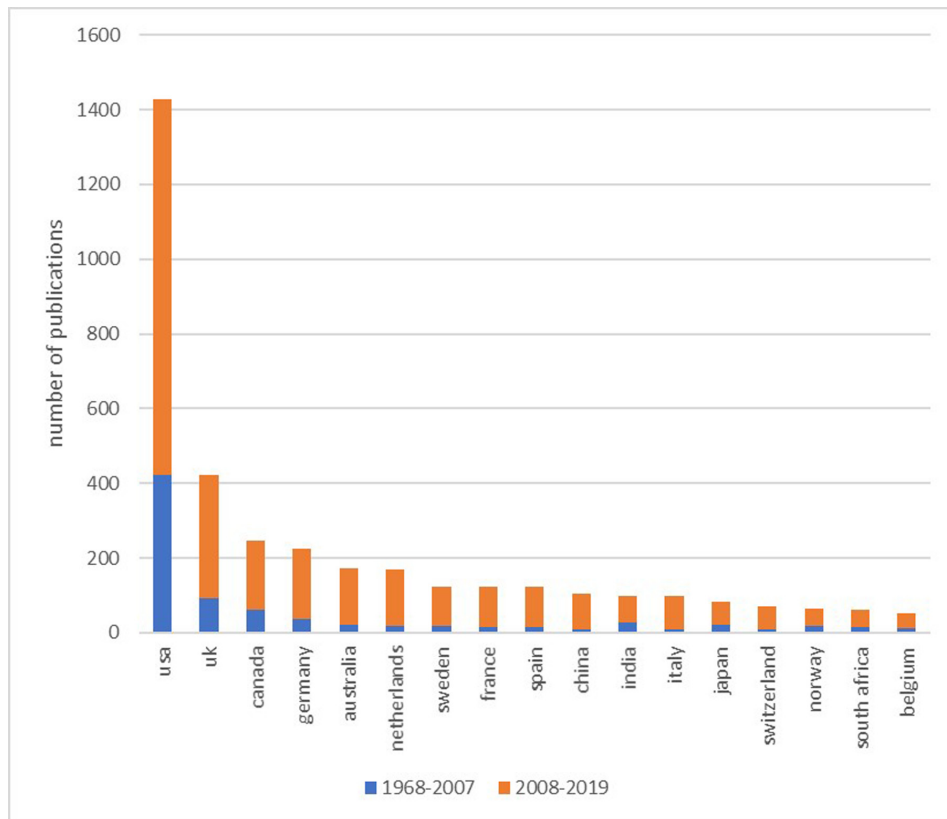
comparative work. As editors we will seek to encourage collaboration by paying special attention to it in submissions and through proactively looking for special issue ideas that stand out in terms of collaboration between disciplines and/or regions.

### Where do we work?

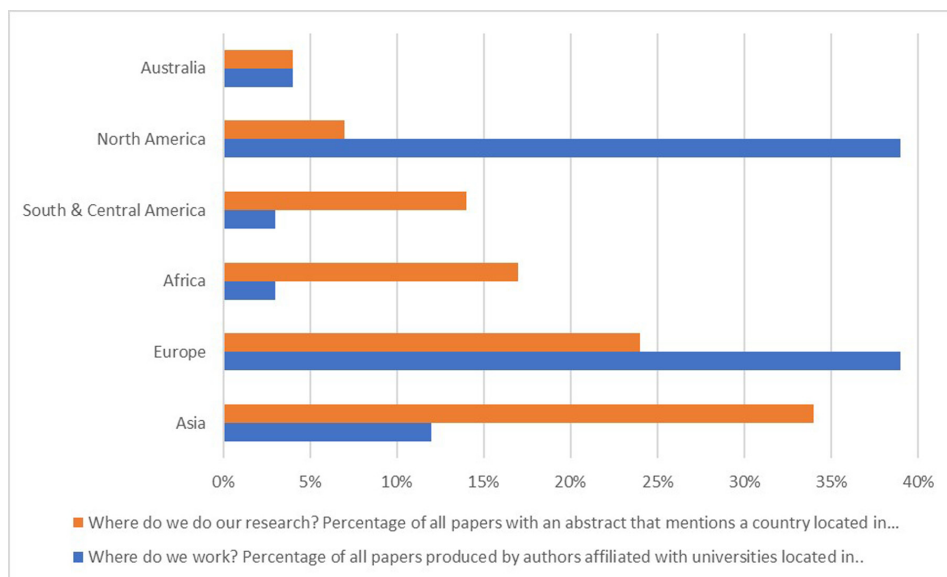
The affiliation information for all unique authors in our data set allows us to assess where their workplaces are located. Almost 71% of all commons scholars work at universities in Europe or the USA. **Figure 12** presents a list of countries where 50 or more publications in our data were produced. It compares the periods before and after the appearance of the 2007 assessment by Van Laerhoven and Ostrom.

