

The Urban Commons Cookbook:

Strategies and Insights for Creating
and Maintaining Urban Commons



Mary Dellenbaugh-Losse
Nils-Eyk Zimmermann
Nicole de Vries

The Urban Commons Cookbook:

Strategies and Insights for Creating and
Maintaining Urban Commons

<p>1</p> <p>4 Forewords</p> <hr/> <p>2</p> <p>6 Introduction: Why do urban commons need a cookbook?</p> <hr/> <p>3</p> <p>7 Urban commons in theory and practice</p> <p>7 What are urban commons?</p> <p>14 Why now? Commons and the city</p> <p>16 Common-pool resources, common property, and the new commons</p> <p>21 Core aspects of commoning</p> <p>28 Commoning as a practice</p> <hr/> <p>4</p> <p>30 The case studies</p> <p>36 Düsselgrün (Urban gardening)</p> <p>46 Freifunk (Wireless internet)</p> <p>57 Incredible Edible Todmorden (Public space and gardening)</p> <p>64 Bike Kitchen Bratislava (Mobility)</p> <p>73 Holzmarkt (Urban development)</p>	<p>Middelgrunden Wind Energy Cooperative (Wind energy) 81</p> <p>Club Cultural Matienzo (Arts and culture) 89</p> <p>Kalkbreite (Housing) 96</p> <hr/> <p>5</p> <p>Practicing the commons 106</p> <p>Self-governance and decision-making 108</p> <p>Community outreach 143</p> <p>Self-empowerment and learning 171</p> <hr/> <p>6</p> <p>Summary & take home messages 183</p> <hr/> <p>7</p> <p>Literature, resources & further reading 187</p> <hr/> <p>8</p> <p>About us 193</p> <hr/> <p>9</p> <p>Imprint 194</p> <hr/>
---	---

Forewords

When I wrote “Urban Commons: Moving beyond State and Market” between 2013 and 2015 together with the other members of the Urban Research Group, urban commons was a relatively new field. For this reason, that book was chiefly concerned with the “what” of urban commons: finding or creating an adequate definition to try to explain new trends in the user-driven urban projects that were cropping up left and right.

In the five years since our book came out, there have been a number of publications and projects about the topic of urban commons. Like our book, these works primarily examined a range of case studies and/or attempted to (further) develop the theory surrounding commons in cities. You can find a selection of these titles in the further reading section at the end of this book.

It seemed to me that what we need in the growing body of literature about urban commons is not another book about what, or another book aimed at academics and theoreticians, but rather a concise, approachable book about the how for those on the ground. It is with this intention that I initiated **The Urban Commons Cookbook**.

I would like to take the chance to thank our backers on Kickstarter, in particular Seats2meet.com, Dr. Martin Schwegmann, and Actors of Urban Change for their support and generosity. Without all of your help, we would not have been able to realize this project. I would also like to thank all of the commons projects who took time to speak with us for this book and share their knowledge and experiences. Many thanks to Tom Llewellyn from Shareable for his support during this process, in particular in contacting many of the projects interviewed. Last but not least, I would like to extend my deepest thanks to Nils-Eyk Zimmermann and Nicole de Vries for their competence, creativity, and valuable contributions to this book. As the interviews revealed, cooperation with like-minded people and groups is key, and this project was no exception.

It is my great hope that the information gathered here will help future commons projects grow and thrive in the space between the state and the market, and that this niche will grow as a result.

Mary Dellenbaugh-Losse
Berlin, April 2020

How can civil engagement lead to a sustainable, democratic culture and social progress? This question has been central to my work as an author and consultant for several years now. Although participation and citizen empowerment are valued by political representatives in some societies, it is important to remember that, in others, this support is not a given. A study of the struggles for citizen empowerment, especially in countries which have undergone fundamental transitions, can be instructive. The development of civil society in Central and Eastern Europe, for example, has demonstrated that, in order to be authentic and sustainable, the process must be citizen-led and bottom up. There are however many barriers to civic engagement. Limited time, energy, and attention, lack of appreciation and recognition of the effort, and deregulation and uncertainty can all undermine the effectiveness and agency of civil society.

Urban commons projects present a good reason for optimism. These projects prove daily that creative, solidary, and resilient alternatives to the market and authoritarian governance exist. In some cases, commons projects provide the last bastion of grassroots resistance and nascent democratic practice. Beyond their emancipatory power, commons also offer a range of benefits for their members. Through their cooperation and deliberation, commoners produce social and economic added value for themselves and their communities. Furthermore, commons projects can be understood as spaces of learning, in which skills for civic engagement, as well as trust and confidence, can be developed.

In this book, we wish to present you with not only the **what** and the **why**, but also a range of tools to help you with the **how**. We hope this work will become a useful resource for strengthening urban commons projects and civil society in general!

Nils-Eyk Zimmermann
Berlin, April 2020

When Mary reached out asking for support on her newest project, I was just finishing my master's thesis on collaborative approaches to designing urban life. I was impressed and fascinated by the numerous projects experimenting with participative ways of achieving social and environmental justice. This is why my special thanks goes out to Mary, who gave me the possibility to dive even deeper into the topic of urban commons. I would also like to thank the commons projects that shared their stories with us, as well as all the projects and initiatives that we did not interview but that are out there and find the courage to fight for a brighter future every day. It is my hope that this book will inspire even more people to realize projects that make urban life a little more beautiful.

Nicole de Vries
Munster, April 2020

Introduction:

Why do urban commons need a cookbook?

One of the main questions that we have received over the course of this project is: why a cookbook? In thinking about urban commons, the metaphor of cooking seemed particularly fitting for us – ingredients vary slightly based on the environments they grow in, pressure differences lead to longer baking times or different cooking temperatures, and each cook seasons to his or her particular taste.

Through our work with urban commons over the last five or so years, we have discovered that there are both a range of characteristics which unite these projects across borders and subtle differences between them as a result of their local contexts. **The Urban Commons Cookbook** is a first attempt to bridge the gaps between individual urban commons projects across resource types and geographical distances in order to show their commonalities and help them and new projects learn from each other's experiences. Our goal is to strengthen civil participation in all aspects of urban life among those who have the courage to start their own projects and to try to help actors from the public sector better understand the benefits of commons and how and where they can be best supported.

This book is divided into three sections. The first section offers background information about urban commons: what are their main ingredients and what is the current state of knowledge about them? This section examines Elinor Ostrom's work and the specifically "urban" aspects of urban commons and unpacks commoning as a social practice. The second section is made up of interviews with eight very different urban commons projects. Just as one can read a recipe as an exact blueprint or as a suggestion to be adapted, it is possible to read the experiences and advice of the projects interviewed for this book as a roadmap or as recombinable parts to be assembled into a new whole in your own local context. Finally, for those looking for new techniques to cook up an urban commons, we have included a range of methods and supporting information in the third section of this book for beginning cooks and experienced chefs alike. We close with a summary and take home messages for activists and policy makers – if you only have five minutes, this is what you'll want to read!

We hope that this cookbook will be a helpful resource for continuing and broadening the already active conversation about commons in cities!

Urban commons in theory and practice

What are urban commons?

Urban commons are resources in the city which are managed by the users in a non-profit-oriented and prosocial way. They can include any number of resource types, from housing to Wi-Fi, but the main thing that makes urban commons different from public goods and consumer goods is that they are managed by the users through a prosocial, participatory process called “commoning”. Because the users themselves decide how to manage the resource, this process can be organized in an agile and flexible way, as we will see from the case studies.

One of the key aspects that differentiate **urban** commons from other commons types is the constant state of what economists call “congestion” in cities. This high level of demand often translates to high prices and overuse of public goods in cities. Urban commons thus attempt to carve out niches in which the costs of using and maintaining the resource are based on its **use value** as opposed to its **exchange value**. To put it another way, urban commons put the focus on the practical, everyday value of the resource for its users instead of treating it as a commodity from which profit can be derived. In this book, we will describe this as “non-commodified” resource use and/or management.

Furthermore, urban commons invert the usual logic of capitalism and the traditional state, which both place the citizen in the subject role of the consumer, instead empowering citizens to address their own perceived desires and co-produce solutions to urban issues that are important to them. In doing so, urban commons both rely on trust and serve to build it.

➡ Commoning: A collective, participatory process of accessing, managing, and developing a resource.

➡ In economics, congestion means that a resource has more potential users than it can support.

➡ Non-commodified resource use is when a resource is removed from the market in order to strengthen its use value.

Public and consumer goods: A quick rundown

Public goods are goods which are owned and managed by the government, which gets to decide how the resources are allocated and who has access.

This process can exclude non-citizens or those who don't fulfill certain criteria.

The state can also impose rules to regulate the resource which can structurally exclude certain groups.

Consumer goods are only available to those who can afford them. The logic of capitalism encourages profit maximization, thus the relegation of resource provision to the market can lead to low-income groups being excluded from resource access.

¹Over the course of several decades, economist Elinor Ostrom undertook empirical research about how commons work; in 2009, she shared the Nobel Prize in economics for this ground-breaking research. The rules, structures, typologies, and fundamental underlying principles which she uncovered inform this chapter. See also Ostrom, 1990.

Urban commons are highly diverse and can refer to “economic goods, property rights or social dilemmas” (Hess, 2008, p. 21). In this chapter, we will attempt to unpack the various aspects of commons and specifically **urban** commons – from common-pool resources to new commons – with a special focus at the end of the chapter on the social dimensions of commoning. This approach reflects our understanding of commons as “a social regime for managing shared resources and forging a community of shared values and purpose” (Clippinger and Bollier 2005 quoted in Hess, 2008, p. 35). In commons, the community is just as important, if not even more important, than the resource itself.

Urban commons have the potential to be more inclusive and ensure accessibility to resources for a wider group of people in the city than is the case for either public or consumer goods, but it doesn't have to be that way. Because of the nature of some resources, it is necessary to limit the number of users to prevent overuse; sometimes the limits on the user group are the result of the fact that the resource is finite and limited (like a housing cooperative). Other resource types, on the other hand, lend themselves well to being shared openly with the wider public.

In order to be able to examine these aspects, we need to take a quick step back. Following Elinor Ostrom's work,¹ commons have three parts: resources, people, and a process of management known as “commoning.”



Key aspects of the commons

Resources: Commons resources can be material or immaterial. Broadly speaking, commons resources are a non-commodified means of supplying some good or service to the commoners.

People: The “commoners.” This is the group of individuals who are involved in the production and reproduction of commons. This group usually forms organically and is self-defined. The “commoners” are responsible for collectively negotiating and enforcing the rules about how the commons resources are managed and used.

Commoning: These resources are not managed following market principles (private ownership, profit maximization, etc.). They are also not managed by an administrative body, such as a city council. They are managed by the commoners themselves, who negotiate and renegotiate the rules about boundaries, use forms and intensities, and penalties for breaking the rules. This includes the prevention and punishment of free-riding. Commoning includes social benefit for the commoners well beyond the “transactional” nature of resource management.

1. Depletability:

Can the resource be 'used up' or not?

2. Excludability:

Can access be limited or controlled?

3. Rivalrous use:

Does one user's use take away from others' enjoyment or ability to use the resource? Can two users use the resource at the same time for different uses?²

➡ Free-riders are users who break the agreed upon rules or don't belong to the group of commoners but use the resource anyway, usually without knowledge of the agreed-upon rules.

Resources

These three aspects can vary in a number of ways, but the characteristics of the resource itself are usually decisive in how the rules about its use and management develop. Resources can be categorized following three main qualities (following Bollier, 2009, p.5): depletability, excludability, and rivalrous use.

Taking a first look at these three characteristics, it becomes apparent how they could affect the way that the commoners approach rule-making. If a resource can be used up, the rules may have to be stricter to prevent it becoming depleted below a certain level. This is easier in resources which are both depletable and excludable – then free-riders can be excluded.

Let's take the example of an apple tree in an open courtyard which is tended by the residents of the house. The residents agree on who tends the apple tree and when and how they will split up the harvest among themselves. The apple tree is a depletable, excludable resource with rivalrous use. The ripe apples can be used up (depletability), and if one person takes an apple, there is one less apple for someone else (rivalrous use). Plus, in using the land for the apple tree, it can't be used for a swing set (rivalrous use).

Furthermore, it would be possible for the residents to put a tall fence around the tree (excludability) to prevent passers-by from picking the apples (free-riders).

²In this book, we assume that landed commons are always rivalrous, since there are always alternate possible uses for land in a city.



People

The group of people who use a commons resource can be either open or closed – this is often dependent on whether the resource is excludable or not. In addition, users can be commoners (that is: involved in the decision-making about rules) or both commoners and non-commoner users. The number of users in an urban commons is frequently dictated by the amount and depletable of the resource.

What are club goods and are they urban commons?

Club goods are a special sub-category of goods which are non-rivalrous (to a point – if there is very high demand, the resource becomes rivalrous) but excludable. As the name implies, if you're part of the club, you can use the good.

Club goods take advantage of economies of scale and can be offered by the state, the market, or in a commons arrangement. A fitness studio is a good example of a club good. Since it's quite expensive to have a personal gym at home, you can become a member of a fitness studio. It could be the big chain around the corner (market), the workout area at the public pool (state), or a fitness cooperative (commons). Independent of who organizes and offers the service, they are unified by the fact that they are all defined as club goods: you need membership to enter.

So while some urban commons can formally be described as club goods, not all club goods are urban commons.

Commons custodians and semi-commons: Commons hybrids for growing cities?

Highly fluctuating urban populations can add an additional layer of risk for commons enclosure in cities, since successful commoning processes are often long-term and locally embedded. For this reason, “commons custodians” and “semi-commons” can be useful alternatives for areas where enclosure is a tangible threat, but the group of potential commoners and users fluctuates frequently.

Custodians may pick up the slack of enforcing rules which are commonly agreed upon in a prosocial way, thus enabling access to resources and the prosocial aspects of commons without requiring all users to engage in the (sometimes tedious) process of negotiation.

Semi-commons blend private and common property rights, with some aspects of the resource protected and others open, for example a private owner allowing commons projects on his or her property. The [Lincoln Street Art Park/Recycle Here](#) in Detroit, who were generous enough to speak to us at length for this publication, are a good example of a semi-commons.

A few key ideas affect group size and organization. One of the most important is **Dunbar’s number**, the theoretical cognitive limit on the number of people with which a single person can maintain social relationships, a concept which was first proposed in the 1990s by British anthropologist and evolutionary psychologist Robin Dunbar. The central idea is that there is a limit on the number of people that one person can recognize and name (e.g. even when seeing that person out of context). Anyone who has seen a coworker in the supermarket and not been able to place where they know them from will recognize immediately what’s meant here. While some people can remember as many as 250 people, for most people this limit is about 150. That means that groups with less than 150 people tend to have stronger natural social controls; because everyone in the group can recognize the other members by sight, it’s easier to prevent free-riding by outsiders and enforce rules within the group. The question is how to apply this principle in cities with high population fluctuations. Anonymity is damaging to commons. If users don’t know who is part of the group how can they prevent free-riding? And if users don’t feel like the rules are being enforced, they themselves will be less inclined to follow them.



In general, for commons projects with more than 150 users, tiered participative structures can help to support direct democratic participation and break direct contact down into smaller groups where social capital and social controls can help build self-enforcing structures to protect the commons. In areas with high population fluctuation, “custodians” can help to ensure that rules are enforced and participation is possible, even for those not able to take part in the commoning process. And finally, as already mentioned, while commons initiatives present the opportunity to build social capital in neighborhoods, it’s important to consider that groups can also work to exclude, not just include.

Commoning: A cooperative process

Commoning, the interaction between commoners which includes the internal negotiation of rules, is a central and fundamental component of commons. It’s this participatory and deliberative process that makes commons different from other resource use arrangements. How commoning takes place shapes the internal culture of a project, since how commoners work together has a significant impact on rules, image, and how one perceives other citizens as partners (or not).

The structures of commoning are shaped both by the characteristics of the commons resource and group size and composition. While small groups may know each other personally and reach decisions through simply protocolled face-to-face meetings, large groups often need more formalized structures to make or change rules. As we will see from the case studies in the next section, the larger the group, the more formalized their decision-making processes frequently are.

Since the rules are intended to reflect the will of the group as completely as possible, commons projects tend to place more emphasis on how decisions are reached than other groups. In this case, a focus on dissenting voices, the requirement for 2/3rds majority, or striving for consensus even if decisions take longer may be the result.

In particular in smaller groups, where the commoners have close personal relationships with each other (also usually outside of the commons project), looking for consensus and making sure that all members feel heard can be an important part of the social aspect of commoning and can serve to build social capital and maintain ties or friendships between the commoners. Conversely, the existing social capital and friendships between the commoners can encourage consensus-based decision-making, since the social ties between the commoners are strong. We’ll return to these aspects at the end of this chapter.

Why now?

Commons and the city

➡ [See further reading for a selection of these works.](#)

[The last ten to fifteen years have seen a dramatic increase in the topic of urban commons.](#) We see three main sources for the current increase in interest in commons in cities. First of all, in the mid-2000s, research on commons in general, especially natural commons, began to increase dramatically. As the global population lurched towards 7 billion people and global warming's effects began to become more noticeable, more attention began to be paid to this work and the finite nature of our natural world. This culminated in the awarding of the 2009 Nobel Prize in economics to Elinor Ostrom and Oliver E. Williamson for their work on commons management and design.

Secondly, at the end of the 2000s, the global financial crisis sent shockwaves through the global economy, resulting in widespread austerity measures and the rollback of public goods and services from Athens to Manchester. Urban commons, some termed as such and some not, sprung up as both emancipatory and “self-help” measures. Commoners planted vegetables in abandoned lots and tended overgrown public parks. [They offered community healthcare and developed new housing alternatives for victims of foreclosure.](#) But what has happened to these commons? As the market and the state have recovered and begun to be able to financialize urban resources again, these projects are often the victims of privatization, which brings us to our third point.

➡ [For some examples, please see the case studies in Dellenbaugh et al., 2015.](#)

Cities, especially in the Americas and Europe, are increasingly subject to a crisis of affordability. Entrepreneurial city tactics have jettisoned municipal housing, municipal landownership, public utilities, and public services, privatizing these through sales or outsourcing. In both of these contexts, urban commons have become not only a way to secure (affordable) access to resources, but also a rallying cry against the waves of privatization of once public resources that are sweeping above all growing cities.

We predict that the interest in urban commons will continue to grow as the demands on cities and their resources do. Urban populations will continue to be subject to the pains of privatization and profit-maximization strategies. Urban commons present the opportunity for the urban population – the users of a resource – to have a bigger say in how it is managed. It provides the possibility to reframe the costs inherent to life in the city based on their use value and maintenance costs, and not the market-driven exchange value. For many, it means the possibility to access these resources at all, as privatization and increases in their market-driven exchange values push them slowly out of reach.

Enclosure of the commons

The term “enclosure of the commons” comes from the enclosure movements in northern Europe (most notably in England) more than five centuries ago. In this process, commonly-held lands, which were an important source of food and fuel for the peasants, were fenced in and commodified. Today, enclosure refers to the loss of accessibility to a resource. Enclosure can happen gradually or suddenly. In the city, enclosure can take the form of privatization or commercialization or result from new laws. If you once had free access to something and now either can't access it or have to pay to use it, you've encountered an example of the enclosure of the commons.

Common-pool resources, common property, and the new commons

Commons researchers differentiate between common-pool resources, common property rights and, more recently, new commons.

Elinor Ostrom's groundbreaking work on commons centered on **common-pool resources** which are depletable and not excludable, for example oceanic fish populations or air quality. Her eight principles for managing a commons, based on an empirical examination of the successful and sustainable management of common-pool resources, are as follows:

1. Define clear group boundaries.
2. Match rules governing use of common goods to local needs and conditions.
3. Ensure that those affected by the rules can participate in modifying the rules.
4. Make sure the rule-making rights of community members are respected by outside authorities.
5. Develop a system, carried out by community members, for monitoring members' behavior.
6. Use graduated sanctions for rule violators.
7. Provide accessible, low-cost means for dispute resolution.
8. Build responsibility for governing the common resource in nested tiers from the lowest level up to the entire interconnected system.

Ostrom highlights the difference between common-pool resources, which no one person or entity can own, and **common property**, "a formal or informal legal regime that allocates various forms of rights to a group" (Hess, 2008, p. 34).

It is important to clear up what roles and rights individual members have. Charlotte Hess and Elinor Ostrom identified seven types of rights associated with common property which can help commoners come to agreement on what rights they want various subgroups in their project to have:

1. **Access:** The right to enter a defined physical area and enjoy non-subtractive benefits.
2. **Contribution:** The right to contribute to the content.
3. **Extraction:** The right to obtain resource units or products of a resource system.
4. **Removal:** The right to remove one's artifacts from the resource.
5. **Management / Participation:** The right to regulate internal use patterns and transform the resource by making improvements.
6. **Exclusion:** The right to determine who will have access, contribution, extraction, and removal rights and how those rights may be transferred.
7. **Alienation:** The right to sell or lease management and exclusion rights (Ostrom and Hess, 2007, p.16)

Urban commons can be either common-pool resources (such as wireless internet) or common property (such as collectivized power grids, housing cooperatives, or bike sharing). In addition, emerging research about so-called “new commons” seems to fit the equally new concepts of urban commons quite well.

New commons, as examined by Charlotte Hess, “are various types of shared resources that have recently evolved or have been recognized as commons. They are commons without pre-existing rules or clear institutional arrangements” (Hess, 2008, p. 1). Similar to the discussion of the emergence of urban commons above, new commons have arisen as “reactions to increasing commodification, privatization and corporatization, untamed globalization, and unresponsive governments” (Hess, 2008, p. 3). New commons additionally encompass once-public resources which have been reframed as commons. In the urban context, this might include the conceptualization of sidewalks as commons, or the recomunalization of formerly-privatized infrastructure such as power grids or waterworks. Furthermore, they describe resources that have emerged as technological advances have created ways to enclose resources which were not possible previously.

Charlotte Hess identifies what she describes as “six common entry-points” shared among the very diverse range of new commons initiatives which have cropped up in recent years: “(a) the need to protect a shared resource from

enclosure, privatization, or commodification; (b) the observation or action of peer-production and mass collaboration primarily in electronic media; (c) evidence of new types of tragedies of the commons; (d) the desire to build civic education and commons-like thinking; (e) identification of new or evolving types of commons within traditional commons; and (f) rediscovery of the commons” (Hess, 2008, p. 6). As we will see in the case studies presented in this book, urban commons are characterized by these six themes as well.

Let us return for a moment to the eight principles for common-pool resources in the context of **urban** commons.

One of the main challenges in highly-fluctuating urban populations is the **definition of clear group boundaries** in the use of common-pool resources but also some common property arrangements. As the case studies show, many groups furthermore strongly wish to remain open and porous as a result of their ethical or moral stance to the social aspects of commoning.

Many of the projects interviewed here also put an emphasis on principle two, **matching the rules governing use of common goods to local needs and conditions**. This is usually attainable from the side of the commoners, since urban commons projects are typically a direct reaction to a perceived need, whether it’s green mobility or open Wi-Fi.

► We outline several possibilities for policy-makers to actively support the commons in our take home messages at the end of this book.

For common property-based urban commons, it is usually easy to **ensure that those affected by the rules can participate in modifying the rules**. This is particularly true in cases where clear group boundaries are possible and desired. As already mentioned, in smaller groups, this can be more fluid and flexible (as can the group composition), while larger groups will require more formalized structures to ensure transparency and fairness.

Principle four, **make sure the rule-making rights of community members are respected by outside authorities**, is frequently a problem, especially when projects come from an activist background. Furthermore, unless projects engage in lobby and public relations work, it's possible that the city administration may be fully unaware of the benefit that they bring to the city. In short, urban commons projects can fill needs that cities have (principle two), but they often lack the recognition and support that they require to scale up (principle four).

The degree of formality for **monitoring members' behavior** (principle five), **graduated sanctions for rule violators** (principle six), and **dispute resolution** (principle seven) are highly dependent on group size and composition. In smaller groups, social control and social capital, both established through regular contact both within the commoning process and in private life, generally mean that these processes take place in a relatively informal fashion. As the group grows and simple social controls lose their strength, more formalized policies and structures become part of the commoning process. These can include official rules such as bylaws or clarifying statements of purpose and shared values such as manifestos or mission statements.

Finally, in larger and more formalized urban commons systems (such as the [Miethäuser Syndikat](#)), the development **of nested tiers for commons resource governance** have been established, though they are necessarily fairly bureaucratic as a result of the prosocial process-oriented decision-making procedures inherent to commons projects. These types of structures are more widespread in common property resource types, though not unthinkable in urban common-pool resources.



Similar to new commons, urban commons emphasize collaboration, cooperation, the link between local actions and global effects, responsibility “beyond our backyard,” ecological and social sustainability, equity, and the vulnerability of commons resources to “encroachment, privatization, commercialization, congestion, scarcity, [and] degradation” (Hess, 2008, p. 39). In equal measure, similar to new commons, urban commons focus on “collective action, voluntary associations, and collaboration. While property rights and the nature of the good may still be important, there is a growing emphasis on questions of governance, participatory processes, and trust; and there is a groundswell of interest in shared values and moral responsibility” (Hess, 2008, p. 37), aspects which will be the focus of the next section.

Public space: **A special commons**

Public space is certainly a commons. But which is it: a common-pool resource or common property?

The conceptualization of public space as a common-pool resource links back to historical and ecological understandings of the commons – resources which no one person can own, but which everyone uses. Formally, however, public space is owned and managed by municipal, state, or federal authorities, who make and enforce rules governing the space (for example dusk-to-dawn curfews in public parks) which may or may not have been agreed upon with the people who use that space. Furthermore, the city administration may allow commodification of parts of public space, such as permitting cafés to place their tables on a public sidewalk or allowing advertising on bus stops or other public structures. From this perspective, public space seems much more like common property.

We suggest that public space may demonstrate qualities of both common-pool resources and common property, and that these characteristics may change over time in different places relative to use and management intensity and changes in the roles of the state and market. The development of commons-based public space management therefore requires a blend of common-pool resource and common property management approaches.

Independent of the categorization, public space is critically important for social and political engagement and expression. This is one reason why the concept of public space as a commons has become central to the fight for the right to the city (Lefebvre, 1996). From this perspective, resistance the encroachments of the state (overbearing or authoritarian rules) and the market (commodification of public space) represent a form of civil engagement which ensures that the public nature of public space is preserved and that the commons remain free and accessible for all.

Core aspects of commoning

Commoning is the participatory social practice of co-governance which forms the basis for making a resource accessible, as well as maintaining, sharing, or spreading it. Similar to other forms of collective engagement for the public good, commoning is a form of public⁴ involvement (Lohmann, 2016). However, as opposed to other forms of collective engagement for the public good, urban commons are exemplified by their commitment to and/or reliance on solidarity and cooperation, creating added value for the community, democracy and inclusiveness, and a culture of hacking. Furthermore, from our analysis of the case studies examined in this book and literature about the commons, we have identified three main aspects in the practice of commoning which will form the backbone of chapter three and which we would like to introduce at the end of this section.