We find that between 1968 and 1998 our domain was dominated by scholars affiliated with a university in the USA – they produced approximately 75% of all commons publications in any given year during that era. Since the new millennium this dominance is somewhat shrinking in favor of authors based in Europe. These produced approximately 40% of all commons publications between 2008–2018. The dominance of USA and Europe based scholars has remained intact for the entire 50 years that our analysis spans.





**Figure 12:** Number of publications per country – 1968–2007 and 2008–2019 compared.



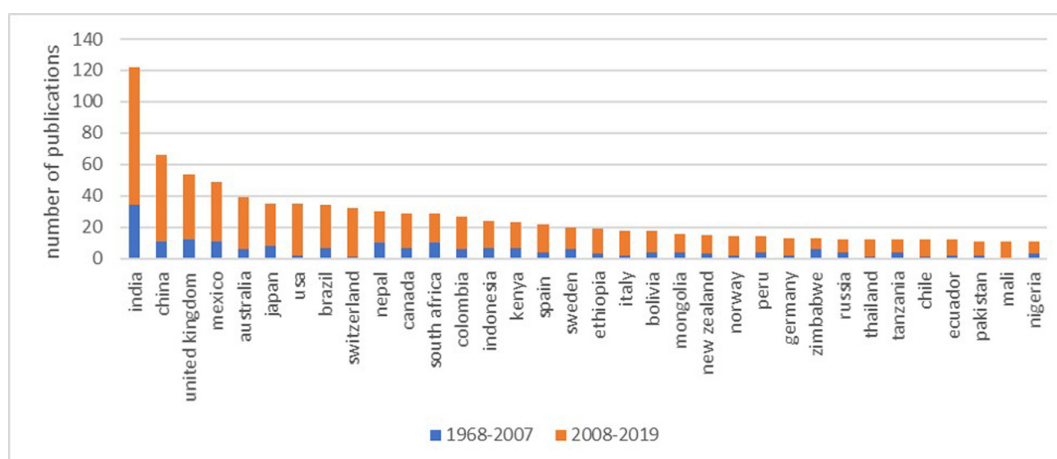
**Figure 13:** Discrepancy between the places where we work and where we do our research.

Although this observation is mostly symptomatic for processes that we cannot control, it is an editorial policy of IJC to give explicit support – both editorial and financial support (in the form of allowing extra rounds of review and author fee exemptions) – to authors from universities that are not based in Europe or the USA.

### Where do we do our research?

There is a remarkable discrepancy between the places where we work and the places where we do our research (see **Figure 13**).

**Figure 14** provides a ranking of the number of times a certain country is mentioned in the abstracts of the titles in our data base – the list is limited to the countries that appear 10 times or more. India is the clear favorite.



**Figure 14:** Number of times a country is mentioned in the abstracts of the titles in our data base – 1968–2007 and 2008–2019 compared.

An editorial policy that we have implemented and will continue to develop is allowing room for contributions on commons in countries that are not among the usual suspects, e.g. Central Asia (Special Feature in Volume 14), Myanmar (Kimengsi et al. 2019) or Kirgizstan (Kasymov & Thiel, 2019).

## What do we study?

Arguably, commons studies grew out of concerns associated with the tragedy of the commons. Accordingly, typical studies of the commons have been associated with local contexts, particularly with common pool resources such as forests, fisheries and irrigation, and an interest in the opportunities and challenges of common property rights and rules. In this section we present a crude assessment of developments regarding the empirical and theoretical boundaries of our field.

### *The Big Five?*

Hardin (1968) asked us to “*picture a pasture, open to all.*” Pastures, together with fisheries, forests, irrigation systems, and water management belong to what the authors of the 2007 study referred to as the “Big Five” in the study of the commons. Through 2007 these topics drew most of the combined attention of commons scholars. Overall, we find that this trend continues unabated (see **Figure 15**). Over time, we see a relative increase in interest in water and fisheries since 2007.<sup>1</sup>

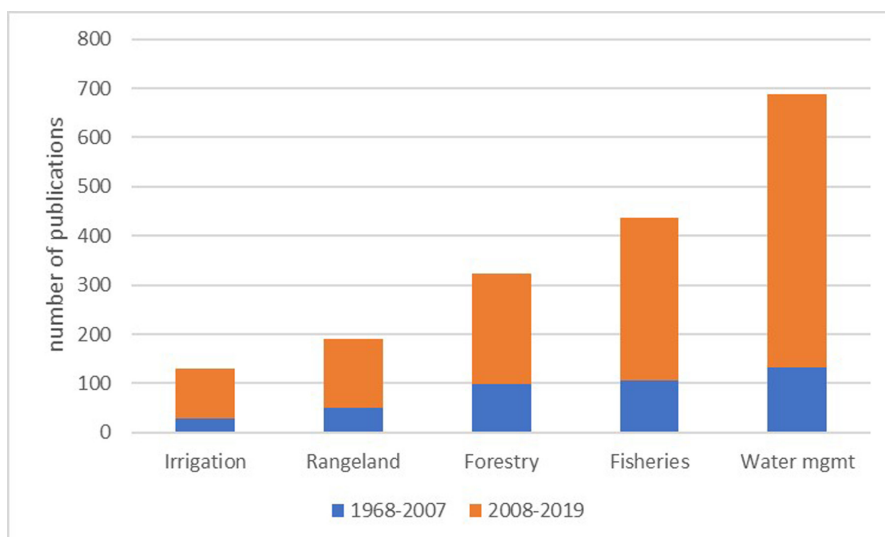
As editors, we have been encouraged with initiatives to push commons research in new directions, as scholars increasingly look at the digital commons (Special Feature in issue 7(2)), biodiversity conservation, genetics and microbial commons (Special Feature in issue 4(1)), technology (Special Feature in issue 5(1)), and other fields. We see great opportunities for the cross-pollination of other fields as commons scholars take commons theory to new arenas and bring insights new to the commons from these fruitful forays, which we discuss more in a section on ‘new’ commons. We will continue to support this expanded view of the field moving forward.