Solidarity and cooperation

Commoning combines the access to and maintenance of a resource with collective public involvement. From this perspective, it is a practice of self-empowerment in which people acquire competencies for public engagement and cooperative organization. The term empowerment here implies that the negotiation of rules and the co-creation of the structures of commoning not only lead to the learning of new, vital civic skill sets, but also the actively lived practice of sharing and cooperation, seen in sharp contrast to the cliché paradigm of a self-interested **homo economicus**. For this reason, commoners often describe their activities as contributing to a greater good and perceive themselves as shaping alternative, human-centered solutions for economic, social, ecological, or cultural problems through a process of engagement. They emphasize alternatives to money as a medium of exchange;

³Throughout this book, we have chosen to use the word “public” instead of “citizen” wherever possible. This editorial choice is a direct reaction to the current surge in nationalist populism and its concentration on citizens and rights. Our understanding of commons and commoners seeks to encourage a wider understanding of a globally mobile public made up of a diverse range of individuals who may or may not be citizens of the place they live in. In this context, commons and commoning represent an explicitly inclusive set of practices beyond borders and passports.

in sociological terms, one could describe this as a preference for social capital over financial capital. Moreover, they embrace cooperation over individualization as the better way to meet their needs. Hess describes this attitude as “commons-like thinking: a belief in the common good and working toward shared outcomes based on voluntary participation and reciprocity” (Hess, 2008, p. 8).

Added value for the community

The distinction between commons and other forms of public goods or social entrepreneurship lends commons projects social legitimation under the condition that they fulfill the following criteria (German Bundestag, 2002, p. 3f):

- Acting voluntarily (this excludes being forced)
- Acting toward a clearly described common good according to democratic rules
- Acting publicly (this excludes private appropriation of the resource)
- Promoting the community over the individual
- Non-profit orientation (financial resources go to support the core activities)

These five criteria highlight and promote the community, open access, and the social and solidary aspects of commons projects above and beyond traditional public goods and social entrepreneurship. Through the fulfillment of these criteria, urban commons projects create an added social value for the communities in which they are located.

Democracy and inclusiveness

From a rights perspective, commoning can be seen as a bottom-up experiment in which democratic rights and needs are realized (i. e. rights connected to social, political, and cultural participation or human rights) or in which new rights are formulated (like the right to the city or access to nature). Furthermore, the process of commoning creates a co-produced space from which people can additionally fight for their interests and rights (for example, promoting the right to the city and empowering people for successful public engagement). These underlying democratic foundations of commons projects reveal the need to develop inclusive commons which strive to engage a broad range of people from urban society. From this perspective, commoning can be considered both a social institution for cooperation and a gateway to democratic participation. Put another way: as already mentioned, commons can be inclusive, but are not **inherently** inclusive.

For this reason, it is important for commons projects, and particularly urban commons projects, to assess their openness at each stage of the development of their project. Especially in urban contexts, commons projects are surrounded by privatization pressures and competitors for land, space, and money. In order to gain trustworthiness and to distinguish themselves from state- and market-oriented competitors, projects need to demonstrate how they ensure that the “real” public character of a resource is preserved through their work (Kratzwald, 2012, p. 82).

➔ [See more under “Social legitimization and transparency,” p. 147](#)

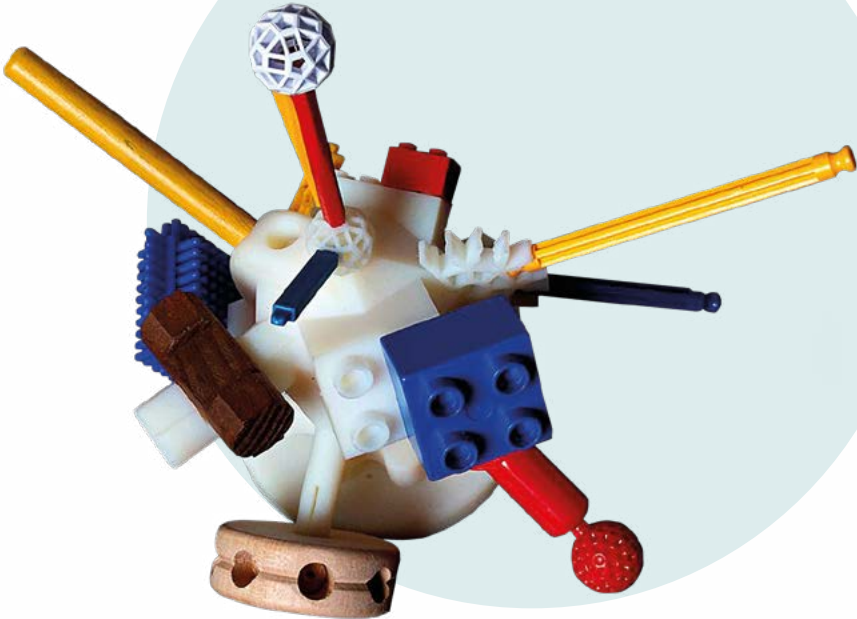
Culture of hacking

Finally, if commons are social and material configurations made from the broad range of needs and materials in our urban reality, then we could describe them through the metaphor of **human-centric constructions**. Those who develop commons necessarily have different design principles in mind than capitalist producers; their projects must still however link up with existing state and market structures. In addition, in the urban context, commons projects create unexpected spatial uses, in essence hacking the urban space and reconfiguring well-known spaces into something new. Finally, through their prosocial approach, urban commons create new connections between formerly separated worlds, structures, and spheres. These three characteristics are similar to the free universal construction kit created by the 3D additivists movement.

Free universal construction kit – A metaphor for urban commons?

The 3D additivists movement explores the opportunities of decentral and user-centered 3D printing for participation, social change, and new forms of living and economy. With the free universal construction kit (Allahyari and Rourke, 2017), they tackled a fundamental problem of products and social processes: their producers limit their **interoperability and compatibility** and often build barriers limiting **free access**.

This can be illustrated by systems of construction toys. Together, they are useless due to their incompatibility. The addivist's hack designs elements that are able to function as connectors. Furthermore, an open and free template allows anyone to reprint this element with any 3D printer. The possibilities opened by this hack are endless and allow the interaction of formerly discrete systems. Through the open source template, users are also encouraged to adapt and expand the concept in and for their own context.

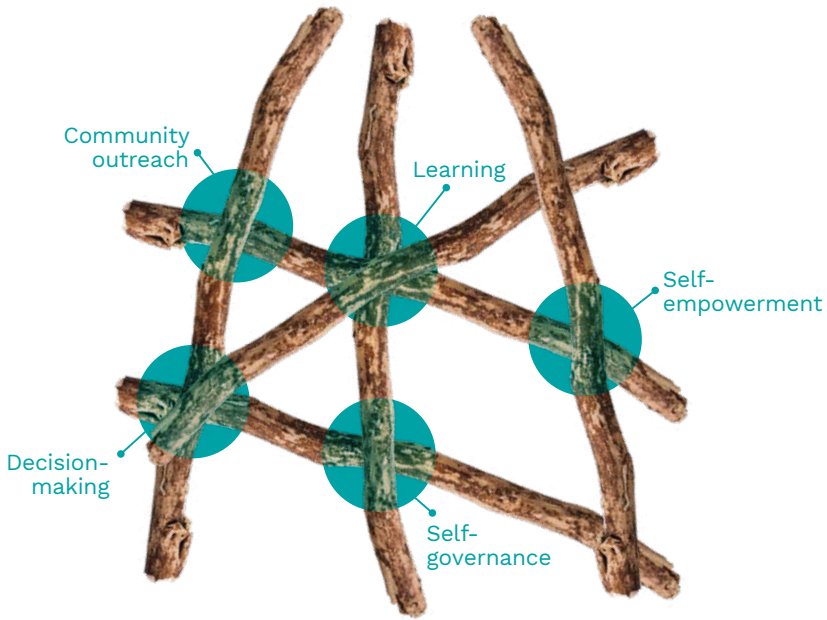


Example for an adapter. Source: Allahyari and Rourke, 2017

Building on the metaphor in the box on the left, capitalism seeks to separate and differentiate, to lock consumers into unique, proprietary systems. Commons, on the other hand, have the ability to create interfaces between different social systems – finding social solutions in a dialogue between the people, the state, politics, and the economy. Similarly, the inventors of the free universal construction kit did not design a new closed ecosystem of better bricks. Instead they used the resources that were available in a lot of homes, an inherently sustainable approach which hacks and recombines existing resources. They enabled people to use their resources (again) in a new and creative way. Their adapters create new solutions not foreseen by the designers of the existing brick toys. Finally, like commons, the free universal construction kit is open: the adapters can be printed using any 3D printer and users are encouraged to adapt, expand, and build on the original idea.

Commoning as a practice

How do we integrate these aspects into the proactive promotion of commoning in our cities? The four aspects described above all incorporate the constant, multi-layered processes of negotiation going on within commons projects, between commons and their environment, and even within the commoners themselves. Throughout the rest of this book, we will describe these various interconnected and interdependent levels of development, negotiation, and discovery as **self-governance and decision-making, community outreach, and self-empowerment and learning.**



In commoning, the ways in which commoners manage their projects and how they define and practice participation play a central role. As opposed to other forms of resource-based negotiation, it's not just about the **what**, but rather the focus is much more often on the **how**. How are decisions reached? What rules have we decided on, how do we enforce them, and how do we negotiate changes to them? Within the construction of a commoning process, communication, internal participation, and governance combine to form a specific institutional culture. The internal constitution of a project, its governance, and its institutional culture play a crucial role in shaping the short-, middle- and long-term development of a commons project. These aspects will be discussed in this book under the heading of **self-governance and decision-making**.

Furthermore, in the process of commoning, commoners negotiate their relationships with each other and as a group in relation to the wider public. This layer of negotiation involves exploring answers to questions such as: what is our mission and how do we define our values? What is our social impact? How do we engage with the wider public and community and how could we improve and deepen those connections? These topics will be discussed in this book under the heading **community outreach**.

Finally, commoning involves a constant process of learning which feeds into self-empowerment. Through commoning, commoners engage in democratic decision-making, come into contact with official decision-makers in the city administration or other administrative bodies, and build social capital through negotiation and finding consensus. They not only learn about the resource at hand, but also about how to engage a wider public for their cause, how to petition lawmakers, and broader questions of resource management, access, and equity. In this book, these topics will be discussed under the heading **self-empowerment and learning**.

Conclusion

Urban commons projects' characteristics are dependent on a wide range of factors, from resource attributes to institutional culture. Independent of the resource type, group size, or the intensity and degree of formalization of the commoning process, commons projects are united by their prosocial, participatory, and cooperative approach. The process of commoning creates added social benefit for the commoners, the city, and society as a whole. In the following section, we will examine eight specific commons projects and trace the factors that contributed to their success and the individual challenges which they faced.

Commoning as a practice

Aspects and core activities

Self-Governance and Decision-Making

Community Outreach

- Constitutional aspects: entity, norms, organizational structure, procedural structure
- Defining member/user roles. Shaping accessibility based on a diverse group of people and needs and the local context
- Enabling people to co-maintain and co-govern the project effectively and how they want
- Rules for usage and control of users' behavior
- Internal democratic legitimation and clear accountability
- Conflict resolution and dispute settlement

- Negotiating and explaining boundaries of and accessibility to the resource
- Ability to relate to the public and to other social actors and sectors (cross-sectoral competence)
- Explaining the social vision and the social impact of the project for the wider community
- Involvement in networks and advocacy efforts
- Promoting the commons/ commoning as an alternative organizational and economic model
- Assuming responsibility and accountability with regard to a wider public

Aim

- Making democratic values and rights tangible and relevant for the commoners and enabling them to participate in the public sphere
- Developing a stable framework for the activities, helping to maintain the resource, and fulfilling the conceptual aim of the project

- Supporting the spread of democratic civil engagement and the co-creation of the public sphere
- Contributing to social and ecological impact and change

Self-Empowerment and Learning

- Opportunities for participants to learn and develop competencies, knowledge, skills, and attitudes
 - Learning about the commons and knowledge sharing with other commons projects
 - Learning specifically about a resource and its management
 - Empowering users to participation and co-creation through 'learning by doing'
 - Sharing insights and knowledge with the community, including knowledge about commons and their socio-political value
-
- Self-empowerment within and beyond the commons project, especially in the process of independent learning
 - Enabling the project as a whole to respond to challenges, changing conditions, and new ideas



The case studies at a glance

The case studies

	Düsselgrün	Freifunk	Incredible Edible	Bike Kitchen
Resource	Urban gardening	Wireless internet	Public space and gardening	Mobility
Number of commoners	Core group is 20-25 people; Overall about 40 people	About 1,000	8 organizers, 300 people on the mailing list	15 core members; About 400 regular white bike users
Resource is:				
Depletable/Finite	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Excludable	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rivalrous use	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Club good?	No	No	No	Yes
Landed commons?	Yes	No	Yes	No
If yes, ownership/right to stay?	Lease of publicly-owned land		Free use of publicly-owned land	
Decision style	Systematic consensus	Unspecified	Unspecified	Consensus
Organizational type	None	Umbrella association	Community benefit society	Non-profit collective
Relative degree of formalization	Low	Low	Low	Medium

Holzmarkt	Middelgrunden	Club Cultural Matienzo	Kalkbreite
Urban development	Energy	Arts and culture	Housing
The two main cooperatives have about 160 people combined	8,552 shareholding members and a volunteer board of five people	70 people	2,000 shareholders in the cooperative, 259 of which live there
Yes	No	No	Yes
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lease of privately-owned land	Lease of publicly-owned land	Rental	Lease of publicly-owned land
Majoritarian; Attempt to reach consensus before votes; One person alone cannot block a motion	Majoritarian; Significant changes need 2/3 majority	Majoritarian; Attempt to reach consensus before votes; 3/4 majority needed for decisions	Systematic consensus
Two cooperatives and a citizen association	Cooperative	Collective	Cooperative
High	High	Medium	High

**“Have the courage to start.
Don’t let yourself get discouraged by
the fact that there are lots of unknowns.
The most important thing is to take
the first step.”**

**“It’s not about gardening.
It’s not about growing food.
It’s about being together.”**

**“Values hold a community together.
We never hide our values;
they are always our top priority.”**

**“You have to ask yourself not only
what you are against but what you are
in favor of, and then fight for it.”**

**“Find ways to realize your goals slowly.
For that you need space to experiment or
even to move back one step and then move
forward again. Never being finished
is part of our identity, and this iterative
process is fundamental to our work here.”**

“There’s no such thing as mistake, only another great learning opportunity.”

“Try to find new solutions. Whether it’s a lawsuit or public relations or starting a legislative initiative, there are so many possibilities to remove obstacles and pave the way for good commons ideas!”

“The first and most important thing is never to forget to be honest and open in your communication. People want to help, but they need to trust you first.”

“Collaboration is always better than competition. If the people around you are good, don’t compete with them, cooperate with them. There is always space for more good projects.”

“People are more important than structure, so instead of making people adjust to your organization, create your organization around people.”

“Before you start something, you should always talk about what happens if someone doesn’t stick to the rules.”



Düsselgrün

(Urban gardening)

Düsselgrün

(Urban gardening)



Tucked away in a public park near Düsseldorf's main railway station is a small community garden by the name of Düsselgrün in which urban commons are a lived reality. The urban gardening project is organized as an open initiative and has been active since 2014. We spoke with Viktoria Hellfeier, one of the early activists of the project, to get the low-down.

Can you tell me a bit about Düsselgrün in your own words?

We call ourselves a community garden. We are not an association, but rather an open initiative. We don't have an official membership – anyone is welcome to come by. The garden has been around since 2014. Before 2014, we were just a group of neighbors gardening in raised beds on an abandoned lot. It didn't have a name back then. But in 2014, we got organized: we gave ourselves a name and created a homepage and Facebook page. It's really taken off since then.

We don't have any private spaces in the garden – everything is used communally. All of the raised beds are tilled in common and harvested at set times. The current location, which is in a public park, is ringed by a hip-high fence with a gate. The gate is however never locked; the garden is always open, even when we're not here. That means that anyone can enter the garden. The park is surrounded by multi-level apartment buildings on three sides. We have good relationships with the neighbors and sometimes they send us photos of what's going on in the garden when we're not here.

And of course, we also see when chairs have been moved, etc. Generally, we want people to use the garden when we're not there, but that's also sometimes a challenging topic because we're located in a public park in a pretty central location in the city.

When we started, our goal was to create an urban garden in the city where we could grow our own vegetables and learn about nutrition and different varieties than the ones you get in the supermarket. We also wanted to spread this knowledge and work to save green spaces in the city. When it became clear that the abandoned lot that we were gardening on was going to be built on, we got in touch with the city and they helped us find the space that we are on now.

How many users are in the group?

There are around 15 to 20 people who are really active and who meet regularly. The overall group is however a little bigger than that and we also have visitors and supporters who come by irregularly for gardening or events. The core group of 15 to 20 is here nearly every Sunday and participates in our monthly planning meeting. They are also on our internal mailing list for organizational stuff. They know all about the planting schedule, events, and assume tasks in the garden management, for example maintaining the homepage or doing the PR work.

Is the group open or closed?

It's meant to be as open as possible. There's no association and no membership. Anyone who is interested is welcome to get more involved and join the core group. They usually just send us an email and then we add them to the mailing list. And if we notice that there are people in the mailing list who haven't been here in a while, we get in touch with them to see if they're still interested. If not, we remove them from of the mailing list. It's pretty non-bureaucratic. People are also invited to come by during our gardening days to get to know more about the project, visit the garden, help, or join.

Do the users know each other personally?

Oh yes, we all know each other really well. We're a pretty tight-knit group and many of us meet outside the garden as well. Being such a close group feels good, but it might make it difficult for new people to join. We have recently been reflecting on this and trying to involve new members more actively.

How do you communicate with each other?

As you might imagine, we communicate with each other a lot in the garden itself, but also via email and during our monthly meetings. We communicate with the outside world through our website and our Facebook page, which has over 2,000 likes. We have lots of followers on Facebook and people share and like our posts frequently. We also have a garden newsletter which we send out at irregular intervals, generally about once a month, which contains information about events and what's going on in the garden – it goes out to about 100 people at the moment. Anyone who wants to know more about what's going on in the garden can sign up for it through our website or by sending us an email.

What contact do you have with one another other than agreeing upon rules, if any?

We have an open garden day once a week on Sunday afternoon. That's the day on which we come here to do the actual gardening. That's also the day on which new people can come by to learn more about us. On our open garden day, there is always someone from the core team here to answer questions, in particular about how to join in. In the past, we also tried to have a second day per week, especially in the summer. It's difficult during the week, so the weekday changes depending on who is organizing it.

Of course, not everybody comes to these meetings. Not everybody likes that kind of thing. Sometimes the meetings can be really long-winded. But I think we have a pretty good handle on it now. One person goes around and collects the topics and then moderates the meeting – it's a different person each month. Then we write a protocol and send it to everyone, including those who couldn't make it. We have an online folder where we save all the protocols. That way anyone can look back and figure out how and when we came to decisions. These meetings are also open – anyone can join.

How does commoning take place?

We have a monthly meeting to talk about planning and other important issues. That's where we meet to talk about the basic questions like how do we want to garden together or if there are requests, do we want to cooperate? Do we want to take part in this or that event? What's happening next in the garden? Do we need to buy anything next month? What's our financial situation at the moment? Do we have any funding left to buy plants or materials? Or if someone has to give up a task, who is going to take it over?

To make sure that as many people can make it to these meetings as possible, we have the meeting on a different weekday each month. That way people who have regular evening appointments like a sports class every Thursday can still make it the next month.

In the summer, we meet in the garden. In the wintertime and when the weather is poor, we meet in the neighborhood association that we're partnered with. We actually talked for a while whether we should meet at one of our apartments, because we have to pay a little rent to meet at the association. But in the end, we decided that it was better to meet there because otherwise it's too private somehow. I mean, when someone new wants to join, I think the barrier is higher to go to someone's house than to go to an association, which is a public place.

Above and beyond this, in my eyes, commoning is an integral part of the structure of the garden itself, since there are no private beds or plants. This also means that the organization and running of the garden is a commoning process. Everything is planned, built up, planted, and harvested together. We don't just negotiate rules and decisions during the monthly meetings – it's a continuous process which also takes place while working and sharing knowledge in the garden.

How are rules negotiated?

When we negotiate a new rule or a change to an existing rule, we first start with a discussion. Everyone who wants to say something should get the chance. In the beginning, we then voted and the simple majority won. At some point, we decided to flip it around. We said ok, if no one has fundamental objections to the suggestion, then we'll implement it. We think it's important that if most people are for something, but two people have a real problem with it, that we take those concerns seriously. We give them more weight instead of just voting over them. And that way everyone is on the same page when we do reach a decision.

This method can be pretty long-winded, especially if the conversation is about really important decisions and there aren't that many people there. We've put decisions off until next month because it's not really a good idea to try to make big decisions if only a few people are there. And of course, that can mean that topics can be on the agenda for months. This way of deciding things has pros and cons. It can be really tough, but I think it works pretty well in our case and is fairer.

Is free-riding a problem? If so, how does it manifest and how is it prevented?

It is really important to us that the garden remains open and accessible for all. We know of other garden projects which have been badly vandalized. We have thankfully never had that problem. We had a workshop about that topic in 2018 together with other urban gardening projects – how do they deal with it? Or how do they handle it when children come into the garden without their parents for example? We've seen people sell drugs in Düsseldorf – we definitely have tried to put a stop to that. But in general, the community garden is and should be a place which attracts people with different needs and desires – so we must ask and continuously reflect on how far this openness goes.

People do come through and eat the fruits and vegetables sometimes. One year we didn't have very many strawberries. We hung up signs and posted to Facebook that we garden together on Sundays and harvest at set times. But we also have a couple raised beds where people are welcome to sample, especially berries and herbs. We also prevent snacking by planting varieties which are unusual, and where someone from outside might not know if the fruits or berries are ripe or not.

Occasionally we find beer bottles or trash or cigarette butts. When it got to be a bit much, we put up signs and trash boxes. And if we see people in the garden drinking beer or smoking, we talk to them and ask them not to leave their trash in the garden.

Two attempts have been made to break into our toolshed – thankfully both unsuccessful. We put up a sign that there is nothing valuable in there, and it didn't happen again. We also reported it because it was an attempted break in, and after that the police kept an eye out if they were on patrol in the area.

What formal policies affect your commons project?

At some point it became clear that the lot where the community garden started was going to be built on and that we were probably going to have to move. So we decided to get in touch with the City of Düsseldorf and with various politicians and we made it very clear that we wanted a space for a community garden in a central location, not in the periphery, in order to continue our pilot project. After all, we were the first of our kind in the city. Thankfully we had a lot of support from the city – it seemed that they wanted our pilot project to succeed.

So, together with the City of Düsseldorf we looked for a new space. We definitely wanted to stay in the same neighborhood because we had contacts here. And in 2015, we found the space that we are on now: a park behind the main train station. We asked for some other spaces as well but the city could only offer us spaces that they themselves owned. They also helped us with other stuff, for example by putting up a fence or installing a water line. At the moment, we have a use contract for this space which both sides can cancel with three months' notice. In my opinion we're freer than other gardens. We don't pay any rent and we don't have fixed opening hours – we are very thankful for that – but the land still belongs to the city.

Are there informal policies which affect your commons project?

The moment when it became clear that we were going to have to find a new space for the garden was also a mayoral election year – that was very good timing. Düsseldorf was governed by the Christian Democrats for years, but in 2015 the Social Democrat Thomas Geisel won the mayor's seat. The new mayor was very interested in intermediate use, which was a hot topic among the cultural scene in the city at the time. Many cultural venues had been having similar issues: they had to abandon their old spaces because of rising rents, problems with the neighbors, etc., and then had difficulties finding new spaces. These venues got together and wrote an open letter to the city government. So questions about art and culture and its role and importance for the city were on the political agenda.

In fact, we invited Thomas Geisel to our Summer Festival in the garden and he actually came; this was back before he won the election. We had a small stage set up and he promised then and there to support us if he won. So it seems that after the election, he put pressure on the administration to help us. I think it might otherwise have been difficult to manage, since we were the first of our kind and didn't really fit into any of the existing categories that the administration usually has to deal with, like allotment gardens.

We also have a few garden members from the Green party or members who had worked for the Green party and knew politicians and political structures – that helped as well I guess.

Have you cooperated with other actors and what results did these cooperations yield? Did cooperation with others play an important role in the project's success?

The search for partners who are working on similar topics and who have already developed an infrastructure of sorts is really important in my eyes. Düsseldorf has a range of cooperations, for example with a beekeepers' association, a local festival for free seeds, and a social-ecological community association in the neighborhood, as well as support from an organic farm, a composting group, and other social-ecological initiatives. Through these cooperations we have been able to learn ourselves – none of us is professional gardeners. We've all learned by doing. And our cooperations have been an important part of that. We trade space and thematic connection for courses that we ourselves can profit from.

We've really worked on developing a network of people and groups who are interested in organic farming, gardening, nutrition, and sustainability because it became clear that the individual projects benefit from the synergies – by sharing knowledge and experiences, by reaching more people, and by making similar topics and strategies more visible – also on a political level.

To what degree has your project engaged in public relations and/or lobbying? What role has media coverage played in the success of your project?

The year that it became clear that we were going to have to move, we communicated through a variety of channels. I have already spoken about our political lobbying – our connection to politics and our lobby work was vital in my opinion. We also made a point to refine our message. We are not squatters or obstructionists; we think that free spaces for cultural projects are important and we were fully prepared to look for a space constructively where we can continue working on our project.

I think our digital visibility also played a big role in our success, in particular being able to gather support from outside. Simple things like having a website and a Facebook page meant that we suddenly had a large community behind us, and that helped us to reach the local media as well.

We used local media really actively before our move. In addition to a signature list, we also sent out press releases. That worked really well, so we created an internal press mailing list made up of journalists who had contacted or written about us. We had summer festivals where several journalists had told us they were going to be there, so we ended up designating two people in the core group as our press contacts. They are in charge of communicating our message at events and act as a contact person if there are questions. We discovered that the local press can be a really useful and important instrument. They reach a completely different audience than Facebook so we were able to spread our message to a much wider group.

We also joined others who were working on similar topics. Together with a number of other initiatives, we signed the Urban Gardening Manifesto, which is about the importance of green spaces in the city. And there is it again: finding others and refining your message. I really feel that that's an important component of a successful project. And it also means that when we have an info booth or contact the press or politics that we can show that it's not just us, but rather that we're part of a larger movement.

What are the main ingredients which have made your project possible/successful so far?

I think that the most important thing is the personal motivation and interest of everyone involved. If we hadn't had the motivation or interest to do all this in our free time, we never would have been able to start the project, much less see it through the challenges we've faced. Another thing that is really important is a fixed location with some security, so that we know that we don't have to move again in the next few years. I also think it was really important that we refined our message and went public with it – on our website, on Facebook, and through the local press. Those are the three most important things: motivated people, a secure space to grow, and a clear message & publicity.

What was one main challenge that you encountered and how did you solve it?

I think the biggest challenge we faced was the move. The most important point for a community-based garden is to find an appropriate location – which means a safe, long-lasting, and accessible space where the project can develop. Finding such a place and negotiating with the City of Düsseldorf about how we want to use it commonly was a big challenge.

But above and beyond that, it was a logistical challenge. How do you move a garden of raised beds, which weigh tons, when almost all of the members only have bicycles? What about the soil – the area we were moving to had been an industrial area? How are we going to get the quantity of soil that we need in the middle of the city? And that's where our cooperations were really important – an organic farm from the local region helped us with tractors and donated soil. That's what I was saying before about infrastructure – you don't have to own everything yourself. Sometimes it's enough to know someone who has the necessary tools or know-how.

What is your relationship with city government/city planning? What is their attitude towards your project?

The relationship with the city administration is very good. There are no complaints so far. We don't have much contact with them at the moment because there is no need, but they're still very positive about our work. After moving to the new space, they supported us by installing a water connection on the site. The contract we negotiated with them also gives the project a certain security and allows us to use the space in a quite self-determined way without paying rent.

How would you assess your impact on society and the city in which you are located?

Through our activism and initiative we have managed to start a conversation about urban gardening in Düsseldorf that didn't exist before – how important it is that citizens have the ability to shape the city themselves or the role that informal meeting spaces play in the social life of the city. Cities can be pretty anonymous. A space like our garden offers the ability to meet other people, to learn, and to share knowledge, ideas, perspectives, and experiences. In my opinion, that is essential for becoming a more solidary society and a topic that is worth expanding on.

If you could give advice to a new commons project, what would it be?

I think the most important thing is to find other engaged people to cooperate with. Projects are always work, but it's more productive and constructive when you have someone to share ideas with and you can share the load – it's more fun, too! It's also really important to build a network with other initiatives – share advice, know-how, even tools and materials. The first thing is to see if there are already networks you can join – you don't have to create parallel structures or reinvent the wheel.

Above all, have the courage to start. Don't let yourself get discouraged by the fact that there are lots of unknowns. Just try and remember that if problems arise there will be ways to solve them. The most important thing is to take the first step.

Have the courage to start. Don't let yourself get discouraged by the fact that there are lots of unknowns. The most important thing is to take the first step.

Freifunk

(Wireless internet)



Freifunk

(Wireless internet)



*For the majority of people, the internet has become the number one communication medium. Still, many do not have access to the web. In 2001, a group of committed people founded freifunk.net, a free networks initiative, which was followed in 2003 by the founding of the association **Förderverein Freie Netzwerke e.V.**, whose aim is to democratize communication media through free networks. Monic Meisel explained how it works and talked to us about how you don't have to be a tech pro to get engaged but that empowerment is key.*

Can you tell me a bit about Freifunk in your own words?

It started in 2001 when a group of people met at the BerLon conference in Berlin to talk about free wireless networks. Together they worked on defining some principles to regulate free and neutral data transit which were then written down in the **Picopeering-Agreement**: free data transfer from node to node, don't inspect the data you're transferring, and don't fiddle with the traffic at all. Freifunk adopted these principles with a few additions. We see the net as common property and believe that it should be uncensored, neutral, and publicly and anonymously accessible – in addition, we believe that it should be non-commercial, that means not be capitalized or organized following market rules.

The main idea was to build our own communication infrastructure. In the nineties, the internet was becoming more and more commercialized. There was limited bandwidth and not everybody had access. So, people started to network, to share – at that time on a small scale, in their neighborhoods. It wasn't necessarily internet – sometimes they created internal networks among computers without connecting them to the net – that's called a mesh network. It's pretty simple: routers are not only connected with the internet but with each other. A special software protocol is used to connect the routers and distribute the internet. If one of the routers breaks down, the software calculates a new data distribution path. And we thought that we could scale that by installing repeaters on rooftops. That's a little more complex, you need stronger antennas, but you can offer internet in places where it's otherwise not available. So, our motivation was threefold: to offer public internet access, to connect remote areas, and to own local, self-built infrastructure.

Since the beginning, the movement has been decentralized. Each community has their own local website. www.freifunk.net acts as an entry point and provides overall information on the movement. Via an API (Application Programming Interface), the individual communities provide general information about their network, activities, events, news, and press reviews, which are aggregated on freifunk.net. And from time to time, maybe every two months, a small editorial team publishes an article on a current issue.

The **Förderverein** acts as an umbrella association, but we don't have many members. We just formed it in order to be able to open a bank account, take care of insurance, organize events, and so on. We don't have a big budget – most of the finances are related to specific projects. And the majority of our work is based on volunteering, trust, and handshakes. In the end, a contract doesn't help you much if you don't have trust.

We are a non-profit with a decentralized organization. Each community has its own focus, agenda, and way of working and some also have established local associations. Various aspects of Freifunk are run by different communities, so for example the Rhineland runs the forum, Berlin has the responsibility for the mailing lists, etc. Everyone deploys his or her local node and makes it part of the infrastructure; it has become a really big community network.

How many users are in the group?

There are more than 450 local groups that run Freifunk access points in German-speaking countries; I would estimate that there are around 1,000 activists involved. In rural areas, you often don't have many people with technical know-how, so sometimes a small number of people run a big project alone. But you also have node operators; people who only flash routers and add them to the network. We have around 50,000 nodes, but it's hard to tell how many people are behind them. We have a big community of people who use our technology and just offer nodes, but are not engaged further within the movement.

Here in Berlin, we are a relatively big group, since we were one of the first groups. Of course, the members have changed over the years. Today we have around 15 people who actively design infrastructure and firmware and do technical stuff. Plus, there are three or four people who take care of events and workshops, communication, and so on.

Is the group open or closed?

Everything is decentralized and open; anybody can form a community. We have an article on our website that explains how to do it. The best way is always to connect with an existing group first to get some technical and organizational tips. But as long as you can identify with our vision, you can open your own group, and through networking and exchange you learn over time what everything means. Start at home, open your Wi-Fi, and then expand to the public space.

Do the users know each other personally?

Most of the activists know each other from the network meetings.

How do you communicate with each other?

We have mailing lists to coordinate our activities and we have meetings, local ones of course but also regional and national meetings. So, we communicate virtually and face-to-face.

What contact do you have with one another other than agreeing upon rules, if any?

The local groups work independently; we don't hear too much from each other on a daily basis, except for reading each other's blogposts. All the groups have their own projects, but if help is needed, they can ask the others for their experience. To help out, we write wiki pages and present case studies at meetings, for example.

Meetings are mostly used to discuss and work on projects. In Berlin, we meet every Wednesday in a local hacker space. Other communities only meet once a month, depending on how much time they have available. Those meetings are open; newbies are always welcome! People can come by and ask how the system works, and then somebody explains. We also try to offer workshops for beginners, but often we don't have the capacity. In the beginning, we did that a lot but then the meetings became more and more technical, and not so much for beginners anymore. But you can still come around and ask questions and we will find the right level.

How does commoning take place?

We don't want to have too much structure, but sometimes it's needed, of course. So, how does commoning take place? First, we have those rules on our website, or rather principles that are interpreted very differently in the local communities. So, if it says decentralized organization, on which level? Is it organizational, technical, and to what extent? It makes sense that way, but to be honest, that's where it gets difficult, because everything works ad hoc. Normally, one group identifies a relevant topic, takes it up and then shares and discusses it with the others.

How are rules and changes to rules negotiated and enforced?

Most things are solved just by conversation; often problems turn out to be misunderstandings. That's why we always recommend joining an existing group before starting your own, to get to know the whole idea. I find this a very difficult topic. We don't want to have too many rules because if we do have them, who takes care of enforcing them? What about sanctioning violations?

We decided to create an advisory council. Members are sent to the council based on the size of the federal state. It functions as de-escalation authority. So, if a community has a problem, they can turn to the council. There was one example where a group formed a for-profit company, which goes against our principle of being non-commercial. The advisory council member for that federal state functioned as moderator and I represented the association. And it turned out that the group didn't want to harm anybody, they just wanted to make their activities sustainable.

But normally, when there are problems on a local level, they are solved locally. Over the years, the **Förderverein** has only been asked to intervene three or four times when a situation escalated. But, of course, it's difficult to judge from a distance. That's why we created the advisory council.

We also wrote a memorandum of understanding that summarizes our principles and our core values like free networks commons, hacker ethics, no surveillance or data retention, no Nazis. We then presented it to the community at the yearly Wireless Community Weekend; after some feedback, we made some adjustments and then everybody agreed on it. But, to be honest, since then we haven't updated it. But that's ok – the main purpose was to make sure that everybody was on the same page.

Is free-riding a problem? If so, how does it manifest and how is it prevented?

A few years back, a troll tried to copy-right our logo. We had to hire a lawyer. Of course, when a group gets bigger and bigger you will always have some people who don't get it. But those have been thankfully few and far between. We have had amazingly few conflicts which had to be moderated over the last few years. We first try to have a conversation and very often problems turn out to be misunderstandings. We don't want to patronize others, of course; everybody has his or her own ideas and sometimes the best thing is to let others make their own experiences.

What formal policies affect your commons project?

On a local level, we mainly try to get access to the roofs of public buildings. And we found, for example, that there are regulations that limit the bandwidth in youth centers to 16Mbit, which is of course totally out-of-date. Another big topic is internet provision for refugees. In Berlin, for example, there was a regulation on how the temporary refugee accommodations had to be equipped: some free Wi-Fi and one mobile device for every 100 people, but even that was not in place. The **Freifunkas** then made an effort for uncensored and unlimited Wi-Fi, without surveillance and so on. All of that wasn't specified. The regulation also didn't specify how much bandwidth is needed. We publicly criticized how and by whom it was realized and monitored, because in some cases, there was a commercial provider who took money. In those cases, it helps being linked up to the local press to uncover such stories.

Secondary liability was also a major issue which only existed in Germany. Secondary liability means that you are liable for all the traffic that happens on your node – that is a huge barrier for people or organizations to open up their network for the public, as you can imagine!

On a global level, radio spectrum policy is a big issue. In Europe, we only have two frequencies that are license-free and open: 2.4 and 5 gigahertz. We use them for our radio communication. But those are so-called trash bandwidths, everybody can use them. Commercial providers have started to put public Wi-Fi hot spots on top of private access points, so you have 10 or more Wi-Fis in one building and they interfere with each other. The Open Spectrum Movement was founded to work on radio spectrum policy. They campaign for opening more frequencies for public use; many frequencies are reserved for specific uses, but lie idle. They also campaign for their own frequencies, for community networks that cannot be used by telephone companies, for example. I also met with representatives of the ministry of transport to discuss the topic, but it's difficult. All the frequencies are assigned. We would like to facilitate the temporary use of unused spectrum. But it is not documented and there is no regulation that allows secondary use for free networks yet.

Are there informal policies which affect your commons project?

Sure, if a city doesn't want to support a local group, it's very frustrating. Then you need to build relations and find alliances. But luckily with every election, members of the senate, the district council, or whoever is in charge change. So you can try again...

Have you cooperated with other actors and what results did these cooperations yield? Did cooperation with others play an important role in the project's success?

We only have a few cooperations, because cooperation always means risks. It's important to clear up the conditions first. Greenpeace, for example, doesn't cooperate with anyone because they never can be sure where others get their donations from. The same is true for Freifunk: we are very independent. We get donations from local companies that support us with hardware or internet uplink. We also take part in Internet Exchanges where the providers meet to peer, to work together. Usually that costs money but they invited us to join because they like our work. We also have sponsorships on a federal or communal level.

The **Medienanstalt Berlin-Brandenburg** was the first public institution to sponsor Freifunk; it was a pilot project to do research on what free internet means for the future of media, radio, TV. Members of different parties support us from time to time, but one of our core principles is that we are politically independent.

To what degree has your project engaged in public relations and/or lobbying? What role has media coverage played in the success of your project?

We raise topics on different levels: local, national, and global. On one hand, communities or the **Förderverein** take up questions specific to free networks. One was the funding guidelines on Wifi4EU: members of the Aachen Freifunk community were interested in the topic, so they took it up and exchanged critique and comments with the EU commission.

But since we are not capable of campaigning on all digital rights issues by ourselves, we collaborate with others. In the case of the data retention, there are many other active net policy groups and we joined forces. Regarding the EU radio regulation, we contacted the Free Software Foundation and asked if they would lead the campaign, since they have more experience on how EU policy-making works.

We have been contacted by groups like **Telecommons** and **Le Quadrature du Net** regarding EU surveillance issues and sent a joint claim to EU regarding violation of the freedom rights.

It's not very formalized within the Freifunk movement; there is no group that takes care of it all or oversees every activity. We do not have spokespersons: every **Freifunka** is free to talk to the media about his or her project. The more experienced ones provide some advice concerning the wording, since words shape thinking, of course! So, for example, we try to avoid the term citizen or citizen network because it excludes people who are not citizens. Instead, we use the term community network.

What are the main ingredients which have made your project possible / successful so far?

One main ingredient is definitely being open. To become a part of our network, you don't have to be a technician. There are so many things one can do, from public relations to educational work. We need people to design logos, people with craftsmanship, or translators. So, everybody is welcome! We're also really open about what we do, so that newcomers feel welcome and like they can ask questions.

Other ingredients are self-empowerment and the passing on of knowledge. We don't see ourselves as service providers that install Wi-Fi and take care of the support. Instead, the idea is that **Freifunkas** teach others how it works, so that people get over their fear of tech a bit and are able to at least repair small malfunctions themselves. Many people think that they don't understand anything about technology and so they cannot participate, but I don't believe that's true. You just need enthusiasm – everything else can be learned.

And the last ingredient is communication or public relations to inform people and to create relationships, that includes the ability to adjust your language depending on who you are talking to and what format you're addressing them in, to at least enable others to understand your points.

What was one main challenge that you encountered and how did you solve it?

One main challenge was Secondary Liability, which I mentioned before briefly. When we started around 2001, there were many free Wi-Fi spots in Germany. Cafés just left their Wi-Fi open. Then some lawyers started sending disciplinary warning letters, making people liable for what others did on their open Wi-Fi. Many people and even public institutions then closed their Wi-Fi and many **Freifunkas** felt insecure. So, we diverted internet traffic to foreign countries – there are no borders in the internet! We got sponsored by a VPN server in Sweden and then used it to show the absurdity of the situation, that the internet and the market don't end at national borders. **Freifunkas** dealing with legal issues led to a formalization of our activities, but also to a politicization of the activists. We drafted a letter that the communities could send to their local member of parliament. Many institutions supported us and got involved. And by building alliances, lobbying and campaigning, a lot of public relations, and commenting on draft laws, we finally reached a legislative amendment. Since 2017, persons who run free Wi-Fi are not liable for law violations by their users anymore. Still, there are lawyers who keep on sending letters to intimidate people, so the fight is ongoing. The problem is that many people lack knowledge, that's why explaining and educating is so important!

What is your relationship with city government/city planning? What is their attitude towards your project?

I would say neutral. There are some districts where public entities have opened their Wi-Fi, but it depends on the administration. If the responsible person there doesn't want to do it, he or she will find a reason why it's not possible. There are ups and downs, sometimes there are conflicts and sometimes there's support.

How would you assess your impact on society and the city in which you are located?

One big impact we have had is the idea of free public networks and open Wi-Fi as such. Today, internet access at home is possible for almost everybody. But Wi-Fi which is accessible at no charge – for guests, for tourists, for everybody in order to find information, use maps, or to communicate while out and about – that's unfortunately fairly new in Germany. And it's a big and very visible impact.

However, I think we've made the biggest impact with our social projects. For example, we provided refugee camps with Wi-Fi so that people living there could communicate with their families and friends. We provided Wi-Fi to youth centers so that they were more attractive. But as our work is voluntary, **Freifunkas** cannot sustain a 24x7 long-term solution. So, we always try to empower the people, to teach them how to do it on their own, so we can take a step back.

If you could give advice to a new commons project, what would it be?

One piece of advice would be not to establish too many rules but to be open for new ideas. I would recommend some sort of agreement on the group's ethics, though, like no sexist and racist comments allowed and so forth. The other piece of advice would be to think carefully about which legal form suits your project best. For educational work, for example, an incorporated association is good, but for infrastructure projects I would prefer a cooperative to manage ownership.

Everything else will figure itself out. You don't need to think everything through right from the start or prepare for every eventuality – you will never find the end of that rabbit hole. Instead, be brave and just do it! Don't get intimidated by regulations and formal stuff. Try to find new solutions. Whether it's a lawsuit or public relations or starting a legislative initiative, there are so many possibilities to remove obstacles and pave the way for good commons ideas!

Don't get intimidated by regulations and formal stuff. Try to find new solutions. Whether it's a lawsuit or public relations or starting a legislative initiative, there are so many possibilities to remove obstacles and pave the way for good commons ideas!



Incredible Edible Todmorden

(Public space and gardening)

Incredible Edible Todmorden



(Public space and gardening)

Back in 2007, people started growing food in public spaces all around Todmorden, a small town in the north of England, with the aim to provide free access to good local food for all. A movement was born that, since then, has inspired projects all over the world. Mary Clear, one of the co-founders, talked to us about how Incredible Edible has become a vibrant part of the local community.

Can you tell me a bit about Incredible Edible in your own words?

Incredible Edible is a group of people who meet together regularly and spend their energy on making the town greener, cleaner, nicer, and kinder. We're interested in what makes that place you call home and in not being victims of government and state trends. We're interested in being self-reliant and active citizens. But primarily we're interested in kindness and collaboration.

We grow food in public places because we're trying to show several things. First, we're trying to model the seasons, because as humans we've lost contact with the food ecosystem. Tomatoes don't grow in the winter; apples only come on the tree once a year and they're ripe in September. Second, we're trying to show people that if we can grow apples and mulberries and herbs and greens in this carpark, in a public space with no water and you have to walk to it to tend it, you could do that in your backyard, too.

Our gardens are our propaganda places. We don't have an office and business cards; our advertising of what we believe in is in those spots. Anyone can pick the produce, anybody can help themselves from those spaces and we try to make those spaces look beautiful as well as functional.

The group is very diverse. We've got volunteers that range from BBC executives, doctors of English literature, people who cannot physically speak, three men who live in shelter accommodation, tiny tots and a granny who's about 92 and half blind. We trust everybody and never stop giving people responsibility – that's very important. Everybody's got their role, no matter how big or small. In the end, it's not about gardening. It's not about growing food. It's about being together. It's about teamwork and doing things.

In the beginning we varied the date and time more or less randomly, and we noticed that people didn't stick with us. So we had a hard look at what really makes an organization work. In fact, we looked to one of the oldest organizations in the world: the church. And we thought what have churches got that makes people stick to them. Well I tell you what, everybody knows what day it is: Sunday. So we thought we'll have a Sunday as well, that seems to be a special day when people can do things. All those people that aren't up at church are picking around. So now we always garden on the first and the third Sunday of the month.

How many users are in the group?

We have what we call a "mucking list" which is an email list of about 300 people. Every second Sunday, what we call a shout-out goes out. Usually between 35 and 45 people show up on gardening Sundays.

In the middle, there are eight of us who take responsibility and if we want to do something really big and we need to engage a hundred people, we can engage a hundred people. That's fine for events but for gardening it can be difficult to have such a large group. It's hard to manage all the gloves, all the high-visibility jackets, getting all the tools, giving instructions...

That's why about one or two years ago we decided to become more organized. Now we have a key holder for the shed and his job is to look after the tools and to fetch and carry them. We have a garbage man who brings a trailer and collects garbage. Then we have the meet-and-greeter whose job is to be there early, say hello to everybody, and write their first name in a book for that Sunday. That's important for the cook, so that he or she knows how many people to cook for, and it's important for the person – it makes them feel special, like not just another number. And then there is the gardening lead whose job is to get that rabble of people and say right, you go there, you go there and do this. What looks like total chaos – all these people arriving at one spot ready to get their tools – is actually really well thought out. It works like a dream now. It's like clockwork. And all that led to an increase in participation because people felt special.

Is the group open or closed?

Both the core group and the larger group are open. As the chairperson, my role is to be a continuous talent scout. So if I see that someone's really good at something, I'm on them. And I go: walk away now if you don't want to be asked to do something. Every year at the annual general meeting, three people must stand down. They can be re-elected, but we continually want to make room for new people. We don't want to build an empire, because if you make one person or a few people too important, if they drop dead the group will collapse. And for me, that would be my biggest failure. Because we do it this way, I know that if anything happened to me or happened to some key people, the core group would still keep going.

The larger gardening group is naturally also open. We're not interested whether you contribute or you garden, if you're just walking past and you want to come and eat for free, you can. That welcoming, warm community feeling is an important part of our gardening Sundays.

Do the users know each other personally?

Yes, but most of the volunteers only see each other on gardening Sundays.

How do you communicate with each other?

We mainly use Facebook and the email mailing list to tell people what's going on.

What contact do you have with one another other than agreeing upon rules, if any?

We garden on every first and third Sunday of the month: gardening is at ten o'clock, dinner at twelve. That's it.

How does commoning take place?

We are pretty organic in our structure. We take kindness as our first rule and collaboration and sharing as our second. Everything we have belongs to our organization but we don't have things that we can't share. We really think there are too many organizations with too much stuff. So for instance we own tents, but we only have a harvest festival once a year where we need those tents. So we lend those tents, which causes a lot of work and is a big drag but we believe in it.

If somebody comes up with an idea or a project, we make them the lead for that job and it's an unspoken rule that the rest of us step back and trust the lead to get on with it. Sometimes it would not have been the way I'd have done it, but they sorted it out and it worked. We love to trust people to do it their way, because that makes the organization stronger and it develops their and our natural capacity. And we love mistakes. We love it when a plan goes wrong because then we say well, what can we learn from that?

How are rules negotiated?

We've never had to have a vote but if we had to we'd have one. We've never had anything controversial to vote on.

What formal policies affect your commons project?

Nearly five years ago we decided not to take any public money in order to remain self-sufficient. We're autonomous and can decide what we want to offer talks and tours about. There is actually quite a bit of vegetable tourism. People come from all over to have a tour 'round the town and hear a little presentation. Our rule is: if you've got money, pay, if you haven't got money, come anyway. It works: we get an income from that. And we were also left a legacy, so we actually have enough money in the bank to last us ten years if we spent 10,000 GBP

a year, which we don't. We are extremely frugal and all of our money is spent on things that go back in the town. I think when money doesn't play a key role in an organization, it's a joy. We're fueled on cake, coffee, and joy.

So there are no formal policies that affect us, or rather we don't take any notice of anything from outside and nobody minds. If good people want to do good things there's no one against you. That's our experience. And anyway, we say it's better to ask for forgiveness than permission. A lot of organizations are bogged down with rules; we're not bogged down. We say the prisons are full and we wouldn't mind being arrested for planting the odd garden somewhere.

Are there informal policies which affect your commons project?

Every now and again somebody from the council drops off clear plastic rubbish bags in my yard and we fill those because we don't just garden, we also pick up all the rubbish in town. We don't mind picking up rubbish. It is noble work, and we can fill those clear bags and leave them by any bin in the town and the council person who empties those bins will pick it up. It's not written anywhere that we will. We don't promise to clean the town and they don't promise to supply us, we just quietly get on with it.

Have you cooperated with other actors and what results did these cooperations yield? Did cooperation with others play an important role in the project's success?

Well, we collaborate with anybody who asks for our help, anyone who wants to use our tools, anyone who wants to borrow our stuff. This collaboration didn't play a significant part in our getting established as a project, but I think our willingness to collaborate secured us in the town.

To what degree has your project engaged in public relations and/or lobbying? What role has media coverage played in the success of your project?

We've never ever sent out press releases. It's all been accidental. There seems to be a great interest for our work and that interest has snowballed to the point where a guy who's got a contract for CNN is coming here for our festival of ideas next week to film for four days and a short film about our project is going to be shown in the American airports and on-board intercountry flights.

What are the main ingredients which have made your project possible / successful so far?

Passionate people, a love of nature and the planet, very good cake and coffee, and very short meetings. We hate boring meetings. We put the focus on doing, not talking.

What was one main challenge that you encountered and how did you solve it?

Our main challenge was that people don't like permaculture because it looks messy. We've overcome that by learning ourselves and also by being considerate. We've learned over the years how to adjust our gardens to combine what looks good and what survives well in the public realm. Because it's not our private garden, but rather public space. We cannot be disrespectful to the people who live in the town.

What is your relationship with city government/city planning? What is their attitude towards your project?

It's fantastic. They adore us. I'll give you an example: every sign in this town that was put up by the council twenty years ago that says "Welcome to Todmorden" or "Here's a map of so and so" is green, rusty, and moldy. So we measured all the council signs, we paid a designer to make our own signs and we went all through the town and replaced the signs. We just screwed them straight on

top of the council signs. A council officer who I know said “You don’t think we would have the money to do it, do you?” He said it’s brilliant we’ve done it and if we’d have asked they would have had to say no because of health and safety.

If you could give advice to a new commons project, what would it be?

Have really lovely and short meetings, good coffee, lovely china, loads of cakes... Forget all of that clean eating: have a table full of food and make people feel relaxed and happy. And don’t talk in riddles. Be homely and simple: less is more. Let the structure grow with the people’s confidence. And there’s no such thing as mistake, only another great learning opportunity.

It’s not about gardening. It’s not about growing food. It’s about being together.



Bike Kitchen Bratislava

(Mobility)

Bike Kitchen Bratislava

(Mobility)



In 2011, Tomas Peciar and some friends founded the Bike Kitchen, a workshop where bikes are repaired and where people come together to cook and organize events in order to promote bike culture and to fight for cycling infrastructure in a city that is dominated by cars. A few years later, they developed a bike sharing system, the White Bikes, which rents bikes for free and makes bike mobility more inclusive and accessible. We talked to Tomas about bikes as a connecting element between communities.

Can you tell me a bit about Bike Kitchen in your own words?

The Bike Kitchen is a community cycling workshop that started in Bratislava in 2011. It's very similar to other community bike workshops around the world. There are thousands of them, but every one is different: some of the bicycle collectives are really punky and some of them are really sophisticated, very formal with hierarchical structures. Our Bike Kitchen is somewhere in between informal and formal.

Our project started with three or four people. In the beginning, we were basically just doing flea markets with bicycles. We repaired old bikes and did one-day events with film screenings or concerts. During that period, we had a very small space. Then, through the participatory budget in Bratislava, we had the possibility to use some space in a building owned by the municipality. After we moved into this space, things became more formalized: we started to meet every Wednesday, to invite friends and to cook together, and to repair bicycles, of course. The three containers at the riverbank that we are using now are already the fifth space we have moved to.

For us, the connection between food and bicycles is very obvious, because the first thing you really need in this world is food and the second one is a bike, right? Food really connects communities – it's inclusive – and so are bikes.