### *Institutions for collective action?*

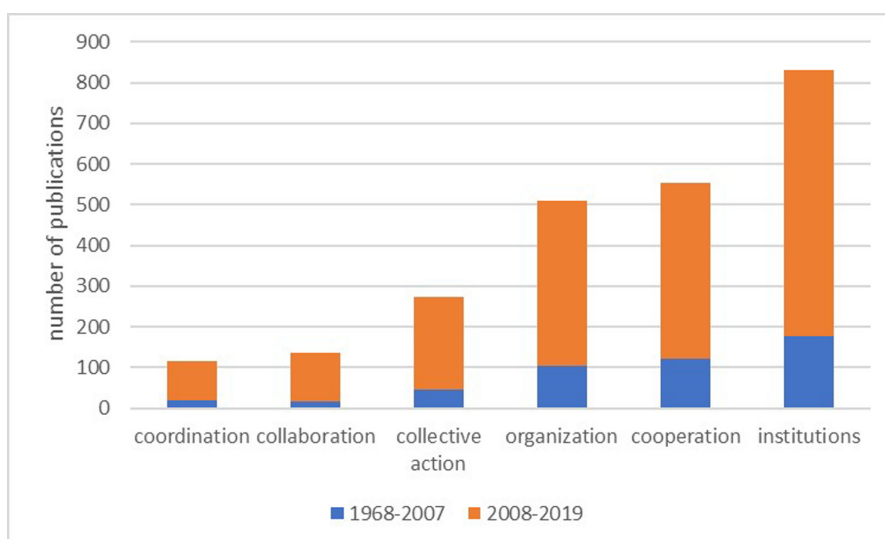
Institutions for collective action have always been at the center of our attention. Not for nothing, *Governing the commons: The evolution of institutions for collective action* was the full title of Elinor Ostrom’s seminal 1990 book (Ostrom, 1990). **Figure 16** shows how trends have evolved.<sup>2</sup> Directly after the launch of our domain by Hardin, institutions weren’t so much on our minds, but that changed quickly. A dominant interest in institutions continues and even increases after 2007.

<sup>1</sup> We used the COUNTIF function in Excel. For gauging the state of interest in fisheries, we searched all abstract for “fish,” for forestry, we used the search terms when applying this function to the abstracts in our data base: “timber” and “forest,” for irrigation we used “irrigate,” for water we used “lake,” “river,” and “groundwater,” and for rangeland we searched for the occurrence in the abstracts of the terms “cattle,” “grass,” rangeland,” “pasture,” “meadow,” and “pastor.”

<sup>2</sup> We used the COUNTIF function in Excel. For gauging the apparent interest in these topics we used the following terms when applying this function to the abstracts of the titles in our data base: coordinat; collaborat; collective action; organi; cooperat; institution.



**Figure 15:** Number of publications on irrigation, rangeland, forestry, fisheries and water management (i.e. the “big five” topics) – 1968–2007 and 2008–2019 compared.



**Figure 16:** Attention for institutions for collective action.

### ***Too local?***

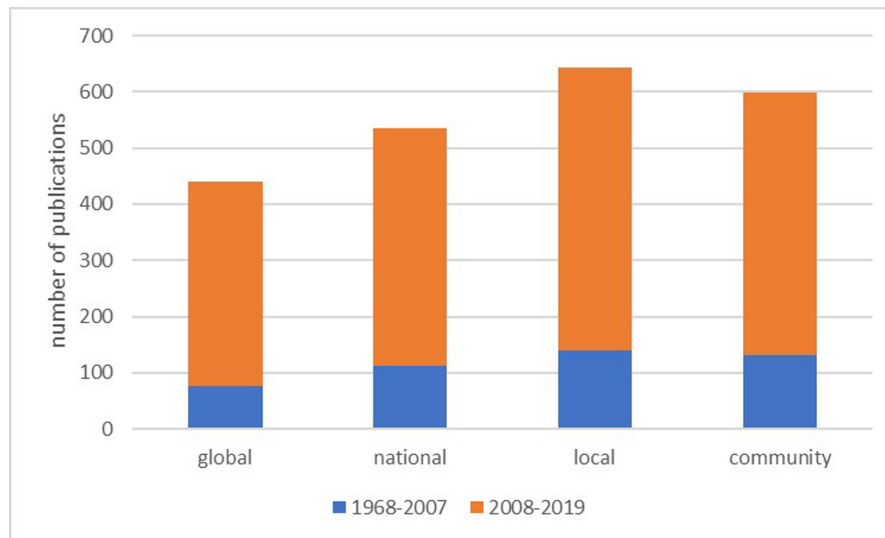
One of the common critiques of commons research is that its researchers and practitioners usually study at the community or local scale. While **Figure 17** shows that this critique may be overstated, as editors we anecdotally feel that there is a surfeit of studies at small-scales and a dearth of broader-scaled studies. With some exceptions (e.g. Ostrom 2010), much of the work that we see is small-scale analyses of case studies.

There have been successful efforts for exchange between commons scholars and large-scale studies. As editors, we support efforts to address this shortcoming, as illustrated by IJC's special feature on The Social-Ecological Systems Meta-Analysis Database (SESMAD) (Cox, 2014).

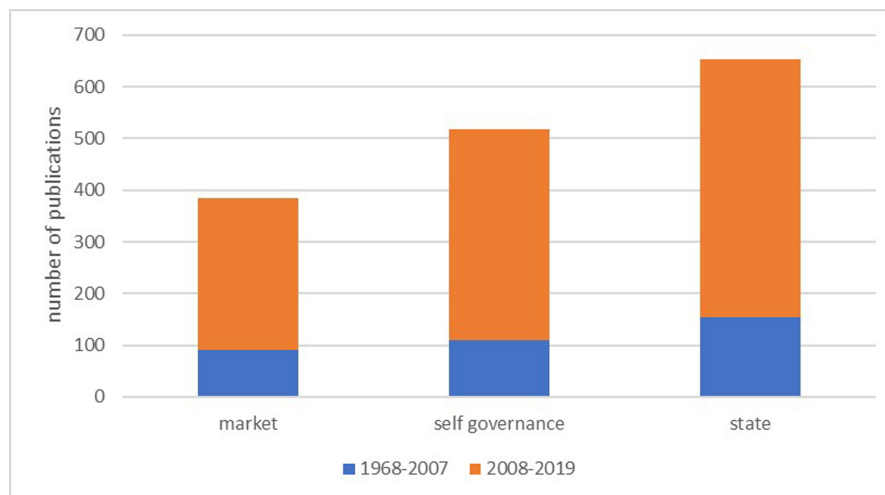
### ***Between the market and the state?***

Where Hardin claimed that only the state or the market could prevent a tragedy of the commons, Ostrom dedicated most of her career to showing how there is a lot of room on the spectrum that ranges between these two extremes (e.g. Ostrom, 1994). **Figure 18** presents a crude way to gauge our field's attention to the market, the state, and self-governance over time.

As the graph suggest, commons scholarship has increasingly included the role of governments and markets in its discourse. We do not know, however, how these terms are used. Much of the commons scholarship grew out of a rejection of governments and market as the only solutions to natural resource management. There are signs that such an “adversarial” approach has reversed over time. Paradigmatic examples are the emergence of new co-management literature (Berkes 1994, Frey et al. 2016) or recent calls to dig deeper



**Figure 17:** Too local?



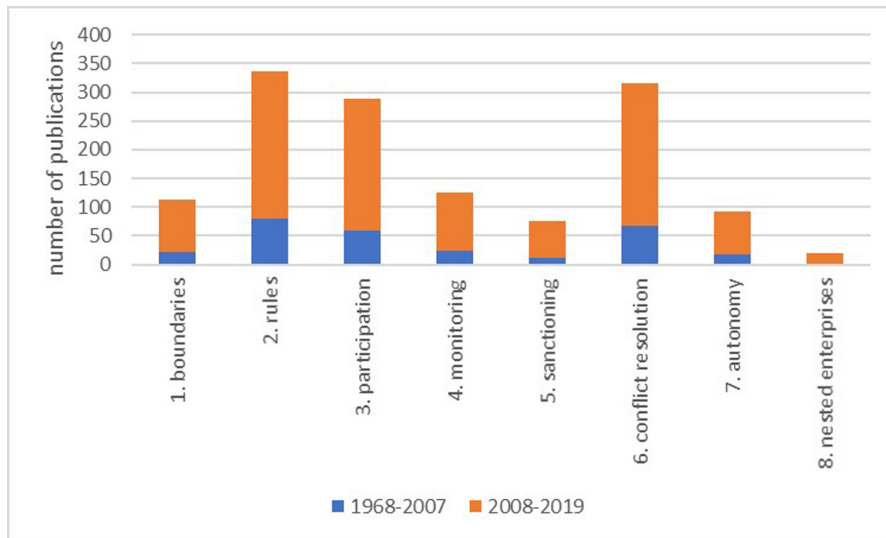
**Figure 18:** Between the market and the state?

into the specifics of hybrid modes of governance (Lemos and Agrawal 2006, Driessen et al. 2012, Villamayor-Tomas et al. 2019). A question for further research is whether the trend unveiled here corresponds with a qualitative change in the way the trichotomy communities-government-markets is addressed.