What really empowered us was the connection with the students in Bratislava. They wanted to move around by bike and didn't want to spend money on public transportation. They were used to cycling, especially the Germans and people from other developed cycling countries. They came to us and we said, ok, we have some bikes, and we can repair your bikes, but you have to cook dinner for us. And so, in return for repairing or lending them bikes, they cooked really great specialties from all around the world for us. And this is still happening; there are many people like Erasmus students who come to Bratislava for only half a year and they cook for us and we share cooking knowledge.

In 2014, we started a cooperative bike sharing platform, the White Bikes. I think the project is quite unique. When we started, it was just some friends sharing fifty bikes around the city, now we've got about 800 users. Even with this growth, we still do it for free. It's run by volunteers who are members of the bike sharing community. Today, the project is independent from the Bike Kitchen but, of course, the Bike Kitchen is one of the places where the bikes are repaired, so it's still connected. The White Bike system is based on open source software that we developed; it's available on GitHub, so everybody can use it anywhere in the world. You can rent a bike through the web app or QR code, but users can also still use an SMS to rent and return bicycles. This means you can use our software in countries where text messages are still big, for example in African countries. We are proud that many people and many other communities use our bike sharing software; it's being used in the city of Wageningen in the Netherlands, in the city of Heidelberg in Germany, on a military base in the USA, and on many university campuses. That's a big success!

How many users are in the group?

There are about 15 core members who have keys to our place, but not everybody is involved all the time. The wider team is open and pretty big. It depends on our activities, though. We organize a lot of concerts for alternative music bands, for example, and the members always bring along friends and involve them in the volunteer work, in cooking, washing the dishes, or buying beer, whatever is necessary. When we need help with construction work or with the community garden next to our Bike Kitchen, for example, we just put a message on Facebook that we need volunteers for something and there are always some people who want to help. But at the monthly meetings we are around 15 people, depending on the season. It's a little less in winter. And that's enough; otherwise everything would take much more time. We put our notes online, so people can follow our activities and decisions from all over the world. In addition, they can participate via Google Docs in real time – they just add to the meeting notes from wherever they are.

There are around 800 people who use the White Bikes. Not all of them are super active but maybe 400 of them use them regularly.

Is the group open or closed?

Both groups are open, but there is a small hurdle to join the White Bikes, since the members have to have some special knowledge and take on responsibility for the bikes.

When somebody wants to join the White Bikes, we have a face-to-face meeting and decide if it fits. We do 20 minutes of training with new users and we ask them what kind of support they can offer for improving the system, or for helping the cycling community or environmental community in Bratislava. I'll say a bit more about that later.

Do the users know each other personally?

Yes, of course. Many of us are also friends privately, so we see each other on a regular basis.

How do you communicate with each other?

The very first contact has to be a face-to-face meeting. Afterwards if we need something, we contact the volunteers via email. If we are really stressed, due to events or bicycle protests, and we need extra volunteers at short notice, we contact them by phone. We also have a newsletter that works as a reminder for the monthly meetings.

What contact do you have with one another other than agreeing upon rules, if any?

We meet up for discussions once a month, sometimes a little bit more often, but definitely at least once a month. We do this for the Bike Kitchen and for the White Bikes, but the meetings take place on different days. We call it quarrel meeting because everybody is trying to quarrel there. We also try to distribute tasks there, for upcoming events, for example. And quarterly we have some kind of systematic or political meeting where we think about our long term visions, our possibilities within the city, and the connections with and our support for other countries, other bike kitchens, and other bicycle initiatives.

How does commoning take place?

First of all, it is important to say that we are very non-hierarchical, which means that we are always trying to find consensus. Of course, new members do not always vote at the regular meetings because they don't know everything yet. But if he or she feels like it, he or she is welcome to vote and participate. The person who takes notes during the meetings also leads the discussion – normally it's a different person every time but usually one of the older members.

At the moment, we are creating a database of possible volunteers. Especially during summer, when people are traveling and many of the core members aren't around, we just draw on the database of White Bike users. The database is categorized by the possible types of support. So, if we are organizing an event and need a graphic designer, we look at the list of graphic designers and illustrators and ask them who can help. If someone doesn't know what kind of support he or she can offer us, it's also fine. We always need people who can carry stuff or who have a driver's license or who can bring food for the breakfast on cycling days.

How are rules and changes to rules negotiated?

We discuss a lot and try to find consensus. Democratic voting is not always the best solution for everything. After a discussion, if the vote is five to five, for example, we just skip that point and try to do some more research and put the topic on the agenda for the next month again. Sometimes the issue gets solved naturally in the meantime. But we all have similar political views and so we never have had bigger problems. Sometimes there are personal issues; we try to solve those just between the persons involved. Sometimes a school teacher or someone else with pedagogic education functions as a mediator.

How are rules enforced?

We have virtual credit: when you start to use the White Bikes, you got a credit of, let's say, 20 points, and if you use the bike for more than one hour then you lose one point, so you have 19 credit points left. If the user doesn't bring back the bike or locks it badly or whatever we subtract extra credit points. When that person has zero credit points, he or she is not able to rent anymore. Of course, they get a notification before. It's possible to earn new credit points by cleaning bikes or riding them back to where they are needed, for example. This makes the system almost self-sustainable, which is very rare.

Is free-riding a problem? If so, how does it manifest and how is it prevented?

We did experience some vandalism, attacks on our bikes at different locations. There was this one week when some hater attacked all our bikes and some bigger things. Then the Bike Kitchen had to give some money to the White Bikes, but that's ok. Besides that, we don't have problems with free riding. It is not possible to take a bike and just ride it without being part of the system. You have to be part of the system; it's community bike sharing! We call it the bike sharing scheme 3.5: it's not dockless bike sharing, that's the fourth generation, and it doesn't have GPS, but it's a closed community and you have to be registered. I guess, for all bike sharing you have to be registered but there are different types of registration, whether it's face-to-face training or entering your credit card information. For tourists, it's a little bit difficult to use our bike sharing; it's mostly for residents of Bratislava or people who come to Bratislava regularly.

What formal policies affect your commons project?

At the moment, there is no official bike sharing in the city. Some were planned, but so far none have been realized. So the municipality doesn't want to harm us or anything and we have a quite strong voice due to the number of users. There are the regular laws like compulsory lights or reflective parts on the bikes and brakes. But there are no other rules; it's quite easy.

Are there informal policies which affect your commons project?

Some of the city departments, mostly the police and the planning department, are not really pro-bike. We think they are not fighting for bikes enough. They are fighting for secure car transport, which often conflicts with safe cycling and walking. It could change with every election, but we are still waiting for that change. Thankfully, their anti-bike attitude does not cause real problems. In fact, it gives the community fresh motivation to keep fighting and being active.

Have you cooperated with other actors and what results did these cooperations yield? Did cooperation with others play an important role in the project's success?

Yes, we have had a really good cooperation with the Rotary Club, for example. The Rotary Club had the connection to the Dutch National Park which gave us the bicycles. We paid the travel costs from the Netherlands to Bratislava and they managed the contact. The National Park gives away some of the older bikes from their park every year – those are our White Bikes. Some people from the private sector, from different CSR departments, have also supported us. That enabled us to buy another container or to create the community garden next to our Bike Kitchen. We also cooperate with other initiatives in Bratislava that focus on environmental or urban topics like street markets, anti-racist football tournaments, and so on. The whole cycling community is very interconnected here; the people from the Bike Kitchen are also involved in the most active NGO, Cycling Coalition Bratislava, which I helped to found some years ago, and in the White Bikes. Everything is super connected.

To what degree has your project engaged in public relations and/or lobbying? What role has media coverage played in the success of your project?

Since Bratislava is the capital city and is quite small, the communal politicians are very well known. We always organize a discussion about transport and mobility for the mayoral candidates. As we are very much respected for the things that we do voluntarily, I guess they are afraid of attacking us. Many of them help us with the formal stuff. But in general, we try to be super independent, even on the electricity and stuff – we have two solar panels. But, of course, we use the media. We have quite a big media list and from time to time we write press releases.

What are the main ingredients which have made your project possible / successful so far?

A group of core people, a positive attitude, and lack of respect for authorities: that's the starting point for a good project. The lack of respect for authorities is like boiling water: now is the time. We have to start now. And we are not afraid. We are not focusing on how not to do things, we are always looking forward. That's the boiling water. And then add some spices like values such as antiracism and anti-homophobia. Values hold a community together. We are

always presenting ours to the outside so that everybody knows what kind of people we are. That connects us and at the same time keeps away those people who are not so into the community stuff. We never hide our values; they are always our top priority. Another important spice is the regular meetings.

What was one main challenge that you encountered and how did you solve it?

Our biggest challenge right now is probably using the database of all the volunteers wisely. In the past, the main challenge was always the space for the Bike Kitchen. We have already had so many different spaces. But then we bought our own containers, Actors of Urban Change [a program for sustainable and participative urban planning through culture based in Germany] helped us with that. And we asked the mayor for permission for a place that we found and he said yes. That was at the beginning of his term. He was ok with it because we offer public services like the workshops and the promotion of bike mobility. Unfortunately, we don't know how long we will have a guarantee on the space. We wanted it for five years and last year all the deputies were ok with that but the mayor didn't sign it. Two years earlier, he had given his

ok but now we were probably too critical of his work. So far, he hasn't kicked us out, but we only have one year contracts.

What is your relationship with city government/city planning? What is their attitude towards your project?

We do have a big issue with the municipality at the moment; the mayor of the city signed a decision with the developer of the riverbank which will remove the cycle lane which has been there for ten years. We protested and criticized the plans. Many employees and the general public support us, so, in total, the relationship is neutral. Normally, we do not fight with the municipality, but when there is an incident like this one, we are of course critical.

How would you assess your impact on society and the city in which you are located?

I would call our project the center of the cycling movement for whole Slovakia. This is the place where you find all the information and all the inspiration and all the motivation for pushing cycling culture forward. So I think the impact is really, really big. Our initiative connects everything.

If you could give advice to a new commons project, what would it be?

Cook together. And another piece of advice: after you get settled, regular meetings are really helpful. And, of course, try to have people around who share the same values. There are initiatives that spend hours talking about differences in their values, but that's not important for the cause, that's for the beer meetings after the regular ones.

Values hold a community together.
We never hide our values;
they are always our top priority.

Holzmarkt

(Urban development)



In the eastern part of Berlin on the banks of the Spree River, a prime piece of land has been converted into a lively urban village home to new ways of living and working and a large variety of alternative leisure and culture facilities. Holzmarkt has become a symbol for user-driven urban development both in Berlin and internationally. Benjamin Scheerbarth talked to us about how to find the balance between creative freedom and economic survival.

Can you tell me a bit about Holzmarkt in your own words?

The case studies

The Holzmarkt is a creative, cosmopolitan urban village covering about 20,000 square meters; it's a manifestation of user-driven, bottom-up urban development. This lot was formerly the site of Bar 25, an internationally-renowned techno club. In 2013, the club owners fought for and received the opportunity to develop this space into a creative village.

The aim is to create a framework, a home for a multitude of cultural entrepreneurs, creative workers, and artists who can act independently of the usual market pressures. At the moment, there are 200 employees, 50 tenants, and about half a million visitors each year. There is a public marketplace, a restored river bank, a wide range of leisure and culture facilities, creative offices, multifunctional spaces, a music school, a bakery, a coffee roaster and, of course, a techno club. A guesthouse, a brewery, and more will follow.

The concepts behind the Holzmarkt – no anonymous glass and steel architecture, free public access to the Spree river bank and so on – resulted from protests to the **Mediaspree** planning concept, in which investors and the city of Berlin wanted to develop the riverbank east of the city center with upscale high-rise office space for media and other companies. In 2008, there was a successful but non-binding public referendum called **Spreeufer für Alle** or **Mediaspree versenken**, which is where these concepts originated. However, the land was sold through a highest bidder process, rendering access financially impossible for community-driven projects. Luckily, we were able to develop a concept and convince the Swiss Abendrot foundation to buy the land and grant us a long-term lease.

How many users are in the group?

Holzmarkt is organized in two cooperatives and one citizen's association. The **Cooperative for Urban Creativity** is a group of entrepreneurs, creative artists, and supporters who can buy shares to support the project. That cooperative has about 150 members. Not all of them work here, though. The other cooperative is the **Holzmarkt 25**, a relatively small group of people who take care of retaining the original spirit of the project and make operational decisions where needed. Most of them were already involved in Bar 25. There is also the citizen's association, **Möhrchenpark**, a non-profit organization, which anyone can become a member of for a small fee. It is responsible for the public space here.

Is the group open or closed?

The citizen's association is open for everyone. The cooperative **Holzmarkt 25** is more or less closed, though one could work one's way into it. The **Cooperative for Urban Creativity** is open to anyone who wants to support it (through buying shares); institutions can also join. There are, however, people and groups that are not welcome to join for ethical reasons, for example those involved in the arms trade or nuclear energy.

Do the users know each other personally?

Most of them do. There is a lot of exchange on all levels, from users of the space to locals and tourists, but also between the two cooperatives, for example the executive committee of one cooperative is part of the supervisory board of the other and vice versa.

How do you communicate with each other?

Via newsletter and email, of course, but there are also regular meetings of the cooperatives where the important stuff is discussed. Mostly people meet informally – in the marketplace, the restaurant, and while actively using the spaces themselves.

What contact do you have with one another other than agreeing upon rules, if any?

The members of the cooperative **Holzmarkt 25** see each other on a daily basis. The members of the **Cooperative for Urban Creativity** executive committee are here almost every day or at least visit regularly too. Some of them have their offices here. There is a lot of day-to-day contact.

How does commoning take place?

There are two basic rules. The first one is quite logical: if everyone agrees, the motion passes. And second: one person alone cannot block a motion – if someone is against a specific activity or change, he or she needs at least one supporter. His or her idea has to be good enough to convince at least one other person. It is a very discursive and sometimes long democratic process.

How are rules and changes to rules negotiated?

One important thing is that everyone has the same voting right independent of how much capital he or she invests. So, no matter how many shares a person holds, he or she has only one vote. We try to find consensus, but decisions are made by simple majority.

How are rules enforced?

We don't have a long list of rules. What's special about this place is that there is so much enthusiasm and a feeling of identity that we don't need strict rules – a lot is based on trust. Many of the users have known each other for a long time and feel a sense of ownership, which really helps.

A large part of the land – 6,000 square meters – is dedicated to the public and open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, period. There are always enough “eyes on the street,” which means that we have some social control to help prevent issues among visitors. However, a decision to render private land public comes with consequences, and we're still finding ways of working with this.

Is free-riding a problem? If so, how does it manifest and how is it prevented?

In the beginning, there were some burglaries, and we do have some trouble with garbage and vandalism. But we never closed the area as a consequence – instead, we employed a night watchman and a cleaning company. Plus, many members of the collective are here daily and can bring up issues if they see them.

What formal policies affect your commons project?

The most critical formal policies which affect the Holzmarkt are building and planning laws. Having formal planning permits and building rights in place is extremely important when it comes to financing a project. Holzmarkt's funky buildings do not have a concept for secondary use, which means that if the project fails, its physical structures are not of much use to the lending insti-

tutions – they can't just foreclose and sell them to recoup their losses. That's why these laws are so relevant, because they give the bank and us security. At the moment, we are learning hard lessons. After the **Mediaspree** protests, we worked together with the district to develop a formal planning permission for the Holzmarkt, but it hasn't been validated to this day. It's a huge challenge.

Are there informal policies which affect your commons project?

The city originally owned the plot and then sold it in a highest bidder process – it's not a law or a rule, but just the way it was done back then. Typically, as a creative or a commons project, that's the end of the line – you just cannot keep up with the other bidders. Finding a partner like the Swiss Abendrot foundation was lucky.

Have you cooperated with other actors and what results did these cooperations yield? Did cooperation with others play an important role in the project's success?

The most important cooperation we've had so far was with the Abendrot foundation – without them, none of this would have been possible. Then, of course, there are strong relationships with the members of the **Cooperative for Urban Creativity**, who invested their

own capital into the project, the neighbors, and the firms who carried out the construction. There have been many international partnerships with projects and initiatives that have been inspired by Holzmarkt. Over the years, Holzmarkt has built up a big network of friends and supporters. On day one, there was no official groundbreaking; instead, everybody was invited to bring a plant and plant it here. More than thousand people came!

To what degree has your project engaged in public relations and/or lobbying? What role has media coverage played in the success of your project?

In general, Holzmarkt is very popular. There are many supporters from very different circles, from radical groups to high politics. We have political support from all parties and all levels of government. We have won some international prizes and city delegations from all over the world have visited.

Lobbying works in both directions: Holzmarkt is also a poster child for the city – diverse, grassroots, creative. Of course, we also receive our fair share of criticism. But I think if you take a stand and offer a place like this to the public you have to be able to deal with that. In many ways, differences and contradictions are what a city is made of.

What are the main ingredients which have made your project possible / successful so far?

One thing I already mentioned is enthusiasm paired with a shared identity that derives from common history. Common experience creates a feeling of belonging and provides identity. That's very important, especially for large collectives.

Another ingredient is the constant prioritization of usage over ownership. We want to use space and make it usable for others – we don't need ownership. This approach leads to interesting solutions that conventional project developers would never think of. For example, we use temporary uses to help fund more permanent ones. The Holzmarkt and its members came from a background of temporary use of space and cultural appropriation of land. At the Holzmarkt, from day one, we had to pay rent to the Abendrot foundation. Conventional project developers would usually start construction of a profit-maximizing project as soon as possible, since you have fixed costs and overhead associated with vacant land. But for us, vacant land is always an opportunity to create attractive spaces with little means. So, the founders did what they do best: opened a restaurant, a club, and a beach bar, and with that they slowly generated the means to engage in more permanent development.

That was very important. Remember, the ones who started the Holzmarkt aren't urban developers or architects but rather club owners, photographers, artists, etc. And when "normal" people do bottom-up urban development, it takes time. They make mistakes and they learn from them, but you have to be able to cover your costs during this process.

Finally, Holzmarkt is something a lot of people were wishing and waiting for. We created open space and generous access to the river Spree. A conventional developer could have chosen not to do that. We did that voluntarily, since we were part of the public that was against the original plans for this piece of land. This is perhaps the most natural ingredient for commons projects, but it's an essential one if you want to succeed: reflect what the public wants and needs.

What was one main challenge that you encountered and how did you solve it?

One challenge was of course the financing. The problem was that there was a lack of trust between the creative actors and the investors. The investors were worried that the creatives wouldn't be reliable or be able to manage money responsibly and the creatives were afraid of micro-management and giving up authenticity. This led to the formation of a cooperative, an institutional form which allows the decoupling of voting power from financial power.

Another challenge is financial viability; we voluntarily forewent the construction of nearly 35,000 square meters of gross floor area. While zoning here would allow us to build almost 50,000 square meters, so far Holzmarkt has built only 5,000 square meters; in the end, it might be around 15,000 square meters. But the land price in Berlin is based on the building rights granted by zoning and permits and the potential profit that could have been made here. You have to find a balance between building less than you are permitted and being able to survive economically. One rule which helps is that no space is used exclusively – it is always shared. For example, DJs share a studio, yoga teachers share a gym, and so on.

We do that to keep rents low. However, Holzmarkt is not just a big co-working village. Everybody who works here is expected to contribute to the community actively. The bakery, for example, doesn't only sell to the people who come by but also supplies the kindergarten and the restaurant. There are many, many interrelations and synergies like that.

What is your relationship with city government/city planning? What is their attitude towards your project?

The project attracts much praise and support, especially from international city governments and planning departments. Ironically, the more local the government, the more challenging the relationship. The district level is most cautious since there is a fear of creating a precedent, allowing something that others might hold against the administration at a later stage. Commoning projects are also rarely the ones which can afford bulletproof and ready-to-approve planning and documentation.

How would you assess your impact on society and the city in which you are located?

High. This project managed to take a piece of prime land off the market, not only through a long-term lease but also through the way contracts are structured. For the next 75 years, this piece of land will be able to be used for a variety of cultural and creative uses without the insecurity usually associated with these forms of programming. That's very important because land prices around us are rising at an astronomical rate: nearly 800% in just five years!

Holzmarkt also managed to create a wide range of leisure, gastronomy, and cultural facilities for the neighborhood and visitors that wasn't here before. Conventional development rarely manages to provide an exciting range of offerings; development driven by a political agenda or the market tends to be more monofunctional. Holzmarkt only made a small contribution to this neighborhood, but it's a significant one. And in the process, it also created around 200 jobs. But, in my opinion, the quality of life created here is the most important thing.

If you could give advice to a new commons project, what would it be?

There are two things. First: You have to ask yourself not only what you are against but what you are in favor of, and then fight for it. It also helps to find partners who share your values to help and support you.

And second: find ways to realize your goals slowly. Slowness helped us a lot. Holzmarkt has specific goals but doesn't always know how to reach them. We do it step by step. For that you need space, space to experiment, or even to move back one step and then move forward again. Never being finished is part of our identity, and this iterative process is fundamental to our work here.

You have to ask yourself not only what you are against but what you are in favor of, and then fight for it.



Middelgrunden Wind Energy Cooperative

(Wind energy)

Middelgrunden Wind Energy Cooperative

(Wind energy)



Three and a half kilometers off the shore of Copenhagen, twenty wind turbines use the constant breezes to produce clean energy; ten of these are owned and operated by the citizen-initiated wind energy cooperative Middelgrunden. The cooperative aims to foster the transition towards a carbon-neutral energy system and energy independence. The wind park, which was the largest offshore farm in the world at the time of its construction, has long become a symbol for community wind energy and the city. We spoke to Hans Christian Sørensen, a board member at Middelgrunden, for more insight into the cooperative's success to date.

Can you tell me a bit about Middelgrunden in your own words?

The case studies

In 1996, we created the wind turbine cooperative Middelgrunden as a follow-up to the successful wind project Lynettenvind. Both our cooperative and Copenhagen Energy, the municipal utility that today is called DONG Energy, simultaneously applied to build a wind farm on a natural reef three and a half kilometers outside of Copenhagen. This was quite an issue for the municipality – they had never had two applications for the same space before, so they suggested that we work together. We created a joint venture; today DONG Energy owns ten wind turbines and the cooperative owns ten turbines, each of which has a capacity of two megawatts. Altogether, the twenty turbines produce around 40,000 megawatt-hours per year. At the time of its construction in 2000, it was the largest offshore wind farm in the world.

You have to live within a certain distance of the wind farm in order to be a shareholder. However, people don't get their electricity directly from the wind turbines that they are shareholders of. The cooperative produces electricity, sells it to the grid, and then pays out a dividend that people use to pay their power bill. That has been proven to be the less complicated way of organizing the cooperative energy system; it is practiced that way in all of Denmark.

How many users are in the group?

We have 8,552 shareholding members and a board of volunteers. As we are a very large cooperative, we pay a company to do the bookkeeping, and we also pay an operations manager to do the invoices and to keep an eye on the turbines – he or she reports about the technical status at the quarterly board meetings. We also pay someone to take calls and manage the member details. You can't even imagine how many people change addresses or bank accounts each year when you have over 8,500 shareholders! In smaller cooperatives, they usually do this work themselves, but for us it just wouldn't make sense. We're also lucky – one of our members happens to be a part-time journalist who works for us on a volunteer basis and does the newsletter, the minutes, and the reports.

The volunteer board is made up of five members plus two substitutes and about five more people who have been with us from the beginning and are really interested in being involved. There is a pretty good replacement rate among the board, since we have a group of volunteers who have been with us since 2000. Up until now, we haven't had a problem replacing board members who want to retire. The board members are elected for two years – two on even years and three on odd years. That way there is always some continuity and some change.

Is the group open or closed?

To use the energy of the wind turbines you have to live within a radius of five times the rotor diameter or the height of the turbine – that's the standard rule in Denmark. That means our group is open to everyone who fulfils that requirement.

To become a member of the cooperative, though, you have to buy shares. The number of shares you can buy depends on how much electricity you use; one share is equivalent to 1,000 mega-watt-hours per year, so a standard household can hold four to five shares. It is possible to hold more shares, though, but then you have to pay taxes on the income you get from the dividends.

We do restrict membership of the board if needed. Just the other day, we had an application from a person who was employed by DONG energy. It was the first time that we had to turn someone away. We just considered that it would be too much of a conflict of interest. We would do the same if we had someone apply who works for Siemens – that's who produces our turbines. We also limit board members from the same household – not more than one partner per household can be elected to the board. But it's very rare that we have to turn someone away.

Do the users know each other personally?

Some of them do, but most of them do not. That would be very unusual for such a large group.

How do you communicate with each other?

We have a general assembly once a year and a board meeting every three months. We get fewer and fewer people at the general assembly each year. We started out with about 200, now it's down to 40 or 50. That's life: as long as things are running smoothly, people don't feel the need to show up.

What contact do you have with one another other than agreeing upon rules, if any?

We have events, for example open houses where people can climb the wind turbines. We have volunteers from among our shareholders who help us; they make sure that people get on and off the boat safely and find their way ok, things like that.

How does commoning take place?

Everyone who holds shares is allowed to vote, but there is only one vote per person, regardless of his or her number of shares. This type of cooperative model is well-established in Denmark; it removes money from the democratic decision process and equalizes things.

How are rules and changes to the rules negotiated?

Decisions are made by simple majority. For important votes, for example to change the bylaws or to make significant economic decisions, at least half of the shareholders need to be present (or otherwise represented, for example by proxy) and two thirds of those voting have to be in favor of the measure. These votes take place at the annual general assembly, or, in exceptional cases, in special shareholder assemblies.

Is free-riding a problem? If so, how does it manifest and how is it prevented?

The fact that one has to buy shares prevents free-riding to a large extent. If, however, a shareholder does not follow the rules of the cooperative, we can sanction him or her by discontinuing their dividends until the problem is solved. In the worst-case scenario, we can even eject that person from the cooperative and force them to sell their shares.

What formal policies affect your commons project?

Cooperatives are a well-established and well-accepted social practice in Denmark which has been around since the war between Denmark and Prussia. Denmark lost Schleswig-Holstein to the Prussians in the 1860s; at the time, that was 40% of all the farmland in Denmark. During the expansion of agriculture to the northern Jutland peninsula, farmers and other producers developed a cooperative model which was based on one person-one vote and a collective use of large investments such as machinery. In this way, the farmers were able to share costs and risks and increase their bargaining power when selling their goods. Their profits were based on how much milk or grain or cheese they had produced, but no matter how much they contributed, they still only had one vote. When I was a child in the 1950s, more than 90% of all Danish people were in agriculture, so it's a well-known and very well-accepted model, even now. All of the water utilities and nearly all municipal heating utilities are organized this way, as is almost all agriculture and just about half of all shops.

The advantage is that you can pay money into the cooperative and you don't get taxed. You only pay tax when you pay out the profit. So, when the profit goes back to the different shareholders, then you get taxed. This means that this kind of model has been a very good model for starting up new businesses because you can inject money and, as long as you don't pay out any profit, you are just collecting the money in the cooperative.