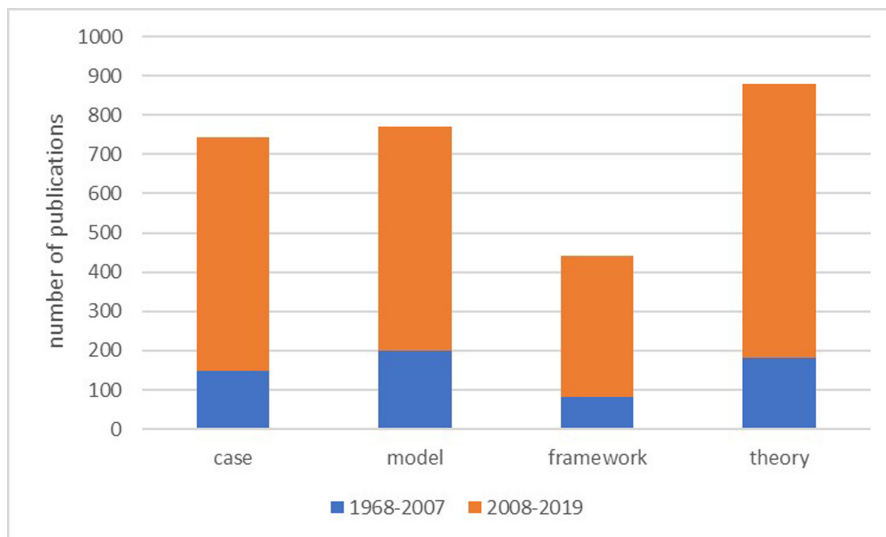
### ***The design principles?***

Ostrom identified the following eight design principles of stable local common pool resource management (Ostrom, 1990; Ostrom 2005; Cox et al. 2010):

1. Boundaries: Clearly defined boundaries (i.e. of the resource and of the group of users);
2. Rules: Congruence between appropriation and provision rules and local conditions;
3. Participation: Most individuals affected by the operational rules can participate in modifying the operational rules;
4. Monitoring: Effective monitoring by monitors who are part of or accountable to the resource users;
5. Sanctioning: Graduated sanctions: Appropriators who violate operational rules are likely to be assessed graduated sanctions;
6. Conflict resolution: Resource users and their officials have rapid access to low-cost local arenas to resolve conflicts among users or between users and officials.;
7. Autonomy: The rights of appropriators to devise their own institutions are not challenged by external governmental authorities;
8. Nested enterprises: Appropriation, provision, monitoring, enforcement, conflict resolution, and governance activities are organized in multiple layers of nested enterprises.



**Figure 19:** Attention for the design principles.



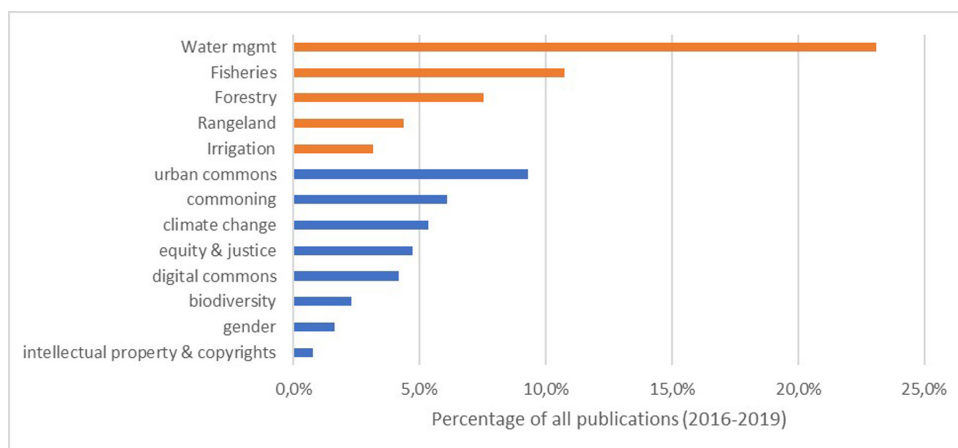
**Figure 20:** Attention for case studies.

**Figure 19** illustrates to what extent and in broad strokes our research seems to have a continued interest in these principles.<sup>3</sup> The earlier mentioned solid interest in institutions is reflected in the interest in rules that is captured in this graph. The earlier mentioned shift towards co-management and governance seems to be reflected in the interest in participation, here. Something that this graph does not reflect is recent interest among scholars to move into a configurational approach to the study of the principles. While evidence clearly supports the empirical validity of the principles (Cox et al. 2010), this evidence is less clear about which sets of them are more relevant depending on the context, or the pathways through which the principles are more easily implemented and make a difference. Recent works have started to move into that direction (Baggio et al. 2016, Schlager 2016, Villamayor-Tomas and Garcia-Lopez 2019). We believe this is a promising approach to making progress.

**Only case studies?**

Case studies appear to be in our genes. After all, *Governing the Commons* (Ostrom, 1990) was based on the analysis of a collection of case studies, aggregated in a meta-analysis. Historically, much of the work on the commons was comprised of case studies at the local scale. But is the impression that we may be spending too much time on producing yet another case study correct? Both before and after 2007 about 15% of all abstracts in our data base mention the word *case* (**Figure 20**). Both before and after 2007 only a minor

<sup>3</sup> We used the COUNTIF function in Excel. For gauging the apparent interest in each one of the eight design principles, we used the following terms when applying this function to the abstracts of the titles in our data base: “boundar”; “rule”; participat”; “monitor”; “sanction”; “conflict”; “autonomy”; and “nested.”



**Figure 21:** Attention for some new(er) commons compared with attention for the “big five” between 2016–2019.

part of all abstracts mentioning the word case also mention the word framework, theory and/or model (11% and 13%, respectively), suggesting that there is still room for improvement regarding the ability to extrapolate case findings in order to formulate generic claims.

We still value the importance of case studies. We have seen (as readers) and experienced (as authors) that the value of case studies is often unappreciated and underestimated by many journals (with clear exceptions such as *Case Studies in the Environment*). This observation strengthens us in our editorial ambition to continue to work with authors to publish case studies, particularly from underrepresented geographies. One vision that we would like to see come to fruition in the coming years is to provide some consistency in format and common meta-data required for all cases with a goal to allow for more effective cross-case comparison. We will start this within *IJC*, but we would like to see it shared by a suite of journals.

### ***New commons?***

The 2007 article hinted at a glimmering trend indicating a growing interest in digital commons (issue 7(2)), intellectual property rights (forthcoming issue), biodiversity (issue 8(2)) and climate change (issue 13(2)). There appears to be a growing interest in commoning, and urban issues, as well. **Figure 21** illustrates how an interest in some of the new(er) commons has been developing between 2016–2019, and how this interest compares to attention for the more traditional topics during that same period.

As editors, we are encouraged by the appropriate usage of the commons and commoning in many new areas, and we will continue to support this. In particular, we would encourage special features in these areas. In part, we believe that pushing into new realms is not only appropriate, but it also increases our audience and brings new voices and perspectives into our community.