We were also affected by technical and legal structures. In Denmark, for offshore wind you have two options: you either follow the standard planning procedure established by government in which the government suggests spaces that are pre-approved for wind farms or you can follow what's called an open-door principle, which means that you can apply wherever you want. If you get approved, you get a special permission for the planning and within one year you have to send in a report about environmental impacts, etc. which determines whether you can continue your project at that location. Our project fell under this second category, which also meant that we had to pay the cable to the shore ourselves. We needed forty megawatts of capacity for the project to be feasible. Fortunately turbines were growing in size from one and a half to two megawatts at that time, so we were able to achieve the necessary forty megawatts with the adjusted design and reduced number of turbines.

Are there informal policies which affect your commons project?

Denmark in general is pushing wind power so projects like ours are usually supported either implicitly and/or explicitly.

Have you cooperated with other actors and what results did these cooperations yield? Did cooperation with others play an important role in the project's success?

The cooperation with DONG energy was very important. Without them, we would not have been able to do this project at all. We had an agreement with them that they would have taken over some of the turbines if we hadn't gotten enough shareholders, which meant that we could take some risks we might not have been able to otherwise.

To what degree has your project engaged in public relations and/or lobbying? What role has media coverage played in the success of your project?

The whole planning process took two and a half years. In the first version of the first project we planned three rows of turbines on the northern part of the natural reef. During the citizen review period of the approval process, we got more than a thousand protests. Three rows of turbines may look attractive from the air, but the residents found it too visually confusing. So, we employed an industrial designer and she came up with the idea of the curved line that we have today, which follows the line of the fortress walls around Copenhagen from 1890. We submitted that for public consultation and this time we only got three or four protests. So at least from that perspective it was a success.

There was however another potential issue. The first version of the first project was located in the northern part of the natural reef, but the new design was going to stretch the length of the reef from north to south. At that time, there was an NGO group working on bringing the beach two kilometers out into the sea between the southern part of Copenhagen and the airport. In 1996, we had very shallow water for one kilometer into the sea; people who wanted to go swimming had to walk through 10cm of water for one kilometer to be able to do so. This NGO wanted to fix this problem.

So, the first thing I did was to call this group and say, "Well, you probably heard about our ideas..." "Yes," they said, "and we don't like it." When I asked them why, they said they were worried about the noise. So, I invited them to visit the just-commissioned six hundred kilowatt turbines at the north part of the island in the harbor area and I was able to change their mind. They were successful in their project, too; we have a fantastic beach today.

What are the main ingredients which have made your project possible / successful so far?

The main ingredient is open communication and information, something we have done from the beginning. Our planning process was very open and informal; we discussed the plans with the residents of Copenhagen even before we discussed it with the authorities. This actually made it easier to get the approval, because we already had consulted the people who were going to be affected and we had them behind us.

We practice the same principle in our internal work. For example, we don't have to inform all the board members and get their ok before releasing information; we just post it on the website. That would be unthinkable in a normal company! That was really important during the planning process – our partners and the residents knew that we were being completely transparent.

People think wind turbines aren't quite as ugly when they have a profit from them, but I think it's also important to accept that some people don't like wind turbines and you have to take that into account as well.

What was one main challenge that you encountered and how did you solve it?

The biggest challenge was probably the protest we got after we released the first layout for the wind park. There was however one other aspect which could have been a big challenge which I mentioned briefly before. We had an agreement with DONG Energy that if we couldn't sell the anticipated number of shares, that means if the cooperative couldn't take over 50% of the turbines in Middelgrunden, then the utility would take the remaining part, so the division could have been 70/30, for example. This was really important in helping us bridge one of the biggest challenges: the risk of starting. I mean, when you're planning a wind farm, there are a lot of unknowns and a lot of costs up front. Partnering with the municipal utility allowed us to buffer these risks, which was a huge advantage, because many of our shareholders decided very late that they wanted to join. We would otherwise have been very nervous!

What is your relationship with city government/city planning? What is their attitude towards your project?

Very good.

How would you assess your impact on society and the city in which you are located?

Well, we cover 3% of Copenhagen's electricity consumption, that's a big impact I would say. But I would also say that we have gone a long way toward changing people's impressions about wind turbines. The price of electricity has been dropping in the last six years or so, which means that continuing the project has become more difficult economically. But when we tell people that now, after 25 years, we might not be able to continue they say "no, you can't do that. You're an icon of Copenhagen!" I guess that shows just how far we've come.

If you could give advice to a new commons project, what would it be?

I guess the first and most important thing is never to forget to be honest and open in your communication. People want to help, but they need to trust you first. And you have to be very open-minded for all kinds of ideas and accept that some people don't like wind turbines. That's how it is. That acceptance has helped keep many discussions about the project itself instead of general philosophies, which has meant that we have been able to make progress where other projects have gotten bogged down in long, existential debates.

The first and most important thing is never to forget to be honest and open in your communication. People want to help, but they need to trust you first.



Club Cultural Matienzo

(Arts and culture)

Club Cultural Matienzo

(Arts and culture)



In the wake of a tragic nightclub fire in 2004, many non-commercial cultural spaces were closed down and the city of Buenos Aires stopped issuing permits to new ones. Club Cultural Matienzo was founded in 2008 to help alternative/independent culture thrive. It is not only a venue for arts and culture but also a platform for local artists which fights for better working conditions and supports other projects. Juan Arano-vich, one of the founding members of CCM, spoke to us about culture as a human right and the importance of a people-centered approach in starting new projects.

Can you tell me a bit about Club Cultural Matienzo in your own words?

We started the CCM in 2008 with five friends. We were looking for a place to create cultural content and social engagement between people; at that time, there just wasn't much space. After a tragic accident at the Cromañón night club in 2004 where almost 200 people died, many non-commercial venues were closed and the government stopped granting permits to new ones. So, in 2008, one of the most interesting cities in Latin America was empty of everything except commercial culture, since they were the only ones who could still get permits from the government.

We called our place Cultural Club because we wanted to be an open space where people don't just participate but also have the ability to become a part of something. We then started to look for other people, other venues, and other artists who were doing the same because we wanted to show the world what we were doing. The problem was that we were all hiding – many venues like us didn't publish their addresses because they were afraid of getting shut down.

The regulation allowed theater and literature, but we were a multidisciplinary space with a gallery and that was technically illegal.

We tried to talk to the government many times but there was no answer, so we decided to organize ourselves. We got together all the venues that were facing the same problems. Our aim was to create a new ecosystem of indie and alternative culture and a network of collaboration. We created Maker, a movement for cultural spaces in the city, and Esce-na, a space for alternative theater. We initiated collective buying practices for the restaurants that many venues have to help cover the costs for their clubs and we created an NGO called Cultural Lawyers who work pro bono to support the cultural venues and to prevent closures. We have been able to make a range of changes and effect political change.

We moved into our current space five years ago – we expanded from 250 to 1,000 square meters. This space includes a music venue, a theater, a gallery, spaces that we use for lessons and offices, a radio station, and a bar. To get the money together, we started a cultural venture fund, a form of cooperative. First, we created a business plan and identified potential users and key partners who we wanted to involve. The offer was that whoever invested would get their money back after two years plus the same interest as they would get at the bank. If the project grew during those two years, the shareholder would get a payout of the surplus. The shareholders are also premium user members at the CCM and have free access to everything in the venue.

How many users are in the group?

We're around 70 people working in the project.

Is the group open or closed?

It's partially closed. We have different forms of participation. There are people who just work in the space one or two times a week and there are some people who do voluntary work, but most of the people who work in the space and participate in our cultural activities also own the place. One year after you start to participate as a collaborator or as a worker in the space you have the opportunity to become a member of the society. And after four years of being a member you become a full-time associate and that gives you ownership of part of the project dependent on the time you work in the project and your hierarchy or your responsibility.

Do the users know each other personally?

Yes, we've been working together for a long time.

How do you communicate with each other?

In person, via email, and on the phone. Most of the day-to-day and important decisions are however not reached at the big meetings, but rather on the sidelines.

What contact do you have with one another other than agreeing upon rules, if any?

We see each other in the club and at events.

How does commoning take place?

We have three or four occasions per year where we all get together. We have two economic briefings annually: every six months the economic team is obligated to report the economic status to all the members. Once a year we have a big assembly to evaluate and talk about our alignment in the future. And once a year we make a Matienzo trip, it's like a camp where we just go to have fun.

How are rules and changes to rules negotiated?

We have a written document that records some rules, something like a manifesto, but it's more like an umbrella. We wrote it three or four years ago and it's already a bit out of date, but our project is developing so fast that we don't have time to adjust it. We would lose too much time if we adjusted it every time something changes. So it's still available but we make most of our decisions during the day-to-day business and based on trust.

We have board of directors who take care of the structural and strategic aspects of the club and a content committee who are responsible for the topics, formats, and events that happen in the club. If we have to make big structural decisions, we form a larger board which includes all the members of the board of directors and the content committee and also includes people who are important for the workflow of the project as a whole who are not on those boards.

We usually try to reach consensus. If we can't reach consensus, we have a vote – at least three quarters of the people who are allowed to vote have to be in favor of the change.

Is free-riding a problem? If so, how does it manifest and how is it prevented?

No, that's not really an issue in our organization because the club is based on membership.

What formal policies affect your commons project?

In 2015, after a lot of lobbying on our part, the law was changed. The new law, which allows us to legally work as a multidisciplinary center, was passed unanimously. We finally don't have to hide anymore!

Are there informal policies which affect your commons project?

For the last ten years, Buenos Aires was ruled by one political party, so we always had the same contact people. The mayor of the city didn't care much about culture. We have a very difficult relationship with the cultural ministry, which is both bad and good. Sometimes it can help a movement to have a clear enemy. But on the other hand, it's exhausting because we believe that culture is a human right, and the government should guarantee access to culture and its diversity. In order to do that you need government policies that support non-commercial projects, and those just don't exist here.

Have you cooperated with other actors and what results did these cooperations yield? Did cooperation with others play an important role in the project's success?

We work together with many, many other groups. Here in Buenos Aires City we work in three different networks: Maker, a cultural center, Escena, a space for independent theater, and the music venue CLUMVI. Four years ago, we even created a network of networks called United Culture. It represents people from networks that work with culture, including urban artists, theaters, music venues, actors, and tango singers.

We also have international collaborations. For example, we started an alliance four years ago with Belgium. Now at least one or two artists from Matienzo go to Belgium each year in order to write dissertations or participate in artist-in-residence programs, and in return Belgian collectives and artists visit Matienzo. Last year, we cooperated with an independent theater company in Paris and developed a site-specific play together. They found the venue, sent us the plan of the venue and we wrote the play here. Then we sent the play with the director and one of the actresses to Paris where they performed it. We also work with a couple of organizations in Brazil and Bolivia. We exchange knowledge, participate in congresses, or develop theater projects in neglected areas. So yes, we have a lot of networks and cooperations.

To what degree has your project engaged in public relations and/or lobbying? What role has media coverage played in the success of your project?

When we want to create visibility for a problem or pass a new law, we usually create a campaign and use social media, then we talk to mainstream media and they replicate it. That heats up the political lobby. We also have concerts in the streets with 5,000 or 10,000 people. That also creates visibility. And sometimes we just go and talk to representatives of the city senate.

What are the main ingredients which have made your project possible / successful so far?

I think every successful project needs three ingredients: the first is a societal need for the project. You need to understand the environment first - you can't start a project that only you need yourself. The second ingredient is the people that work in the project. They really need to have passion for it. And the third is that the implementation has to be good. A good idea with a bad implementation is always a failure. Nothing has to be perfect but the implementation plan has to be professional. With those three ingredients you can realize any project.

What was one main challenge that you encountered and how did you solve it?

That's a really difficult question. We have faced so many challenges over the last ten years! If I had to choose one, I would probably say moving and the transformation from being a small project with no money to a big project with impact and with resources to pay people better. That was a difficult year.

When there is no money at all, it's easy to collaborate. But when there is money involved and you have people working full time, you have responsibility. It gets difficult to manage expectations and maintain the values of this project that used to be a passion and a hobby that is now a job too. You need to stay true to your values and not get lost in the day-to-day stuff that starts to appear when you get so big. If you only pay attention to the operational problems you lose sight of why you are doing it in the first place.

What is your relationship with city government/city planning? What is their attitude towards your project?

Like I said, the mayor of the city doesn't care a lot about culture. In the beginning, the fights with the city were really intense. For the first five years, it felt like we were being persecuted. Things have gotten a bit better, but it's still a fight.

How would you assess your impact on society and the city in which you are located?

When we started in 2008, there were around 100 alternative cultural venues. Now there are almost 500. So that's a big impact. We also did some research and asked 100 of these venues how many visitors they had and how much they charged for entry. In 2015, there were around 1,200,000 visitors. The average ticket cost around 100 pesos, which is about 5 dollars, and 30% of the entries were free.

If you go to the public theater or to big music events, you see a lot of artists who grew up in our venue. It's a cycle. We have created a kind of cultural ecosystem. There is still a lot to do but the situation is a lot better than when we started.

We also have frequent evaluation meetings and use software analysis to see how many visitors we have, what they are coming to see, and so on. But so far we don't have very much information because we don't have the budget and the time to work on this as much as we'd like to. But we are working on it. I think it's very important to assess the quality of our work.

If you could give advice to a new commons project, what would it be?

I would say that one of the biggest things we've learned is that collaboration is always better than competition. If the people around you are good, don't compete with them, cooperate with them. There is always space for more good projects. And the other thing we have learned is that people are more important than structure, so instead of making people adjust to your organization, create your organization around people.

Collaboration is always better than competition. If the people around you are good, don't compete with them, cooperate with them. There is always space for more good projects.



Kalkbreite

(Housing)

Kalkbreite

(Housing)



As inexpensive living space has become a scarce commodity, the cooperative model, which has a long tradition in Switzerland, is becoming increasingly popular again. The Kalkbreite in Zurich does not only offer moderate rents but also experiments with innovative and flexible housing forms. Fred Frohofer, one of the residents, told us about this success model and explained how participative planning helped make the Kalkbreite a reality.

Can you tell me a bit about Kalkbreite in your own words?

The Kalkbreite is a new-build cooperative which includes housing and retail. The building was realized on land that is owned by the city of Zurich. It was built around a tram depot, which means that in the evenings and on weekends trams are parked here. Realizing this kind of building was a huge challenge. In fact, when the city published the announcement for construction on this site, only very few cooperatives took part because the stipulations were so high – we had to include the tram depot and 40% commercial space and have as many apartments facing the courtyard as possible.

In line with our ecological goals, the Kalkbreite itself is car-free. Normally when you build a residential building, you have to build a certain amount of parking. That wasn't possible here in the area; building underground parking would have increased the price of the housing too much.

So now when people move in, they have to sign a declaration that they do not own a car. It's not legally binding, but very effective since there is a shortage of affordable housing here in the city and the people who move here know what they're getting themselves into. Instead, we have around 500 parking spots for bicycles.

As part of our ecological vision and in line with sufficiency thinking, we designed the apartments with less living space per person than the current average. In Zurich, the average living space per person is 39 square meters; here at Kalkbreite we reduced it to 31.2 square meters. In addition to our individual rent, we each contribute the costs to support 0.8 square meters of common space like the cafeteria. We also have four rooms whose function is agreed on together. At the moment we have a room for sewing and ironing, a weight room, a room for yoga and meditation, and a room for youths. In general, rents are about 40% cheaper in cooperatives. Here at the Kalkbreite, the average rent is 20 CHF per square meter.

In addition to the individual apartments, we also have ten guest rooms that can be rented. In the last few years it has become a professional hotel that can be booked by people from outside. We also have conference rooms that can be rented, a sauna, and an additional kitchen on a terrace. There are many common rooms, maybe too many; we would do that differently today, as not all the space is used to capacity.

The Kalkbreite is the result of the successes of the squatting movement of the 1980s in Zurich – our contact with other house projects proved to be really important in realizing the project. But I should probably also say that housing cooperatives are not necessarily radical here. The city has been working together with cooperatives since 1907; there are about 100 housing cooperatives in Zurich and around 18% of the apartments in the city are in cooperative hands.

How many users are in the group?

There are about 2,000 people in the cooperative. The first residents moved in in 2014 – today 259 people live here and around 200 people work here.

Is the group open or closed?

It's closed. To get an apartment here, you have to become a member of the cooperative, and to do that you have to buy a share; the shares cost 1,000 CHF. If you leave the cooperative, you get that money back. In addition, you have to pay a one-time 200 CHF fee to join the cooperative. According to our bylaws, the capital from the shares can only be used for the housing itself – the money from the fees people pay to join gets put in a discretionary fund. The cooperative provides us with 10,000 CHF per year from this fund to pay for activities within and around the house.

Once you are a member of the cooperative, you can apply for vacant apartments, however we have pretty strict rental regulations which were worked out by one of our working groups and comprise four criteria: age, migration background, education level, and gender. We want the Kalkbreite to have the same mix as Switzerland and Zurich – not just middle-aged people or academics or native Swiss.

As there is a serious affordable housing shortage in Zurich, if a cooperative offers an apartment, there are usually plenty of applicants to choose from. We have always been able to find someone who fulfils all the criteria. For example, the apartment next to mine was recently rented. We were looking for a man over 50 who was not an academic, and we found him! His name is Hans.

Do the users know each other personally?

We have seven stairwells that are all connected horizontally by a mezzanine level; that helps in getting to know each other and I think the residents here know each other better than in other cooperatives in Zurich. Of course not everybody knows everybody, but it's totally natural that we greet each other in the hallway. It is of course also possible to live here pretty anonymously as well. Like in everything else, we have a good mix; in this case, some people are very social and others don't find that so important.

How do you communicate with each other?

We have a mailing list and every first Tuesday of the month we have a full plenum meeting. Decisions that are made there are communicated via email afterwards. It's also possible to post announcements in the stairways and elevators if there is a big decision to be made. We planned to have our own intranet, but it seems like 259 people is not enough to make it feasible. At the moment, we have to make do with the email list.

What contact do you have with one another other than agreeing upon rules, if any?

We have working groups for all sorts of topics. One does urban gardening and is responsible for our new raised bed garden. Another group is responsible for the workshop; one maintains the cafeteria, refills the beverages and runs after those who don't do the dishes. And we have other topical groups. I'm part of one concentrated on reducing resource use and there's also a chess group, for example. And then there's the "super-household," an association of 65 people within the Kalkbreite that runs a dining room and a kitchen which employs two cooks. On weeknights, the association members meet there in the evening and eat together. That group has a really strong connection to the Kalkbreite and to each other – they are really the heart and soul of the project.

How does commoning take place?

Group decisions are made by systematic consensus, not majority vote. So, a proposal is made and then the moderator asks if anyone has an objection. If there is one, we discuss it until we find a solution that's acceptable for everybody. The most important thing is that you're not just allowed to be against the measure, you have to say why you're against it. It's a very constructive way of making decisions.

We also have a solidarity fund. A portion of everyone's rent goes directly into that fund, and if someone is broke and can't pay his or her rent, he or she can use the fund. The fund is now even open to other cooperatives that also open theirs. So if one cooperative has too little money, one of the others helps out.

How are rules and changes to rules negotiated?

The cooperative law in Switzerland dictates that changes to the bylaws of a cooperative can only be changed at the annual general meeting and must be made by a majority vote.

How are rules enforced?

One means is social control. In the beginning, for example, there were a few people from outside who just walked into the building. At that time, the residents didn't know each other very well yet and so didn't always know if a person was a resident or not. So we just started greeting people we didn't know yet in the hallway and asking them which apartment they were in. And if he or she said something like "I live in number 72," we knew that he or she wasn't a resident because that kind of numbering doesn't exist. Our courtyard is open to the public, but the house itself is private property.

Another means are sanctions. For example: in the "super-household," the association members wash their own dishes. They drew up a plan in which every member had to wash the dishes once a quarter, but since it was a small group, in the beginning they didn't decide what to do if someone didn't follow this rule. And that became a problem because some people just didn't wash the dishes.

So we called a general meeting and together decided that not washing the dishes costs 50 CHF. And since then the dishes get done much more regularly, and when they don't, we have a little extra disposable income. So when we talk about commons, I always remind people of Elinor Ostrom's rules – one of them is about sanctions. They have to be determined on grassroots basis, of course, but before you start something, you should always talk about what happens if someone doesn't stick to the rules.

Is free-riding a problem? If so, how does it manifest and how is it prevented?

In the beginning, there were some thefts, but then we started to lock the doors and it stopped.

We are located in the city center, close to Langstraße, which is where the main nightlife attractions are in Zurich. On weekends, sometimes people sit here in the courtyard until the early morning and party. Sometimes visitors from outside get a bit loud; thankfully, usually if we tell them that they are being too loud, they normally quiet down or go away.

Unfortunately, people leave a lot of trash in our courtyard. In addition to our weekend visitors, during the week, people like to have lunch in our courtyard. We have somebody who collects the garbage every morning and we collect around 110 liters of garbage every day.

What formal policies affect your commons project?

Well, first there was the construction law and the contract that we signed with the city to be able to build here. There were a number of stipulations which I have already mentioned. We are also affected by Swiss cooperative law, as I have already said.

We are however most affected by the Zurich model of long-term public leases. The city of Zurich tries to buy as much land as possible and then leases it out long-term. That's normal in Switzerland and there are two models: the Zurich model and the Basel model. Within the Zurich model, there are two types of contracts: commercial contracts and non-profit contracts. Non-profit contracts often have more stipulations; for example, we're only allowed to have apartments with one more room than the number of occupants (so, for example, three rooms for two occupants).

In the Zurich model, the lease is set at 2% of what the land is worth per year and the contract is normally limited to 60 years. Over the course of the 60-year lease, the municipality makes more money than it would have made by selling the land. The leaseholder only begins to pay once the building is finished, not before. This in turn means that you can build with a lot less starting capital. It's really a win-win situation.

Are there informal policies which affect your commons project?

Not really. In the 1990s, Zurich was still very, very conservative but that has thankfully changed. Today, the city is oriented towards the left and the green and very open-minded. You can really talk to the authorities nowadays.

Have you cooperated with other actors and what results did these cooperations yield? Did cooperation with others play an important role in the project's success?

Yes, we have cooperated with many people and groups. We have an umbrella organization of cooperatives; that has been a very important alliance, since they work closely with the city. Then there are direct connections to other cooperatives, like Karthago, Das Dreieck and Kraftwerk 1. We have close relationships with the people who run businesses in the building. When we want to have a party or something, we try to get the supplies from them. We also cooperate with the local transit authority who owns the tram depot in our building. Finally, we cooperate on political level, both with political parties and with politically-active groups whose goals are aligned with ours.

To what degree has your project engaged in public relations and/or lobbying? What role has media coverage played in the success of your project?

We haven't really been active in that regard, but we receive a lot of media attention. The mainstream media – TV and radio – has been quite positive. There has been some negative stuff in the right-wing media, but I guess that's to be expected.

What are the main ingredients which have made your project possible / successful so far?

One of the most important things was that we didn't hesitate to realize the project. There were so many stipulations and construction costs of 60 million CHF. There were a lot of risks, but we didn't let that scare us.

But I think that the main ingredient was that we planned participatively from the beginning – that really distinguished us from other cooperatives. We started that process before the cooperative was even founded. A think tank called **Stadtlabor**, really just a mailing list, organized a two-day concept workshop for this plot.

The result was a concept that already included elements that we ended up building, like the sauna and the **Wohnjoker**, rooms with en suite baths that can be added on to an additional rental contract for up to four years if family constellations change. During the construction phase, decisions were constantly handed over to small teams. One team, for example, took care of designing the courtyard – should it have trees, bushes, paving, how much, how much should it cost...? As soon as the lease contract was signed, those teams were paid. The first 20 hours were voluntary; from the 21st hour of work onwards they were paid 20 CHF per hour. On the one hand, we wanted to show people that we value their work. On the other, we didn't have enough apartments for all the volunteers, so we wanted to ensure that there was a clear division between this work and the right to an apartment.

In the end, this was a great way of doing things. The users were able to organize their space themselves. Take the cafeteria, for example. The team found a brilliant solution: they asked the furniture dealer on the ground floor if he wanted to use the cafeteria as a showroom. That way they don't have to buy furniture and he needs less showroom space on the ground floor. And if somebody buys a piece he replaces it. It's a win-win-situation. The management would probably have chosen the easier way – they would have bought new furniture, which would have cost a lot more. Some of those teams only met two or three times, but because of them we often found better solutions.

What was one main challenge that you encountered and how did you solve it?

One big challenge was of course getting together the money to be able to build at all. We luckily found a finance specialist who often works for cooperatives and he was able to help us raise the money. We took every loan we could get, no matter what the interest was, and then tried to build very quickly in order to get the rent income and pay off the loans.

There was also the fact that many of the people involved didn't have much experience in realizing this kind of project, so we had to convince the district council and the general public again and again. That was a big challenge, but we solved it through transparent communication. We were very open about our plans and how things were proceeding. That was key.

What is your relationship with city government/city planning? What is their attitude towards your project?

Good! A former Kalkbreite board member is now the director of the city real estate office. She acquired all the know-how and expertise she needs for her new job working for the project. Strong relationships between the city and the cooperatives are normal, though. Usually, when a cooperative completes construction, a representative of the city, usually from the city real estate office, becomes a board member. These representatives usually stay on even after they retire from the city, so I guess that goes to show that they are really authentic public-private partnerships.

How would you assess your impact on society and the city in which you are located?

High, very high. We offer a larger number of tours – the interest among the general population in new forms of housing, especially housing for seniors, is very high. But I also want to emphasize that we're also open with our mistakes. If something doesn't work so well, we don't hide it but rather provide advice for others how to do it better. The cooperative has been a big experiment from the beginning and we want others to benefit from that – both the things we get right and the things we don't!

If you could give advice to a new commons project, what would it be?

Follow Elinor Ostrom's rules. She did an excellent job – she won the Nobel Prize in economics after all. Follow her rules and nothing can go wrong. That means that it's important to think about sanctions, about controlling, and about who's included and who's not. I know it doesn't sound very romantic, but I really believe that if you concentrate on those three things – sanctions, controlling, and membership – you can't go wrong.

The other thing is: in deciding those rules and developing your project, don't plan behind closed doors, instead build trust through transparency.

Don't plan behind closed doors, instead build trust through transparency.

Practicing the commons





Self-governance and decision-making

The following sub-chapters go into the three core aspects of the practice of commoning described in the first chapter: **self-governance and decision-making**, **community outreach**, and **self-empowerment and learning**. Each sub-chapter is followed by a range of methods relevant to that topic which we hope will prove helpful for commons projects. Methods which have been adapted or included from other authors have been cited as such. All other methods are the work of the authors or already so well-known and in such wide circulation that it is not possible to name a specific source.

➔ [For more about bonding and bridging capital, see p. 152.](#)

Commoning, in addition to the self-determined co-management of a resource, also includes a process of community-building between members and/or users. Commoning fosters the deepening of social relations, the forging of connections between people who are not tied by tradition or family, and more interpersonal trust in general. Before the existence of modern solidarity systems, cooperative projects and the trust and social capital which they engendered were an essential part of survival (Dell-enbaugh-Losse, 2019).

Today, commoning as a solidary practice which produces “social glue” between individuals has been gaining traction again, in particular in urban contexts, where the traditional ties between inhabitants are often weak; we explored some reasons for this in chapter one of this book. This change reflects a shift from a reliance on the state-provided welfare system to a self-determined provision and management of resources by citizens. In this process the focus, however, has not shifted, since “reciprocity is the basis of the welfare state for which so many people have fought” (de Moor, 2016, p. 10). The main societal shift in the rediscovery of commons is therefore a **change in the responsibility for managing processes of reciprocity and sharing from the state to the community**. The “social glue” produced in the course of these processes is what Robert Putnam describes as **bonding (as opposed to bridging) social capital**. Bonding social capital, Putnam argues, is “good for undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity (Putnam, 2000, p. 22).” However, bonding social capital is also inward-looking; while it can provide added benefits to its members, it can also work to exclude those outside of the inner circle.

For this reason, urban commons projects must give careful thought to the definition of their boundaries and the criteria for inclusion as part of the wider structural conditions, rules, and participatory culture of the group. The governance and institutional culture in commons projects fulfill both an active and a preventative function. On the one hand, these structures describe how people might participate on different levels and how they can become empowered to qualitative participation. At the same time, there is a need to hedge free-riding and mimicking by people not really interested in “giving” and sharing. This chapter explores various aspects of self-governance and decision-making, from organizational aspects to the discussion culture within commons projects, and offers a range of tools and methods to help commoners examine and discuss the underlying structures of their project.

Understanding participation

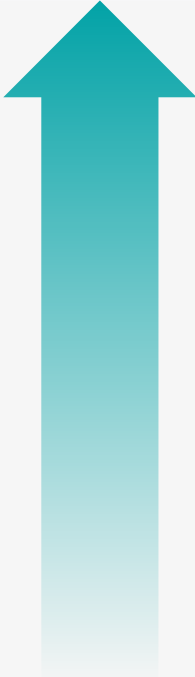
In the words of Charlotte Hess, commons call “for new or renewed processes of participatory self-governance, particularly of local communities” (Hess, 2008, p. 38). But what exactly does that mean? Participation describes the whole range of activities that citizens and in particular group members undertake in order to express their opinions and exert influence on social decision-making – whether it’s in politics, economics, or a commons project (Fahrun, Zimmermann and Skowron, 2014).

In the late 1960s, Sherry Arnstein developed what she described as the “ladder of participation” (1969), which examined degrees of resident participation in public processes. The ladder, which is made up of eight “rungs,” ranks degrees of participation methods. The lowest rungs of the ladder are categorized as non-participation; residents could even be manipulated by these so-called “participatory” measures. The second group of “rungs” is described as tokenism; residents’ feedback plays a minimal or symbolic role in decision-making. These steps range from “informing” to “consultation” (as opposed to dialogue) to “placation.” Finally, the third group of “rungs” is categorized as “citizen power.” As the name implies, these are the highest degrees of participation, and include partnerships, delegation, and complete citizen control of the process. At this level of participation, residents are at eye level with the leader or initiator of the process or even conduct the process themselves.

Projects, organizations, and governments often pretend to use “participatory methods” when in fact their actions can be better described as **informing**, **consulting**, or **placating** residents. As described above, these methods can be described as “tokenism,” since the participation that residents (are permitted to) have is largely symbolic and often does not have a significant effect on the end result.

Commons projects have the concept of self-governance baked into their institutional DNA; they fight for more authentic participation both within their projects and between the projects and the administration. By ensuring that group members have easy access to higher levels of internal participation and decision-making, commons projects can maintain credibility among the wider public and policy-makers in their fights for more authentic participation in public processes and the right to co-shape the city. Building off of Arnstein’s work, we have reconceptualized the levels of participation for commons projects to reflect the various ways and intensities in which members and participants in commons projects can get involved.

Different layers of participation in commons projects, adapted from Arnstein (1969)

Levels of participation	Roles (exemplary)	Intensity of participation
Defining the mid- and long-term strategy (Legal representation and responsibility)	Board, council	
Governing (Legislation and core decision-making)	Functionary/delegate, spokesperson, owner	
Co-deciding, co-shaping (Voting, Proposing changes)	Active member, group delegate	
Cooperating (Conducting common activities)	Partner	
Maintaining, organizing, mediating (Keeping the project running)	Member, member of internal group, project leader, core staff	
Spread the word (Engaging in promotional activities)	Multiplier, educator	
Consulting (Giving feedback / advice)	Client, participant	
Informing (Learning about commons or the resource)	Event participant	

Scaling up: Internal differentiation

As you can see from the graphic above, it's possible to play a wide range of different roles in a commons project. This type of internal differentiation of roles and tasks takes on particular importance when a project starts to scale; we saw that in the case of Düsselgrün. When their project started to grow, it became necessary to designate a press contact, for example. In Freifunk, various local groups manage different aspects of the overarching organization. And in Incredible Edible, roles are assigned on gardening Sundays so that the process runs smoothly. When a project grows from an initiative to a differentiated group of people to an organization, the mechanisms and procedures might change, but participation should remain the guiding principle. Well-chosen structures and roles should ensure that each member or participant can inform themselves about relevant aspects of the project and have “substantial insight into the win-win constellation” (Beckenkamp, 2012, p. 55) between them and the project. This allows them to re-evaluate their individual involvement from time to time and assess whether the internal workings of the project are still in line with their ideals and expectations.

Independent of whether the group is very diverse with complex structures and rules or small and informal, urban commons projects need to ensure active involvement, as well as transparent information and decision-making according to the needs and interests of the members. However, as stated by several of the case studies, too many regulations and rules can choke the delicate plant of grassroots engagement. So, while it's important to achieve clarity and formalization of key issues, it is equally important to choose **useful, resilient, and adaptable rules** and procedures which allow for growth and transformation over the later stages of the project.

➔ [We have included a checklist to help you think about how to incorporate Elinor Ostrom's eight principles of good commons design into your commons project on p. 128.](#)

Choosing an organizational structure

One of the most important frameworks that a project can choose is its organizational structure and legal form. These structures can be important tools for stabilizing or balancing the interests and expectations of participants or members. The designation of the organizational structure and legal form serve to shape the bonds between people by defining roles and attaching tasks and rights to them. The case studies demonstrate the range of forms that these can take.

In Buenos Aires, for example, the CCM takes a meritocratic approach. Here the path to becoming a full associate starts with becoming a simple collaborator of the cultural center and includes later becoming a member of the association before finally becoming a full associate. In Bratislava, a point system regulates access to the White Bikes (with a preference for local inhabitants). The system motivates people to maintain the bicycles and support the Bike Kitchen as points (i.e. use and access) can only be “earned” by performing maintenance and assistance tasks. Both the Kalkbreite and Middelgrunden are traditional co-operatives. New members buy shares to join and thereby gain rights to potential housing or electricity cost offsets, respectively.

Holzmarkt is characterized by an elaborate structure of two registered cooperatives and a non-profit association which interconnect to balance the interests and needs of the owners, trustees, users, and the public. A further example from Berlin not interviewed for this book provides a similar example. The former factory Rotaprint is run by the non-profit company ExRotaprint gGmbH. This company consists of ten owners plus an association made up of the tenants who rent the offices, workshops, and workspace in the former factory called RotaClub e.V. Similar to Holzmarkt, this hybrid construction seeks to satisfy the needs of both the owners (a participatory role which also involves material resources) and the users/tenants. This constellation ensures that the tenants have knowledge of the operations and strategies of the company, which they can also co-shape, since the tenants’ association has a certain number of votes in the company’s assembly. Furthermore, each tenant has the possibility to participate by becoming a member of the association. At the same time, this constellation ensures the owners that their rights and property will be respected. These hybrid constructions are typical for urban projects which involve land or buildings.

Organizational forms in urban commons

Informal group	No legal form, each member represents themselves
Association	Association of community members. Non-profit, following a social goal or responding to a social need
Cooperative	An association of individual entrepreneurs or other owners. Owners can hold multiple shares, but each person has only one vote
Company	A non-profit traditional company

Popular hybrid constructions

Entrepreneurial focus	An entrepreneurial unit is the owner of the resource, but a community-member-run body co-controls it. Owners and members negotiate opportunities for influencing or vetoing each other.
Citizen focus	An association manages the resource. For entrepreneurial activities, the association establishes an entrepreneurial unit. The entrepreneurial risk is assumed by members and the earnings go back into the association.
Shared framework or brand	Actors following a shared framework or brand are the owners or are allowed to be users (for money in franchises or for free like in Freifunk). The owner of the framework or brand can be an entrepreneurial or a member-led body.

Diversity as a potential

Although the ability to shape a heterogeneous public space is the foundation of pluralist democracy, both political and administrative decision-makers and individual resident-led projects often struggle with the application of diversity principles and the design of structures and activities which enable diverse people to join and co-create. Put another way, in building ties to one another, we sometimes forget to build bridges, explore, and actively seek opinions outside of our core group.

It's not always easy to achieve a diversity of perspectives in organizations and projects. First, many organizations and projects find less hierarchical, horizontal structures (such as those typically found in commons projects) challenging, in part because of the ubiquity of vertical and hierarchical organizational structures in our daily lives. As several projects interviewed for this book mentioned (for example Bike Kitchen), due of the intensity of decision-making processes and the lack of hierarchy, they preferred to have people with the same or similar values and viewpoints in the group. Second, new people with sometimes controversial perspectives might create conflict and not be seen as an enrichment. Again, the intensity of negotiation and decision-making processes means that strongly dissenting voices or people with radically different views can create seemingly unnecessary delays. But too much homogeneity can lead to a lack of rigorous discussion and the "echo chamber" effect. Diversity and friction can help promote growth in grassroots projects. Being open toward others is a challenge and a potential; it is also a necessary requirement for a democratic civil society.

➡ Managing diversity means recognizing and unlocking the existing capacities, experiences, and qualities of the individual members as a potential for co-creation.

➡ You can find the checklist on p. 129.

➡ Positive action is concrete actions or mechanisms to eliminate and prevent discrimination and offset disadvantages.

Managing diversity in order to appreciate diversity means the recognition of the existing capacities, experiences, and qualities of individual members (Fahrn, Zimmermann and Skowron, 2014, p. 11). From a historical perspective, this is not really a new idea. Past urban commons projects were frequently aimed at combating inequalities, empowering minorities, and offering marginalized groups the space and tools for co-creation.

The demography of the urban centers of the 21st century is more diverse and international than ever before; correspondingly, the ways in which residents organize their projects and activities needs to respond to that change. Diversity consciousness and structures aimed at social and cultural diversity are key factors for resilience and adaptability. As a first step towards assessing a project's diversity, we suggest a simple check for inclusion, participation, and representation.

Have you discovered aspects of your project which you would like to make more inclusive? Beyond awareness-raising for inclusion and diversity, groups and institutions can furthermore implement positive action to increase the representation of minorities. Positive action describes measures "to eliminate and prevent discrimination or to offset disadvantages arising from existing attitudes, behaviors, and structures" (European Commission, 1998). One can break down this theoretical approach into very concrete measures in a peer group or an organization.

Positive Action: **Examples**

- Reduced fees for specific user or member groups such as the unemployed, students, pensioners, or people with lower income
 - Minority rights in meetings, for example the opportunity to get extra speaking time or the right to add their points to a protocol
 - Female quota for the managing board or body
 - Quotas for minorities on the board or in groups
 - Specific supporting activities such as trainings or mentoring in order to lower the barriers to entry and participation
 - Gender-equal lists of speakers in a discussion
 - Codifications for the use of language or for behavior
 - Selection criteria for positions that are neutral or include skills of minorities or marginalized groups
 - Working conditions such as time, day, rhythm of meetings, and workload are shifted according to the needs of potential participants so as to promote their involvement
- ➡ Kalkbreite engages in positive action to balance the demographics of their resident group. Read more about their approach on p. 98.
- ➡ Düsselgrün has tried to tackle this problem through the selection of their meeting time and place. Read more on p. 39.

➔ [Düsselgrün came to this conclusion too. Read more about how they handled it on p. 40.](#)

Promoting positive discussion culture

The civic culture of a group – how they use and share power – can best be experienced in the way that they discuss and reach decisions. In a group of people with different backgrounds, opinions, and passions, it can be expected that individual participants will experience both being in the majority and the minority opinion on decisions over the course of the project. In contrast to other social decision-making and discussion processes, in a participatory group, even representing the minority opinion can be enjoyable. The inclusion of different perspectives can often increase the quality of decisions and participant “buy-in;” however, [traditional discussion culture is often reduced to the ability of individuals to convince others, in effect marginalizing minority perspectives.](#)

Many commons projects take a different approach to decision-making which puts the focus on deliberation. These approaches measure the quality of meetings and collective decisions not only on the results, but also on the quality of the discussion and the deliberative process that led to them. “Quality” in this regard describes the added benefits of this form of participative deliberative culture; through this process, the group gains insights into positive communication forms and affirmative decision-making processes. Furthermore, as a result of these discussions, they build a stronger feeling of belonging and relating to each other which leads to a better understanding of the problem and a more consensual decision. For this reason, many of the projects interviewed – for example Bike Kitchen, Düsselgrün, and Kalkbreite – use alternative deliberative and decision-making structures.

Systematic consensus

One way to examine the obvious and hidden shared interests between the members of a group is to focus on the things that are preventing members from reaching a decision. Their resistance may involve a range of unrelated topics that could be resolved by other means. In order to be successful with a proposal, “one needs to identify what raises resistance in a group and what does not. For that purpose, one needs to try to understand the others and explore their needs in order to make as many concessions as possible” (Visotschnig and Visotschnig, 2016, p. 18).

Systematic consensus is a decision-making process which leaves the usual majoritarian models behind. It requires broader backing for decisions which come closer to consensus. As a first step, each group member ranks each proposal on a scale between 0 and 10. This number does not reflect a prioritization of the ideas, but rather how **resistant** they are to each idea.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
No resistance					Some concerns					Absolutely not!

Let's take the example of an urban gardening project which is trying to decide what to buy for the next planting season. The members have proposed three options: buy vegetables, fruit trees, or flowers. In addition, we must also consider the passive solution: do nothing now and invest in the garden at a later date.

Each member is requested to rank the four options based on how resistant they are to the idea. Since lower scores mean lower resistance, the choice with the lowest score "wins."

The five members tally up their scores with the following result:

	Vegetables	Fruit trees	Flowers	No investment (passive solution)
Andrej	3	2	3	4
Maria	0	4	7	7
Paul	3	0	5	8
Carla	5	5	0	2
Luca	9	4	3	5
Consensus score	20	15	18	26

According to our rules, the activity with the lowest number wins. The group will plant fruit trees.


If we had instead organized this process following classical (binary) voting, the process doesn't yield a clear decision. Instead, the vote is split between fruit trees and flowers without an obvious idea of how to break the tie.

	Vegetables	Fruit trees	Flowers	No investment (passive solution)
Andrej	0	1	0	0
Maria	1	0	0	0
Paul	0	1	0	0
Carla	0	0	1	0
Luca	0	0	1	0
Number of votes	1	2	2	0

If we look at Andrej's rankings, we can see that he does not have very clear preferences. For this reason, with a majoritarian vote, he would have the potential to become a king-maker or even decide alone who wins. In consensus-based voting, the power is more evenly distributed among the group members. Furthermore, by gathering more detailed information about the resistance level of each participant, it is possible to have a more nuanced discussion about choices and negotiate a solution closer to everyone's wishes.

	Vegetables	Fruit trees	Flowers	No investment (passive solution)
Consensus score	20	15	18	26
Number of votes	1	2	2	0

Source: Einführung in Systemisches Konsensieren

 [See also: A Consensus Handbook: Co-operative decision-making for activists, co-ops and communities](#)

Commons projects tend to give commonalities priority. They demonstrate a strong preference for consensus and often voice criticism of procedures which they deem too formal or strict. Research by Martin Beckenkamp (2012, p. 56) has shown that people with commoning experience behave differently than people who have no experience with commoning; specifically, the former are more lenient with sanctions and are more willing to establish rule-conforming behavior. This study seems to imply that the practice of commoning is successful in nudging social behavior and avoiding strict sanction rules. Thus, to improve and build on these innate tendencies, we suggest a strategy which seeks to find the aspects that unite people most as opposed to decision-making processes which seek to divide participants into various “camps.”



In **step 1**, the decision-making process aims to identify the commonalities shared by participants.



In **step 2**, the basis for the commonalities is examined, broadened, or profiled further in order to allow those who are not yet included to join.



Finally, in **step 3**, the participants conduct a check whether the solution is acceptable for all participants and leads to the intended outcome in an efficient way. If not, the topic is tabled and put on the agenda for re-consideration.

In contrast to traditional ways of deciding, which focus mainly on the viability and clarity of the product or the decision, this form of deliberation places the focus on the quality and personal and social aspects of decisions. This process requires each participant to assess their own personal needs and actively find shared opinions and views with others. The decisions reached reflect a range of diverse perspectives and interests which are united by one or more common interests, views, or goals.



➔ Trust and confidence mean that I believe in the willingness of the other involved persons to cooperate and to stick to shared principles.

The mutual respect for differing views engendered by this technique further adds to the social cohesion within the group. This approach to deliberation and decision-making is a key aspect of the project's institutional culture and has a significant effect on how strong the ties are between members. Before I can trust others and am willing to accept their decisions (even if I do not agree with them 100%), I need enough confidence in all parties' willingness to cooperate and to stick to principles like fairness and mutual respect.

Deliberation can lead to a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the issue one is discussing and deciding on. In order for participants to be able to co-decide in an informed way, they not only need relevant information, but also access to the space where the deliberation and discussion will take place and the ability to be able to meaningfully contribute to the discussion. It is therefore not only important to examine the various topical aspects of the decision at hand, but also give weight to the various perspectives of the participants and the social dilemmas inherent to and consequences of various options.

When it comes to the decision itself, [majoritarian decision-making might still be the right choice](#).

After all, both consensual and majoritarian decision-making styles have both pros and cons. Although society seems to be showing increasing acceptance for efforts which try to build a more consensual basis for agreements, sometimes social dilemmas cannot be solved by compromise or the costs of reaching a compromise are simply too high to be justifiable.

➡ [As we can see from a side-by-side comparison of the case studies \(p. 32–33\), however, those with majoritarian decision-making have more and stricter rules about what is considered a valid and fair decision-making structure.](#)

Sometimes consensus leads to blurry solutions that are closer to diplomatic statements than stable, implementable agreements. In other cases, consensus presents an opportunity to ignore fundamental disagreements more easily instead of addressing them constructively at an early stage. In these cases, it is preferable to choose between two clear options. In the end, the decision whether to make choices based on consensus or majority can change from case to case. A project can also use a blend, for example giving more weight to dissenters like Düsseldorf or forcing dissenters to convince at least one other person like Holzmarkt. The table on the next page examines the pros and cons of consensus-based and majoritarian decision-making styles.

Decision-making: **Consensus vs. majority**

Consensus-based decision-making	
Pros	Cons
Takes the relationships and needs behind a decision into consideration	Ineffective compromise: The decision does not solve anything but makes everybody happy
Decision-makers understand what they are deciding on	Irrelevance: The less crucial aspects are in the focus
Favors win-win constellations	Micro-management: In a state of ambiguity, a group might prefer to do what they do best: fix less-complex problems than the one they have to decide on.

Majoritarian decision-making

Pros	Cons
Focuses on the result. Clear picture of the votes	House of cards: King-makers and negotiators have more say than empathetic team players
Potentially fast process. A vote can be considered successful as soon as the majority is clear	Overemphasizes solutions to the detriment of the underlying needs or a basic understanding of the problem
Handy when deliberation is not essential, for example standard operational decisions or when approving other teams' work	Minorities that are frequently ignored in decisions will begin to feel disillusioned and are likely to disengage from the process

Checklist: Ostrom's Eight Principles

➡ You can read about [Ostrom's eight principles for sustainably managing a common-pool resource and Hess & Ostrom's work on common property rights on p. 16](#)

In the beginning of this book, we referred to the success conditions for the [sustainable management of a common-pool resource](#). Several projects interviewed suggested that writing up a manifesto or list of common values can be a helpful step in getting on the same page. We suggest incorporating Ostrom's eight principles into considerations of commons projects by answering the following questions:

- Have you clearly explained who is a user or beneficent (and who is not)?
- Do your rules and procedures reflect the needs of your members and those of the environment/ the resource (i. e. ensuring maintenance which prevents exploitation)?
- Do your rules and procedures guarantee that those affected by rules can change them?
- Have you conducted research about relevant stakeholders in your community who may be able to influence your project and reached out to them? This includes (but is not limited to) economic actors, other NGOs, and city officials.
- Are you monitoring behavior and sanctioning rule violations in appropriate ways?
- Have you established effective and fair conflict resolution mechanisms?
- Do your rules and procedures lead to factual co-governance and qualitative participation?

Check: Inclusion, Participation, Representation

Inclusion

Low-barrier opportunities for people to join a group

- When I think about our project and the practical hurdles that may prevent people from taking part, which people or groups have less access to our project?
- How can we make our project more accessible to these and other groups?

Participation

Opportunities to discuss and decide

- At which points (and in what roles) do people have an opportunity to co-determine how the project or activity is designed?
- How do we include a variety of actors into decision-making?

Representation

Opportunities to narrate one's own story and to speak for oneself

- How do we make sure that people can speak for themselves?
- Whose important skills and backgrounds are we missing?

Source:

Initiative Cookbook - Homemade Civic Engagement: An Introduction to Project Management, p. 62.

Positive Action Self-Assessment

Analysis

Identify the relevant legislations and positive actions on a state level, in NGOs and in other groups

Evaluation

How do the members evaluate the legal/formal achievements? How relevant is positive action for their everyday life as a citizen? How would it improve the process of co-creation in their project?

Concrete Action

What should be done in the state, the economy, and civil society to establish equivalent opportunities and equal treatment? Which ones do the members want to use in their group?

Source:

Diversity Dynamics: Activating the Potential of Diversity in Trainings, p. 27

Moderation: A crash course

In order to conduct effective deliberation processes, a competent moderator or moderators is crucial. Although this cookbook cannot replace a [moderation](#) handbook or facilitation training, we'd like to take a moment to share the basic aspects of moderating group processes.

The moderator

The moderator is responsible for shaping the deliberation process toward a commonly-decided goal in a pre-determined time window following principles which have been agreed on by the group.

The specifics frequently depend on the expectations of the group and the moderation context; however, the moderator generally has the **right**

- to decide on the procedure and the choice of the method/path toward the goal,
- to allow people to speak and to interrupt them, and
- not to be disturbed while conducting a task.

On the other hand, moderators are **limited**

- by the requirement to make their decisions and plans transparent,
- by their commitment to democratic principles and the rights and rules which the group has agreed on, and
- by the need to negotiate and align their interests and desires with the interests and desires of a group (and in some cases also with a contractor who is not part of the group).

➔ “Moderation” in this context means supporting a group in communicating, in particular in making decisions, deliberating, or discussing (controversial) issues.

Together, the moderator and the group set a goal for the session which should follow **SMART principles**:

Specific: what exactly do you want to achieve?

Measurable: what shows you that you have reached your goal?

Achievable: can you accomplish your mission under the given conditions?

Relevant: does the goal fulfillment lead to answers you need for further progress?

Time-based: Can you reach the goal in the time given?

Moderation steps

You can think of a successful moderation process as a bridge from one side of a decision to the other. A good moderation is made up of seven steps.



1. Preparation

Depending on the group, different moderation methods might be needed. Also the speed of a discussion will differ from group to group. Give some thought to the participants beforehand. Do they know each other? Do they all speak the same language? What is their background and level of information about the topic? Will you need to offer some information to get everyone “on the same page?” The moderation should be planned with the needs of the group in mind.

2. Goal-setting

At the beginning, the moderator establishes their relationship with the audience/group.

- Introduce yourself and allow the participants to introduce themselves.
 - Present a clear introduction of the topic and the main goals of the meeting
 - Explain the working method and any materials you will be using
 - Agree on a SMART goal for the session together with the participants
-

3. Collecting and choosing topics

- Use this time to collect and organize the topics that will be discussed.
 - The participants should rank the topics by priority and, following this ranking, choose a reasonable number of topics to discuss in the set time.
 - The moderator should then set the agenda following this selection.
-

➡ Please see the resources listed at the end of this book for some more inspiration.

4. Working with the topic

In step 4, the concrete work on the topic(s) following the moderator's methodological concept takes place. Some examples of common methods include world café, moderated discussion, group work or role-playing. In general, the moderation process should involve the following topics:

- Summary and analysis of the situation
- Introduction of the various proposals how the group aims to solve the issue
- Chosen methodology, for example moderated discussion or discussion in small groups
- If group work has been conducted, the groups should present their results for further discussion in the wider group
- Dissents and counter proposals should be addressed and discussed
- Repeat the process or combine other methods as needed

5. Outcome

At the conclusion of the discussion, the moderator paraphrases the outcome together with the participants. This step often results in a to-do list or action plan, which typically includes the following points:

- Who will do what? When and how will these steps be completed?
- When we will check if this solution works? Who will check this?
- When and how will everyone be informed about the achievements and/or the further steps?


6. Reflection

Finally, there is space for reflection and evaluation. We recommend keeping this part short and simple and include the following aspects:

- Could the SMART goal be reached? What could be improved next time?
 - Did the participants find the moderation effective for reaching the stated goal? What could be improved next time?
-

7. Documentation

The moderator's final task is to record the findings and how they were reached. This might include a written protocol or photographs of the sticky notes or moderation cards produced during the discussion and methods.

 For more moderation tips, tricks, and methods, please see the resources listed at the end of this book and in the next few pages.

Quality check: Discussions and decisions

	Discussions	Decisions
Representation	Does everyone have access to the discussion and decision-making processes or are there barriers limiting their access?	Affected or involved persons who could not be present are given the opportunity to participate in other ways. The people involved accept the decision.
Participation	Is everyone who might be affected by the decision considered? Have they been involved?	Everyone who is affected and/or was involved knows how they can get involved with the implementation of the decision. The participants in the discussion reflected the diversity of the group affected by the decision.
Efficiency	Have we reached a solution that takes existing limitations on resources, in particular time, attention, and money, into account?	The available resources, especially time, attention, and money, are invested in the implementation of the decision. The chosen solution represents the most efficient use of the resources available.
Fairness	Was everybody treated equally and with respect?	The implementation efforts are divided fairly. Those who benefit from the decision contribute actively to implementation.

Viability**Discussions**

Did the discussion lead to the identification of a solution?

Decisions

It is clear how the designated activities contribute to achieving the goal. It is clear who is contributing to the implementation, which roles they will play and which skills and competencies they will contribute. The implementation plan realistically reflects the available capacities, resources, and skills. It is clear how the implementation will be monitored and followed up.

**Accountability/
Transparency**

Were the relevant topics from the perspective of the relevant groups or roles mentioned (and not negotiated behind closed doors)? Were the roles and responsibilities of the various persons involved clear to all participants?

It is possible to read/learn about the decision and the decision-making process from an easily-accessible source. Those who have received tasks know how to report back about their progress and do so in a timely manner.