### **Traditions & trends?**

In sum, this admittedly coarse and rather unsophisticated bibliographic analysis appears to reveal the following. We publish more and more (but so do all other fields and domains). During the last 50 years, we have found 1,900+ peer-reviewed journals willing to publish our work. Since 2007, the *International Journal of the Commons* appears to have become our favorite outlet. There's an incredible number of scholars that publish or have published on the commons during the last 50 years – approximately 6,500. Publications get noticed and cited (21 times on average), an indication we think, of the fact that the debate on the commons is still ongoing and vibrant. Many disciplines are involved – we count 28 subject areas – but the social sciences, more particularly economics, dominate. There is remarkably little evidence of multi/inter-disciplinarity or across-country collaboration. We are mostly affiliated with universities in the USA and Europe, but we mostly do research, elsewhere (i.e. mostly in what some refer to as the global south). We seem to be consistently interested in ‘big five’ topics (i.e. forests, fisheries, irrigation, water and rangeland), and in an institutional take on the commons. We have always liked and continue to favor case studies, but there appears to be a growing concern about the lack of standardization for the sake of comparison, and subsequently, theory development. In an era where planetary boundaries are coming into sight or have been surpassed (Steffen et al. 2015), we are glad to see that our field has embraced global and national issues, besides its tradition of applying local and community perspectives. Where we once

started off by contrasting the market and the state on the one hand, with self-governance alternatives, on the other, we now see a tendency to look beyond this dichotomy and study co-management, co-production the role of markets and participation, instead.

### Consequences for our editorial policy?

The Focus and Scope section of the IJC portal calls attention to our interest in interdisciplinary work and the role of “institutions for use and management of resources that are (or could be) enjoyed collectively” such as natural resources or knowledge. Based on our observations here presented we derive the following as input for IJC's editorial policies:

- We will make sure that our journal is widely and undeniably considered as a safe place for all views on, and approaches to the commons;
- We will attempt to mitigate challenges of diversity through our explicit support of authors in developing contexts;
- We will attempt to improve the circulation of ideas and findings among the commons community, among other things by giving more attention to new methods, looking for theoretical progress, and avoiding redundancy in research endeavors;
- We will encourage the submission of work coming from authors with an explicit natural science background;
- We will seek to encourage collaboration in all sorts and forms, i.e. between disciplines, departments, and geographic regions;
- We will allow room for contributions on commons in countries that so far have gotten less attention;
- We will encourage and support initiatives that push commons research in new directions and that can complement our conventional interest in the governance of relatively small-scale, local natural resources;
- We will support efforts to encourage the standardization of case study work in an attempt to facilitate cross case comparisons for the sake of theory development.
- Although not the object of this first study, we recognize the importance of bridging the gap between practitioner, policy-making and scholarly communities. This has been an ongoing challenge for both IJC and the International Association for the Study of the Commons (IASC). We will keep supporting submissions and initiatives that move in that direction.

The tools at our disposal to accomplish these goals include

- Proactively identifying and financing individual work and special issues that would help us achieving these objectives;
- Offering editorial support (in the form extra rounds of reviews), and financial support (in the form of author fee exemptions) to authors from developing contexts;
- Create an editorial board with the means, capacity and willingness to support these goals, and;
- Encourage contributions that help moving us towards the accomplishment of these goals by means of the *Ostrom Memorial Award for Most Innovative Paper*.

### Future analysis?

In this analysis, we zoomed out and took a closer look at the large number of publications that appeared over the span of 50 years. A shortcoming of this approach regards the fact that we cannot really appreciate and interpret the more turbulent developments that are taking place at the forefront of our field, right now, or outside peer-reviewed scholarly work.

As editors we have the privilege of being able to follow in real time what is going on at the very forefront of our community. After finalizing this analysis, we all three had the feeling that the sense we are getting from our familiarity with exciting, more recent approaches to the commons is not very well reflected in our data set. In an analysis of almost 4,000 titles, recent attention to for example gender (37 titles), inequality (60 titles) or environmental justice (80 titles) disappear under the volume of other writing, and subsequently remains below the notice of many. The same holds for the seemingly dominant grip that institutionalism keeps on our field. The numbers from this analysis don't let us tell the more nuanced story of pioneering work that is being developed as we speak.

Therefore, in our next editorial we hope to counter the picture that emerges from the current analysis with an analysis that captures more accurately the turbulence and cutting-edge novel work of commons scholarship by today's pioneers.

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## Competing Interests

This editorial is authored by the EICs of the International Journal of the Commons.

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