**Information/
Understanding**

Did the discussion include the “whole picture,” so all of the relevant topical aspects? In particular, did it strive to include the problems and dilemmas which need to be considered for an informed decision?

The decision-making process included an examination of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Everybody knows what has been decided. It is clear for all involved how the transfer of the decision into practice will take place.

Three simple ways to promote a balanced discussion



The talking stick

People may speak only when they hold the talking stick (or any other agreed-upon object). This allows the person holding the stick to consider and take their time.

Silent gestures for discussion participants

Talking and listening to each other can be time-consuming. Silent gestures are one technique for guiding the discussion and registering reactions to what is being said without interrupting.

The parking lot

In the course of the discussion, topics may come up that are important, but not relevant to the discussion at hand. It's a good idea to have a whiteboard or large sheet of paper on the wall where you can 'park' these ideas. Come back to the issues in the parking lot later. This allows you to stay focused but reassures participants they will be heard.



Hands up

The first gesture is quite common. When you wish to contribute, raise your hand and wait until it is your turn to speak.

Raise both hands

If you want to add directly-relevant information which people need to hear before other points, raise both hands. This allows you to jump to the head of the queue. (However, it doesn't give you the right to jump the queue to have your say on the discussion topic.)

Silent applause

When you hear an opinion that you agree with, wave a hand with your fingers pointing upwards. This saves a lot of time since it allows the facilitator to gauge opinion.

I block this proposal

A raised fist can be used to show fundamental disagreement.

Thumbs up/down

To get a sense for how the group feels about a certain topic, a show of thumbs up (positive), horizontal (neutral), or down (negative) can be used.

Source:

A Consensus Handbook: Co-operative decision-making for activists, co-ops and communities

Group Diagram

This method lets the participants conduct a small-scale survey among themselves. The result is a vivid visual representation of the survey outcome which can be used as the basis for a discussion. Moderation cards or any colored cards of similar size and shape can be used.

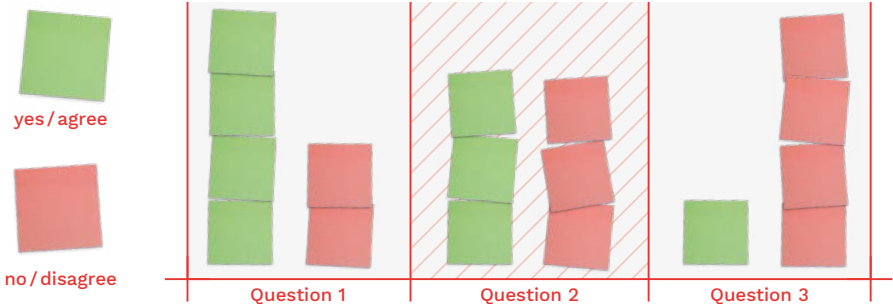
Steps:

1. Come up with sets of yes-or-no questions which either target the same issue from various angles or elicit answers about the different aspects of the same issue.
2. Prepare a large piece of paper or a whiteboard with the questions.
3. Group members stick red or green cards on the paper/whiteboard depending on their answer. The pieces of paper should be “stacked” to form bar graphs. The relative number of yes and no votes should be clearly visible.
4. Divide the group into small groups, for example over a coffee break, to talk about their choices
5. Finally, talk it out in the large group: what does the result mean?

Variation:

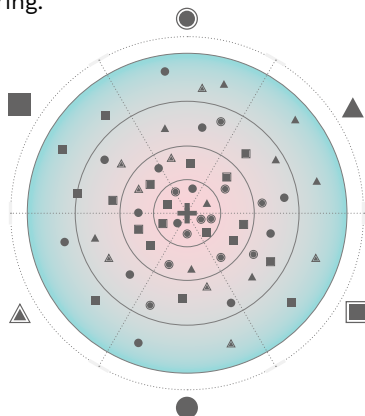
The group members write their commentaries on the cards. This variation makes the voting non-anonymous, but contributes more material into the discussion steps.

Source: [Competendo - Tools for Facilitators](#)



Targeted feedback

This method allows the quick evaluation of several questions in a transparent way. Sentences or questions are written on a sheet of paper or whiteboard around a target, with each sentence/question in its own “pie slice.” The target represents a scale from inside to outside, for example satisfaction; high would be in the middle and low would be on the outside ring. The group members are asked to rate each sentence/answer each question based on the scale by placing a mark on the paper/whiteboard; for example, in answering the question “How satisfied are you with the current system?” a high answer would be near the center and low answer would be near the outer ring.



Variation: Detailed evaluation

By offering the participants sentence beginnings instead of complete statements, it is easier to find out what they found relevant. First, ask the participants to complete up to three of the following sentences on pieces of paper or cards individually:

- I liked ...
- I did not like ...
- For the next step I would like ...
- I would benefit more, if ...

Then put each set of answers on its own target (one for each category – all of the “I like.” cards together, all the “I did not like” cards together, etc.). Each card gets its own pie slice. Then invite participants to evaluate the sentences as described above.

Source: Competendo - Tools for Facilitators

Prioritization

In order to not overstretch a group's attention and time, moderators of group processes should prioritize. This means choosing which topics require the deeper and more deliberative involvement of the whole group and which ones could be better handled through

- delegation (for example, to a delegated project team),
- information (for example, research by the board or a working group), or
- small feedback rounds (for example, proposals prepared by a team, 10 min. question-and-answer sessions, or dot voting).

But what should one dedicate more time to? We suggest that the topics in a project can be divided into three categories: operational questions, strategic questions, and constitutional/structural questions. Each of these categories will play a more or less important role over the course of the project and has a longer or shorter "life span." Understanding what categories decisions fall into can help with time planning and prioritization in meetings.

Divide topics into:

Operational questions	Strategic questions	Constitutional/ structural questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Everyday issues, standardizable tasks and routines.• Easy or quick to solve	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Aspects that define the longer-term development and the mission, goals, and values of the group.• Suitable answers often need examination, discussion, and follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Aspects which determine the way rules and roles are set and how people relate to each other.• Longer-lasting process involving interests, conflicts, and involving the core identity of the group

Community outreach

Communication is a fundamental aspect of any commons project. [Communication](#) takes place on a variety of levels simultaneously: between commoners, between the commons project and its environment, and between the commoners and political decision-makers. A credible and authentic communication strategy must take care to embed the commons project in its local social and political context and be centered on the social impact it aims to achieve. This communication strategy represents the concrete realization of commons projects' goals of contributing to the public good, creating a space of civil empowerment, and offering an alternative approach to collaboration and exchange. Commoners need both to explain their work to the public and engage in cross-sectoral collaboration. This means speaking and listening to people from other social spheres and social backgrounds, including policy-makers. The first step in this process is creating a common understanding of the project.

➔ [Communication is the ability to create relations and to shape an image in an authentic and credible way.](#)

Toward an authentic image

Image and [identity](#) are two sides of the same coin. The identity of a project is its internal self-understanding exemplified by its behavior, communication, and design. The image is the interpretation of this identity by the environment, from the outside. Image is therefore a result of an identity-based communication.

➔ [Incredible Edible takes a highly authentic approach to communicating their identity. Read more on p. 58.](#)



► Identity is the interplay of communication, behavior, and design. Image is the perception of this identity from the outside.

Many commons projects are started by academics and/or influenced by academic discourses. This frequently leads to communication problems and comprehensibility issues. [Language choice](#) in identity-based communication can play a big role in this. How do you describe your housing project? “De-commodifying housing by separating use value from exchange value,” “Cheaper housing without land speculation,” or “No profit with the rent!”? From an objective point of view, these three statements mean the same thing. But which groups do you think are being addressed with these three messages?

Furthermore, while the commoners themselves may be very interested in commoning discourses, the local community and wider public may be more interested in the reasons behind the start of the commons project, its day-to-day work, its values and mission, and how to get involved. While it is difficult to control image, it is possible to shape the three core aspects of identity: communication, behavior, and design. [The more these three layers overlap and agree with each other, the more authentic and credible the image will appear.](#)

➡ [Freifunk adjusts their message and language to fit their audience.](#)
[Read more on p. 54.](#)

➡ [For help refining your image and identity, check out the corporate identity self-assessment \(p. 159\) and inverted content pyramid \(p. 160\).](#)

Commons Identity

Communication	Behavior	Design
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conscious selection of language style and choice • Selection of communication style (formal/informal) based on need • Variation of communication format and media (online, offline) • Targeted communication for different stakeholders • Defining key/core messages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity as a social process. Sustainable changes need patience and long-term orientation. • Action related to social, environmental and other values • Forms of and formats for participation, cooperation, and interaction • Choosing financing models in line with values • Behavior of members, employees, board, and other internal stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a design which reflects the core mission and values and visually reinforces the communication and behavior styles (for example by using a “mood board”) • A design framework that defines core elements of a sensory language, such as colors, typography, images, signs, and symbols

Social legitimation and transparency

Activists, projects, and non-governmental organizations often derive their motivation from the non-profit character and positive social impact of their projects. Others may therefore suspect them of believing that they are morally superior. In fact one could ask whether even the founders of Google once thought about their entrepreneurship as a kind of social startup when they chose the motto “don’t be evil.” The loss of social legitimation comes from a lack of transparency; if the public can’t compare what you say you are going to do and what you actually do, then suspicion and lack of faith seem warranted. [So how can projects concretize the values and mission of the project and communicate these uniformly through communication, behavior, and design in an easily comprehensible way?](#)

In cities, commons projects are always at risk of having their models, language, and style copied or commodified. At the first glance, one could ask what makes Bike Kitchen Bratislava better than an investor-driven bike sharing platform? Or is there really a difference between an open gardening project run by a local power company and a grassroots community garden like Düsseldorf? The question is one of social benefit, legitimate social engagement, and non-profit orientation. Commons projects cannot expect to have the full trust of the public on day one. On the contrary, legitimation grows slowly through a voluntary, peaceful, transparent style of collaboration both inside the group and with the public. [This process can be promoted by increased transparency and social reporting – both of which demonstrate to the public that your actions match your words.](#)

➔ [We have included three methods to work on transparency and social reporting at the end of this chapter: a transparency checklist \(p. 161\), a social reporting framework \(p. 161\), and a purpose and goals self-assessment \(p. 162 - 163\).](#)

➔ [Middelgrunden practices radical openness in their project, which has helped them effectively build trust with their surrounding community. Read more about how they did it on p. 87.](#)

➡ [For more about theories of change, please see Reflective peacebuilding: A planning, monitoring, and learning toolkit](#)



Explaining social impact

One way of describing social impact is through a theory of change. [A theory of change](#) is an “explanation of how and why a set of activities will bring about the changes a project’s initiators seek to achieve” (Lederach, Neufeldt and Culbertson, 2007, p. 25); they can be a good analytical tool for critically examining a project’s goals and which steps the commoners think will get them there.

Because a commons project has social impact in a range of social spheres, it can be useful to develop personal, ecological, relational, structural, or social theories of change. Taking the example of an urban garden again, the personal goal might be to acquire the ability to grow plants or to learn about beekeeping. The steps to reach that goal could include taking classes at the local community college or partnering with more experienced gardeners or the local beekeepers’ association. The project’s social goal might be to increase the appreciation of regional species among the wider public. The steps to achieve that might be the promotion of regional and heirloom varieties by planting them in the garden and writing about them on the project’s website and in their newsletter. Commons projects and individual commoners may find it useful to examine these spheres individually.

➡ [Check out backward planning on p. 164 to help you develop your theory of change.](#)

[Developing a theory of change involves the analysis of social impact – which steps do I need to take to make positive change?](#) In the case of the commons, this process always begins with a personal connection between the individual and the activity or subject. Freifunk seeks to increase open access to the internet, Bike Kitchen wants to increase bike mobility and safety in Bratislava, and both Incredible Edible and Düsseldorf want to raise awareness for seasonality and healthy cooking.

In order to develop a theory of change for an entire project, it can be helpful to develop an impact chain. The [impact chain](#) for the project starts with the sources and resources which the members bring to the project (in this example, the gardening activity and the garden). Outputs are the concrete activities and products one needs to complete in order to achieve the impact (the vegetables, classes, and publicity). An outcome describes how the outputs led to a behavioral or cognitive change of the people involved (the public is aware of the benefits of regional produce and the supermarket carries the products). Finally, impact more broadly describes how the concrete activity contributed to social benefit or made the world a little better (other people will also buy more products from local farmers).

➔ [You can find the impact chain method at the end of this chapter on p. 165](#)

However, in their implementation, impact chain-based models often seem to ignore the benefits of projects in which social interaction is the central focus. These examples reveal the limits of measurability. One particular challenge is defining the social value of the simple existence of a group, as it is difficult to define a set of indicators which demonstrate the impact on the social environment or community. But an emphasis on social relationships is a key feature of commons projects which typical (quantitative) indicators miss, and it's precisely this "unmeasurable" quality which seems to bring the most social impact for the project's immediate environment.

In other words, the question is: what kinds of data might be appropriate in order to measure the impact of projects which can't be measured quantitatively? One viable approach is to demonstrate the project's relevance by recording [stories and testimonials](#) from the people involved in a group or a community around a project which show how and to what extent the engagement in a project has changed their perspectives and behavior.

➔ [Try using the vox pop method on p. 166 for this.](#)

Getting involved in the community

A lot of projects rely on good relations with the public from the very beginning. The support and good will of the neighbors surrounding Düsselgrün helps prevent damage to the garden; a lack of support or even animosity, on the other hand, could lead to the neighbors lobbying to have the garden removed from the park. Middelgrunden also discovered the importance of public support when their first design for the placement of the wind turbines met with thousands of protests. And Holzmarkt owes its existence to public support for its goals: accessible river banks and no high-rise construction on the site. The number of people who came to their opening festival is a testament to their broad support among the local community.

Dialogue with the local neighborhood and the community and the promotion of the idea of commoning can function as a blueprint for other more citizen-centered urban solutions. Cooperation with other commons projects, including learning from and supporting each other, can help improve individual agency and foster collective impact. Furthermore, cooperation and partnerships can inspire new projects, which adopt the existing projects' methods for new resource types, in new contexts, and in new communities. [Van den Bosch and Rotmans \(2008, p. 32\) describe this process as “broadening.”](#)

➡ See more about their approach in their report: [Deepening, Broadening and Scaling up. A framework for steering transition experiments](#)



In cities, commons projects are often in direct competition with market and state actors; they are therefore frequently required to justify their existence. Take the example of a central, city-owned plot in a city which has attracted the attention of both a commons project and private entrepreneurs. A project claiming to offer the social use of public space needs to prove how they will contribute to citizen empowerment, how they will guarantee further access to the resource, and why this will lead to the intended mid- and long-term social effects (social impact) better than the private investor's plans.

The basis for successful networking is mutual understanding. To help a creative project succeed, its initiators must be able to share it with others and convince them of its merit. But authors and social groups often use a specific language not actively spoken by others, even though the terms and phrases that they use are common in their group. The same is true for political parties and politicians, the public administration, different age groups in the population, and different parts of civil society. The adherence to your own group's language can isolate the group by preventing outsiders from understanding the group's message or goal. One tactic for avoiding communication difficulties is to [adapt the group's language to that of the group you are trying to communicate with.](#) If you deal with lots of different stakeholder groups, you might need a whole range of different "languages" to be able to speak to people from different groups and sectors.

➡ You can also try visual and graphic approaches to make your message even more approachable. Check out some ideas for visualizing your project on p. 167.

Advocacy is a specialized form of networking in which the group uses their activities to attempt to influence political, economic or social decisions. [Social diversity among a project's members can be a particular asset](#) here, as each of these members brings their own skills, competencies, and "language" – and those of their network – to the table. In this way, Middelgrunden benefits from having a journalist among their ranks who takes care of the protocols and public relations while Düsseldorf benefits from having Green party members in their commons project.

➡ Read more about this in the section "Diversity as a potential," p. 115.

Advocacy has advantages both for the project and for the society as a whole. In addition to helping the project reach its goals, advocacy also helps generate what Robert Putnam described as “bridging social capital” (Putnam, 2000, p. 22). While bonding social capital increases the solidarity and cooperation **within** groups, bridging social capital increases the connections **across and between** groups. By learning other groups’ “languages” and engaging in cross-sectoral communication and advocacy, commons projects actively contribute to the promotion of bridging social capital.

Advocacy and networking

The term advocacy describes a wide range of measures that citizens and their organizations can take which aim to influence public decision-making or public discourses. Groups and non-profit organizations prefer to use the term advocacy instead of “lobby” as a way of distinguishing between engagement for a not-for-profit goal and lobbying for financial or business interests. Advocacy can take place on the local, national, or transnational levels.

➡ Düsselgrün effectively used alliances to learn and engage in advocacy. Read more about how they approached it on p. 42 & 43.

➡ Freifunk successfully lobbied to change the German laws about secondary liability. Read more on p. 54.

➡ Club Cultural Matienzo formed a variety of networks to multiply their advocacy work. Read more on p. 93.

How to lobby for the grassroots

- A local promotion campaign for a concrete project
- Motivating citizens for grassroots lobbying by addressing local decision-makers with a concrete concern
- Collecting signatures
- Joining national campaigns and action alliances
- Getting involved in legislation processes with proposals or positions
- Joining national or transnational networks which bundle interests and organize advocacy on a higher spatial level

Building authentic partnerships

Cooperation and partnerships can be an important tool for the beginning of a project and when the project needs to scale, transform, or grow. Middelgrunden's partnership with DONG energy allowed them to take risks that they might otherwise not have been able to afford. Holzmarkt's partnership with the Abendrot foundation made it possible for them to use the land that they are located on. And Düsseldorf's partnership with other like-minded organizations has furthered their learning processes and also made their move possible. But partnerships can also bring issues. Freifunk's wariness of partnerships reflects the fact that commons projects need to be sure that those with whom they are partnered share their values. Open communication following the concepts above can be a first step to understanding and getting to know one another. It is also important that the commons project has a good understanding of their own identity and values. Finally, it is important to write down the expectations and rules which govern the partnership so that both parties are as clear as possible about what has been decided.

Looking at the specific nature of each of the partnerships above, it is obvious that there are different forms of cooperation. Some develop in a non-formal way among peers (like the regular exchange between two similar projects from different cities). Some are fixed in a formalized way and described in partnership agreements and involve partners with very different resources or power. The degree of ownership might also be different. The example of Middelgrunden shows that a smaller initiative can partner on equal footing with a bigger company. It's certainly a challenge, but if the conditions, contributions by each partner, and outcome are clear and the competences and influence within the partnership are balanced it is possible.

➔ We've included tools to work on refining your project's identity and image on p. 146.

➔ Check out our checklist for assessing partnerships on p. 168 – 169

Scaling up: Incorporating commons into urban development

Advocacy doesn't have to involve only individual projects; it can be used to promote the overarching concepts behind the commons on a city or state level. Some communities and policy-makers have already begun exploring the potential of commoning for urban development. We'd like to present two of these and show how they have incorporated commons principles into urban development. Perhaps you will get inspired to become a commons advocate in your own community!

➔ [Bologna's regulation concentrates on facilitating urban commons by repealing bureaucratic obstacles and treating citizens as equal partners in designing the city.](#)

Bologna, a city of 388,000 residents in northern Italy, has a long tradition of citizen engagement and decentralization. Since 2014, the municipality has been testing new forms of co-governance of public space and abandoned buildings together with citizens under the title "[Collaborare è Bologna](#)," "Collaboration is Bologna." So-called "collaboration pacts" and a low-threshold application process mean that citizens can easily apply to co-produce solutions to urban issues. This approach "starts by regarding the city as a collaborative social ecosystem. Instead of seeing the city simply as an inventory of resources to be administered by politicians and bureaucratic experts, the Bologna Regulation sees the city's residents as resourceful, imaginative agents in their own right. Citizen initiative and collaboration are regarded as under-leveraged energies that – with suitable government assistance – can be recognized and given space to work. Government is re-imagined as a hosting infrastructure for countless self-organized commons" (Bollier 2015). Programs in Bologna which support commons and the activation of vacant spaces and houses have helped a range of initiatives gain legitimation, support, and a stable framework for their actions. Giovanni Ginocchini, director of the Urban Center of Bologna, explained the change in the city and between commons and city this way:

“In 2014, a new regulation for urban commons was passed to make it easier for individuals to participate in urban development, for example caring for a piece of green space in the city or painting a public wall. Before, you had to ask for several permits from various city departments. Now you have only one person to ask. And there is only one paper you need to sign, the so-called ‘pact of collaboration,’ which is something like a contract between you and the city. The city takes care of your insurance during your working time. This has always been a big problem and now it’s solved. Another important change is that you can work temporarily. You don’t need to found a new association and elect a president. You can simply start” (Schwegmann et al. 2017, p. 10).

Building on earlier collaborative governance approaches, Collaborare è Bologna places the citizens and administrative actors at eye level. The projects are grouped into three categories “living together (collaborative services), growing together (co-ventures) and working together (co-production)” and include examples such as parent-run kindergartens, a “social streets” project and an urban agricultural cooperative (Bollier 2015).

More information about Bologna’s commons initiative can be found at the [P2P Foundation](#) and at [Labgov](#).



➡ Ghent's Commons Transition Plan foresees changing from a top-down approach towards a partner city, enhancing the development of initiatives, and fostering public-civil partnerships.

Ghent, a city of about 260,000 residents in the Flemish region of Belgium, has also recently started actively engaging with the topic of urban commons. The impetus was the realization that the city is home to many initiatives, but that these are largely fragmented; as a result, potential synergies are not being tapped. In 2017, the city commissioned a Commons Transition Plan for the city in order “to document the emergence and growth of the commons in the city, to offer some explanations of why this was occurring, and to determine what kind of public policies should support commons-based initiatives” (Bauwens and Onzia 2017). The report involved mapping, interviews, a questionnaire, and workshops. The report examined the hurdles that these projects face on a variety of levels and made 23 recommendations for institutional adaptation as steps toward becoming a “commons city.”

Similar to in Bologna's regulation, the report envisions the city as a “partner state” – on eye level with citizens in a cooperative partnership to create the city; “the city is then no longer a territory which needs politicians behaving as managers; it is, first and foremost, a living community of creative citizens. This means that instead of privatizing businesses or outsourcing to public-private partnerships, the aim is the development of public-civil partnerships” (Holemans 2017, p. 78).

The report suggests the creation of a number of institutions to bring together and supplement existing structures. For example, it suggests the creation of a “States-General of the Commons,” an umbrella platform which would be organized by sector and be the primary institution representing classical civil society organizations and engaged citizens. It furthermore suggests the creation of the “Chamber of the Commons,” a play on the Chamber of Commerce, which would be primarily responsible for representing actors “committed to the resilience and future of the commons economy” (Holemans 2017, p. 79), such as social entrepreneurs, cooperative/solidarity-based entrepreneurs, and commons entrepreneurs.

Ghent is the first city engage in in-depth situational and policy analysis to examine the state of urban commons in their community. Their goal is to foster exchange between initiatives so that they can learn from each other and promote partnerships between different stakeholders through structural support, space, and advice. Examples of commons projects in Ghent include a community land trust, a renewable energy cooperative, and food cooperatives.

More information about Ghent’s work on the commons can be found [their website](#) and in their [commons transition plan](#).



These two examples demonstrate that commons can be scaled up to higher levels of government and administration, where they have the potential for re-shaping the relationship between the administration, politics, and citizens. Existing tools, like the Bologna regulation and collaboration pacts or Ghent's commons governing body, can be adapted to other local situations and circumstances. What could your community do to strengthen commons initiatives? What kind of arguments could convince administration and politics in your community to experiment more with you and other urban commons?

➡ [Check out backward planning to get the creative juices flowing,](#)
[p. 164.](#)

[What steps could you take to move your city closer to commons transition?](#)

Self-Assessment: Corporate Identity

Projects engage in a range of public relations and publicity activities such as informing & reporting to the public, creating and distributing promotion materials and products such as flyers and websites, personal cooperation, interaction with the public through representatives of the project, as well as the development of official letterheads, business cards, templates, and logos.

Assess the aspects of communication, design, and behavior for the most important public relations/publicity activities for your project by considering the following questions:

Communication	Behavior	Design
<p>How does your project use language choice to address the wider community? Do you change your language to address different groups?</p>	<p>How do your actions reflect and support your core messages and your stated values?</p>	<p>How do your visual design choices reflect your core message and behavior styles?</p>
<p>Which formats do you use to address the community? How do you use different formats to address different groups?</p>	<p>What participation, co-operation and interaction formats do you use? How do these address different target groups? What barriers to entry exist for which groups?</p>	<p>Do design choices support your communication and behavior choices? How?</p>
<p>What are your core messages and values?</p>	<p>What financing models have you chosen? Do these appropriately reflect and support your core messages and values?</p>	

Inverted content pyramid

People often begin describing their ideas and activities with the context. This is a natural reflection of the internal perspective of the speaker, but not the most relevant information for the listener or reader. The inverted content pyramid helps commoners focus on the core message and not overstretch the attention of their counterpart.

The first piece of information is the most important: who, what, when and where. If you only had 30 seconds, this would be the entire message that you could convey. If time allows, you can fill in the background: how, why, from where, the specific details of the project, the background and, finally, the context. This listener-oriented technique can help you get your message across in a short period of time and hold your listener's attention.

who / what / when / where

how / why / from where

specifics

background

context

Variation: Forging a common identity

The inverted content pyramid can also be used to create a basis for internal discussion. In this exercise, the commoners write 2-3 sentences for each point in the pyramid. In small groups, they can then read these aloud and discuss them. In larger groups, it can be helpful to write the answers to each level of the pyramid on moderation cards and then group them on a bulletin board or whiteboard. The commoners then discuss commonalities in their answers as a way towards developing a commonly-understood identity.

Checklist: Transparency

Transparency International encourages civil society organizations to inform the public about ten aspects of their organization:

- Name, seat, address and year of foundation
- The constitution and description of institutional goals
- Information about fiscal (tax) privileges
- Name and function of relevant decision-makers
- Activity report
- Personnel structure
- Information about the origin of resources
- Information about use of resources
- Legal and formal connection to third parties
- Name of legal persons donating more than 10% of the annual budget

Source: [Initiative Transparente Zivilgesellschaft](#)



Social reporting framework

This format for social reporting, adapted from other transparency and social reporting concepts, can help projects report the social impact of their projects.

Mission and goals	Values and beliefs	Theory of change	Activity reporting	Organization
The goal a project wants to reach in order to improve society and how they intend to reach it.	How the project relates to major values such as sustainability, human rights, participation, fairness, democracy, and community.	How the project wants to reach its goal directly (output and results) and indirectly (social impact).	Reporting about individual activities, the resources used and invested, achievements, and future plans.	Information about the people behind the project and their different roles. Making rules, behavior, and style transparent.

See also: [Social Reporting Standard - Guide to results-based reporting](#)



Self-assessment: Purpose and goals

The way we talk about our initiatives or projects is another means to be inspirational and motivational without being explicit. When people talk about their work, they usually start by answering the questions “what do I do?” and “how am I different from others?” It is however more important to get to the core question: “why am I doing this?” The aim of this task is to get to find out more about the intentions of a group regarding the outcome and impact of a project.

Introduce the following steps one after another. The participants are asked to answer the questions in order. We propose a first individual working step followed by an exchange in smaller groups. Alternatively, the task can be done in small groups and the outcome be shared in a plenary setting.



1. Start by answering the question why?

- What's your purpose?
- What's your cause?
- What are your beliefs?
- Why does your project exist?
- Why do you get out of bed in the morning?
- Why should others care?

2. Then answer the question how?

- How does your initiative/project correspond with your beliefs?
- How do your actions mirror your values?
- How does your idea/group differ from others?

Reflect critically: Where are “why” and “how” not congruent?

3. Finish by answering the question what?

- What are you doing or delivering?
- What aspects is your project tackling?
- What is your offering – to whom?

Reflect constructively: What can be done differently?

Source: Adapted from Competendo - Tools for Facilitators

Backward planning theories of change

Often it can be difficult to know which step to take first in order to reach a goal. Backward planning can help relieve the pressure about knowing what to do next by examining the situation from its (successful) endpoint.

➡ [For more about SMART goals, see p. 132.](#)

Participants begin by identifying their goal. The goal should be as concrete and SMART as possible, for example “we have increased the awareness of regional species to the extent that supermarkets in the area sell them regularly.” The participants then work backwards alone or in groups to identify the steps that led them to that goal.

It can be helpful to write the steps on moderation cards or slips of paper in order to be able to add intermediate steps in between or shift the order.

Example of backward planning:

Goal

We have increased the awareness of regional species to the extent that supermarkets in the area sell them regularly.

Step 4

We lobbied the supermarkets to raise awareness.

Step 3

We demonstrated how the species could be used by organizing regular cooking events and publishing our recipes.

Step 2

We raised awareness among the public by planting the species in our garden.

Step 1

We learned about local species from the community college and other gardeners.

Impact chain for a project

Resources: Starting point

What the community and commoners bring to the table: Can be material and immaterial resources like time, voluntary work, or in-kind contributions.

Outputs: Services and products

What we or the people actively involved do or what they offer

- Meetings/events
 - Services/products
 - Activities for maintenance
-

Outcomes: Individual or local change

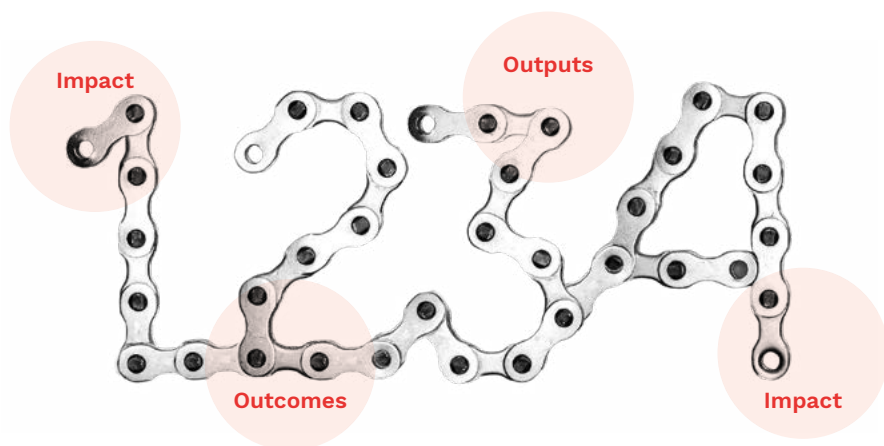
Results at the level of the target groups and people involved

- Changed perspective on the topic or the project in general
 - Change in people's motivation or behavior
-

Impact: General social effect

Results at the social level, the long-term change instigated by the activities

- The higher common social good
 - The impact of the voluntary civil engagement on other social processes
 - The impact on a secondary and tertiary public that did not participate in the activities directly
-



Vox pop: Short community interviews

In order to gain some insight into how your project has impacted the community, you can conduct a range of short informal interviews. The name “vox pop” comes from the Latin “vox populi,” “voice of the people,” and usually refers to a journalism style in which passersby in pedestrian zones or on the street are asked about a particular topic.

Using a camera or recording device (like a voice recorder or mobile phone), ask relevant community members about how the project has impacted their lives. Suggestions for questions might be:

- How has contact with our project changed your perspective about the issue?
- Have you changed your behavior because of things you learned or realized by being involved with our project?
- What is one new thing that you learned by being involved with our project?

Short community interviews can be a good tool for understanding the project’s current impact on the community in order to adjust aspects of the impact chain.

Visualizing your project

	USE TO ...	WORKS BY ...	COMMON FORMATS
GET THE IDEA	Expose	Evoking reactions	Simple graphics and images, posters, simple infographics
GET THE PICTURE	Explain	Telling stories	Infographics, animations, maps
GET THE DETAIL	Explore	Building journeys	Dynamic databases and complex visualisations, interactive infographics

Further inspiration: [Visualising Information for Advocacy](#)



Checklist for assessing partnerships

The following checklist can help you reach a mutual understanding of the nature and potentials of a new partnership. Furthermore, it can act as a guide for negotiations between partners of different sizes and types. We recommend going through the aspects step-by-step.

1. The purpose

- What is the purpose of the cooperation for each partner?
 - What is the intended outcome/impact for the community or society?
 - What is the vision for the joint work?
-

2. Parties involved

- Who are the parties involved in the partnership?
 - What are each organization's values and principles?
 - What are the non-negotiable expectations concerning values and principles?
 - Describe the specific partners' strengths relevant for the cooperation
-

3. Description of partnership

- What type of partnership is being proposed?
-

4. Transactions

- What is being transacted in each direction between the organizations (For example: money, information, access, equipment, training, people)?
 - At what stage and under what conditions?
-

5. Time frame

- What is the time frame for the initial partnership?
 - Is there the possibility for renewal?
-

6. Roles

- What roles and responsibilities does each party have in the partnership?
 - How can agreed changes in roles be incorporated into the agreement?
-

7. Naming rights and property

- What is the protocol concerning branding and mutual use of names, logos, and content developed in the partnership?
 - How will this agreement be settled formally?
-

8. Sharing information and transparency

- What types of information will be shared among the parties and with the public (i. e. reports or other publications)?
 - What information can each organization withhold from the other?
 - How and by whom should information be made available?
-

9. Decision-making

- How and by whom will decisions be made between and within each organization?
 - How will transparency of relevant internal decision-making be ensured?
 - What system will be in place in each organization for 'signing off' on decisions?
-

10. Monitoring progress and evaluation

- How will transactions be accounted and measured?
 - How will progress be measured?
 - How will the development of the partnership be monitored?
 - How will the achievements and impact of the partnership be measured?
 - For each of the questions above: When and by whom?
 - Who will determine the indicators?
-

11. Reporting

- What frameworks will be used for reporting?
 - What will be done to ensure that reporting is a two-way process?
-

12. Conflict resolution

- What mechanism will be used to share concerns and to rectify collaboration, trust, and respect problems?
 - What mechanisms will be used to resolve resource, interest, and other conflicts?
 - What role could third parties play (if any)?
-

13. Exit strategy

- Under what conditions and how might the agreement be terminated prematurely?
-



This is a shortened and applied version of a checklist from WWF-UK's [The Partnership Toolbox](#).

Self-empowerment and learning

Civil engagement and participation in commons projects involve both unconscious and conscious collective empowerment and autodidactic learning. The project itself can be understood as a collective learning space in which commoners learn about a resource, resource management, and civic (self-)education, and as a space for creation and experimentation.

The term empowerment includes the word “power.” As you might imagine, self-empowerment therefore involves strategies to gain and use power. Unlike other commons resources, power has the advantage that it tends to grow over the course of a project, especially through cooperation. Empowerment involves the development of both confidence and agency. Put a different way: if you are empowered, you are **confident** that you can do something and you also have the **ability** to take that action.

It’s important to note that, in cooperative arrangements, when one partner gains power this does not automatically mean that other group members have lost it. For example, one member might become empowered to do an activity and gain from it even though the other members are not especially interested in that particular activity. When a number of members empower and enrich themselves about different topics, the group as a whole benefits from their now more skilled and competent membership.

➡ Empowerment is a process in which a group member or the group itself learns how to use power justly. This includes structural and theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and value-related attitudes.

➡ [You can use the self-assessment on p. 176 help gauge the group's needs and interests.](#)

➡ [For some tips on how to design inspiring learning experiences, see p. 179.](#)

The considered and appropriate use of power is the result of a learning process which includes learning about cooperation, procedures, and decision-making rules. Individual empowerment can involve learning how to convince others, how to include other perspectives, and how to present one's standpoint, for example. Furthermore, empowerment is also an attitude. When you are empowered, you accept [other people and perspectives](#) as equal and legitimate, are able to share or discuss in an open and honest way, and can concede the point if you are not in the majority.

Learning by commoning

Doing things together has a direct link to the concepts behind democratic involvement. By commoning, we [learn](#) a lot about decision-making, discussing, and civil involvement in general. Commons projects provide a safe learning space to acquire, practice, and strengthen the skills required for democratic participation, networking, and advocacy for a wide range of potential participants.

Learning through commoning

Commons projects are necessarily connected to questions of resource management and may also touch on social justice and/or environmental issues. As part of commoning, the commoners engage in an informal, autodidactic process of learning through which they collectively gain expertise and competencies in their chosen field. We see these processes quite clearly in Düsselgrün, Incredible Edible, and Holzmarkt. Over the course of their projects, they have learned and incorporated these lessons into their project, thus continually improving them. Furthermore, many of the projects interviewed were involved in outreach, actively sharing their expertise with a wider public.

Suggestions for including facilitation and teaching into urban commons

- Presentations to the public
- School workshops
- Teacher trainings
- Workshops for adult educators
- Regular internal workshops and further training for members
- Open houses with small presentations and workshops
- Guided tours for groups

The most obvious learning process in commons is the commoners' acquisition of the knowledge and skills that they need in order to maintain and manage the resource. This might include how to maintain a garden, how to apply for a building permit, or how to organize a group of people. Furthermore, commoners also gain and share knowledge related to the social and environmental context of a project. For a gardening project, this might include learning about food production, industrial farming, and which vegetables can be harvested at which times. For urban development, it might involve the larger context of regulations and construction rules.

Learning about commons

In addition to learning by commoning and learning through commons, commoners also have the ability to learn about commons in a more general way. Learning about other commons initiatives in other sectors and cities can help commons projects understand their own activities in a new light.

Commoning is a cooperative style of engagement and co-creation between community members. Horizontal networking between commons projects and other groups and institutions which study and support commons can help promote the sharing of knowledge about how citizen-driven self-organization might change a city for the better and promote commons as an alternative to other (competing) forms of service and product delivery in the city.

Suggestions for learning more about commons

- Invite researchers to visit your project (for example members of the International Association for the Study of the Commons)
- Invite policy experts to visit your city and meet with policy-makers to explore developing regulations and support infrastructure for innovative citizen-state partnerships
- Advocate for the advantages of commons as a partner for citizen-driven urban development to politicians, the media, and other key stakeholders in your community
- Present good practices from other cities like Ghent or Bologna to your local administration, civil society stakeholders, and political representatives
- Read and promote this and other books and blogs about commons

Learning from the community

Exploration and curiosity form the basis for any learning process. Especially in their engagement with the community, the commoners should seek to cultivate an attitude of empathy and curiosity for the community's interests, behaviors, and mindsets. After all, the commoners and the community are not really two separate entities, but rather overlap (sometimes a lot!).

This is often easier said than done. Often the idea for an initiative comes from a perceived problem with the environment or originates from an attitude of protest and need for distinction. But, as Holzmarkt stated, in order to be able to

communicate about your project, engage the community, and achieve collective action, you have to know what you are **for**, not only against. As we have already examined, communicating about your project can be difficult and differences in language use and communication styles between the commoners and the community can lead to misunderstandings.

In order to increase their comprehensibility, projects need to develop sensitivity for misunderstandings and the ability to translate their issues in the logic and language of the world(s) around them. [By opening their senses for what others think about the project or the common issue, they can lay the foundation for later group-specific communication strategies.](#)

➡ [The methods persona \(p. 180 – 181\) and “through the eyes of...” \(p. 182\) can help commoners start a more in-depth conversation with those around them.](#)

More resources:

- P2P Foundation:
<https://p2pfoundation.net/>
- Digital Library of the Commons:
<https://dlc.dlib.indiana.edu/dlc/>
- International Association for the Study of the Commons:
<https://iasc-commons.org/>
- Commons Strategies Group:
<http://commonsstrategies.org>
- The Commons Transition Primer:
<https://primer.commonstransition.org/>



Sharing knowledge fairly

By using a license or agreeing to a certain publishing model, you ensure access and usability of your materials and help the commons grow. Here are a few popular resources for sharing your work in a collaborative and open way.



Creative Commons is a popular license model for Open Educational Resources and other media. <https://creativecommons.org/>



According to UNESCO, Open Educational Resources are “teaching, learning, or research materials that are in the public domain or released with an intellectual property license that allows for free use, adaptation, and distribution.” <https://en.unesco.org/themes/building-knowledge-societies/oer>



Open-source software is software which complies with the criteria developed by the Open Source Initiative. Different license options can be found on their website: <https://opensource.org/>



Open Access is a model for scientific and scholarly literature which ensures its “free availability on the public internet.” <https://open-access.net>

When using texts, images, publications, videos, music, or other content which have been shared using the licenses detailed above, we suggest keeping a few points in mind:

1. Ethics of the commons: Authors and those providing material under open licenses rely on your fairness. Keep the “golden rule” in mind when using their materials and don’t use them in ways you wouldn’t want your own materials to be used.

2. Respect and identify sources: Authors often depend on being visible as contributors. Respecting and identifying their contributions will help them be able to continue their engagement as commoners.

3. Adopting, not stealing: Don’t take others’ content in a thoughtless way. Adapt and incorporate others’ work with attribution and in ways that respect the original intention of the author.

4. Give back: Give something back to the community and to authors by publishing, using, and sharing other good materials or by highlighting good authors.

5. Appreciate quality: Appreciate what others give you for free. The value of openly-available content is not measured by money. Try to find the specific quality of each work.

6. Respect rights: Original ideas and models can be used in your own work, but these need to be cited with appropriate information about the sources. Copyrighted material cannot be mutualized without permission.

Self-Assessment: Needs and interests

In every project and community, there are many expectations and needs involved. Sometimes they are stated explicitly; more often they are not verbalized. All of the needs and interests are potentially important, as they form the basis for learning processes. A specific interest in a topic or in certain activities may be just as important as personal needs. For example, one person might want to get involved in a project in order to change legislation, others want to assume responsibility, and others yet want to participate to overcome their shyness in groups. The organization culture within a project should try to keep the members' needs and interests in focus and encourage the participants to make them transparent. How are the **needs and interests** of the participants addressed in your project?



Social cultural
Intellectual
Emotional spiritual
Physical

Possible ways to address the participants' needs:

- Collective reflection and strategy rounds: Update and reconfirm at regular intervals
- Regular needs (self-)assessment and exchange in smaller groups or plenary constellations
- Involve visitors or the community. Ask them about their needs and interests related to the project in interviews or with a small questionnaire

➤ For example using the vox pop method, p. 166.

How to design inspiring learning experiences

- Facilitate the idea of initiative and civil engagement through creative workshops or project management courses
- Shape opportunities for independent member activities
- Leave space for transparent discussion of the relevant issues
- Share relevant knowledge and experience with all members
- Give members roles appropriate to their needs and competences
- Invite community members to common activities such as project days, hackathons, bar camps, or project workshops
- Learn from the experience of other commoners. Invite commons projects from other cities and countries to exchange good practices

Persona



A persona may represent a typical person affected by an initiative or the initiative's target audience or group. Imagine a concrete person, with a name, habits, and opinions. Try to understand them as deeply as possible. Try to think like them. Take a "walk in their shoes."

Developing these personas is the first step toward helping real people and reflecting critically on our assumptions about target groups, audiences, and community members involved in a project. Furthermore, this method mobilizes empathy and helps groups to prevent negative attributions and stigmatization. To develop a persona, use the following six steps.

1. Short Description

Give a short general description by explaining the following features of the imagined person:

- Social context (Social role, position in the social hierarchy, personal network, memberships)
- Attributes (Name, age, gender, marital status, occupation, hobbies, beliefs and values)



2. Motivations, goals, and needs

In the next step, gather information about the following aspects your persona's motivation, goals, and needs. Consider the following questions:

- What are motivations, goals, and needs of actual people like your persona?
- What are their challenges?
- What emotions and passions are involved?



3. Your activity

Explore your persona's opinions, emotions, and wishes regarding your activities. To achieve this, the group could engage in role-playing. One or two learners take on the role of the persona and are interviewed by a colleague, while a fourth group member documents the key points that come up during the interview.



Another option is to draw the persona individually, and then present the different types of personas to each other. Discuss and collect the key features (e.g. on a flipchart), separating motivations, goals, and needs.

4. Personal touch

Draw a common persona, and then explain it in short sentences. Include an image, name, and quote that expresses the needs and goals of the persona.

If the task is conducted in a larger group, facilitators can add an additional step of identifying the most common aspects shared between the personas of the various groups in a plenary setting.

5. Explore feedback

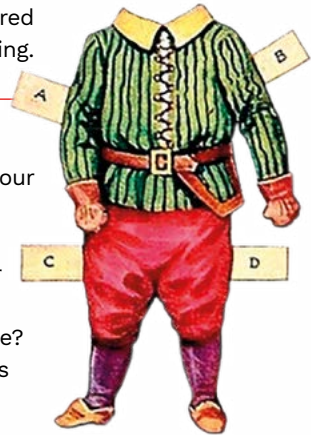
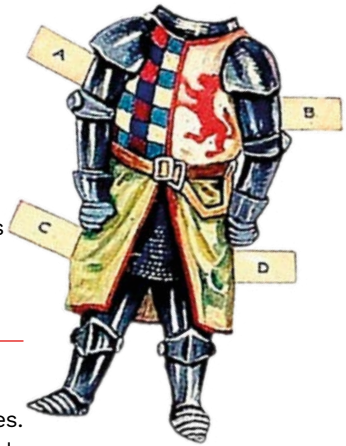
Chat, talk, or write to people that share characteristics with your persona.

- What are their goals and needs?
 - What are possible motivations for their being involved in or supporting your activity, or using your product?
 - Which characteristics of the persona did you not see before?
 - What kinds of new knowledge about local conditions needs to be included?
-

6. Adjust

Adjust the persona based on feedback.

Source: Competendo - Tools for Facilitators, adapted from <http://www.opendesignkit.org/methods/personas>



Practicing the commons



Through the eyes of...

The groups of people with a potential interest in your project or the ones responsible or relevant for its success can be very diverse. Some can be direct target groups like visitors or participants. Others could be more influential stakeholders like the chair of a neighborhood association or local politicians. And still others are more of an audience, representing a broader public (for example those addressed by mainstream media). The following table should help you examine what your project can offer different stakeholders and adjust your project to better meet the interests/needs of various groups.

Group	Why they are important from the perspective of the project	Contact point Locations/formats to get in contact with them	Accessibility How can one contact and meet them?	Offerings and outcome from the perspective of the target group	Motivation for action What makes them act?
Example: teacher	<p>Give access to the students</p> <p>Help in designing workshops</p>	<p>Open day in school, school secretary, teacher's union meeting, membership newsletter of the union</p>	<p>Personal contact, Engaged ones are organized in the union, Telephone, School secretaries, Online forums</p>	<p>+ Trip to the project location</p> <p>+ New input for their teaching</p> <p>- One more external offering</p> <p>- Costs time to contact and negotiate</p>	<p>Helping a good initiative ...</p> <p>Less work (no preparation of the unit)</p> <p>Topic and format fit into curriculum</p>

Summary & take home messages



Urban commons are resources in the city which are managed by the users in a non-profit-oriented and prosocial way. They are different from other resource management structures in two main ways. First, commons are managed by the users through a collective, participatory process of accessing, managing, and developing a resource called commoning. Second, commons projects remove resources from the market, highlighting their use value over their exchange value.

Urban commons projects' characteristics are dependent on a wide range of factors, from resource attributes to institutional culture. Independent of the resource type, group size, or the intensity and degree of formalization of the commoning process, commons projects are united by their prosocial, participatory, and cooperative approach. The process of commoning creates added social benefit for the commoners, the city, and society as a whole. In this book, we identified and explored three core aspects to the constant, multi-layered processes of negotiation going on within commons projects, between commons and their environment, and even within the commoners themselves: **self-governance and decision-making**, **community outreach**, and **self-empowerment and learning**. We presented a range of methods in the sections above which we hope will prove helpful.

The case studies provided a wealth of information about the nuts and bolts of day-to-day life in an urban commons project. Each one tells its own local story. But one of the main goals of this book was to examine crosscutting issues in urban commons. [So what can we learn from the case studies about shared challenges and strategies for succeeding in the world of the urban commons?](#)

1. Cooperation with industry, private foundations, and larger or more established groups can help aid in transition & scaling up and mediate risks. Cooperations with big partners can be of particular importance when there is a big initial investment. However, it is important to define the conditions of cooperations in a concrete way to avoid misunderstandings and potential risks of enclosure.
2. A written mission statement or manifesto can be a good tool for getting everyone on the same page, but it's important to be flexible in day-to-day work, especially in small and medium-sized groups. The written statement may become outdated fairly quickly because the commoning process is so agile. Written agreements are especially important for very large groups, where informal control mechanisms are weak.
3. A clear adversary or problem can be a good motivator for immediate action and continued support, but it's also important to give thought to how to survive beyond the initial "fight." Concentrate on what you are **for**, not only **against**. Only being against can alienate others; try to align your theory of change with the values and goals of the wider community.
4. Join forces with other like-minded groups. Create or join umbrella organizations to increase the effect of collective action and take advantage of economies of scale and internal differentiation of roles. Share resources and skills to empower each other and build synergies.
5. Scaling up/moving/transformation is one of the biggest challenges commons projects face. Growing pains can help test how good existing structures are and point to where improvement or adjustment could be helpful or needed.

6. Use media to increase awareness and visibility as a first step towards advocacy and political lobbying. Differentiated media use (i.e. local newspapers vs. Facebook) and adjusting your language based on your audience can help you reach a larger variety of people.
7. Base the structures of commoning on the real situation and be willing to adapt structures to changes in the situation. Make the organization about the people instead of forcing people to accept your organization. This includes how the group communicates, decides, how deliberations are moderated, and a range of other aspects.
8. Make the process enjoyable and tap into people's enthusiasm. People's passion will help keep the project afloat even when it is faced with challenges. Try not to get bogged down by too many rules and don't forget to have fun!

Urban commons can bring a range of benefits to communities. They can increase citizen buy-in in administrative decisions, increase community cohesion, and build social capital overall. Furthermore, the affordability and community that urban commons bring to a neighborhood can act as a salient pull factor for new residents. [So what can policy-makers do to support urban commons?](#)

1. Take stock of commons projects that are in your community and work to empower them. Something as simple as a seed fund for citizen-led initiatives can be a good start.
2. Space is frequently a problem for commons projects. Examine which spatial resources your community could offer to citizen-led projects.
3. Create options for citizens to engage with administrative structures. Create a better match between citizen needs and policy needs. This may mean designating a new point of contact in the administration for citizen-led ideas.

4. Take Arnstein's ladder into consideration with existing and future participation methods. How participative are they really? Offer citizens a more authentic role in the co-creation of the city and make sure that their suggestions are implemented in a transparent and accountable way.
5. Take a closer look at existing good practices such as Ghent & Bologna and explore how these practices could be incorporated into your city's administrative structures.
6. Start a round table for citizen-led projects which involves various administrative actors. Promote cooperation and collaboration between the city administration and commons projects.
7. Get in touch with experts, local stakeholders, and regional and national networks to learn more about what commons can do for your community.

Literature, resources & further reading

➡ Further reading

🍷 Resources

Allahyari, M. and Rourke, D. (2017) [The 3D Additivist Cookbook](#). Amsterdam.



Arnstein, S. R. (1969) 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation', *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 35(4), pp. 216–224.

➡ Barnes, P. (2006) *Capitalism 3.0 - A Guide to Reclaiming the Commons*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Bauwens, M. and Onzia, Y. (2017) [A Commons Transition Plan for the City of Ghent](#).



Beckenkamp, M. (2012) 'Der Umgang mit sozialen Dilemmata – Institutionen und Vertrauen in den Commons', in Helfrich, S. and Heinrich Böll Stiftung (eds) *Commons: Für eine neue Politik jenseits von Markt und Staat*. Bielefeld: Transcript, pp. 51–57.

Bollier, D. (2009) '[The Commons: A Neglected Sector of Wealth-Creation](#)', in Helfrich, S. and Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (eds) *Genes, Bytes and Emissions: To Whom Does the World Belong?*



Bollier, D. (2015) [Bologna, a Laboratory for Urban Commoning](#).



➡ Bollier, D. and Helfrich, S. (2019) *Free, fair, and alive: the insurgent power of the commons*. Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers.

➡ Bollier, D., Helfrich, S. and Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (eds) (2012) *The wealth of the commons: a world beyond market and state*. Amhearst: Levellers Press.

➡ Borch, C. and Kornberger, M. (eds) (2015) *Urban Commons: Rethinking the City*. New York: Routledge.



- 📖 [Community Planning Toolkit - Community Engagement](#). The community engagement toolkit contains a range of good points to consider when engaging stakeholders. The Community Planning Toolkit website also contains a range of other useful resources.



- 📖 [Competendo - Tools for Facilitators](#). Competendo is an open toolbox and creative commons project highlighting good practices and collecting and offering handbooks on how to create inspiring learning experiences and facilitate activism.



Dellenbaugh-Losse, M. (2019) [Urban commons: Why now?](#)

Dellenbaugh, M. et al. (eds) (2015) *Urban Commons: Moving Beyond State and Market*. Basel: Birkhäuser Verlag.



de Moor, T. (2016) [‘The time is now – commons from the past to present,’](#) *Green European Journal*, 14, pp. 6–13.



European Commission (1998) [One hundred words for equality - A glossary of terms on equality between women and men](#). Luxembourg.



- 📖 Fahrún, H., Zimmermann, N.-E. and Skowron, E. (eds) (2014) [Diversity Dynamics: Activating the Potential of Diversity in Trainings](#). Berlin: MitOst Editions.



- 📖 Fahrún, H., Zimmermann, N.-E. and Skowron, E. (eds) (2016) [Initiative Cookbook - Homemade Civic Engagement: An Introduction to Project Management](#). Berlin: MitOst Editions.

- ➡ Foster, S. R. (2009) ‘Urban Informality as a Commons Dilemma,’ *Inter-American Law Review*, 40(2), pp. 301–325.

- ▶▶ Foster, S. R. (2013) 'Collective Action and the Urban Commons,' Notre Dame Law Review, 87(1), pp. 57–134.



German Bundestag (2002) Enquete Kommission Zukunft des Bürgerschaftlichen Engagement. English Summary of the Study Commission's Report: Civic Activities: Towards a Civil Society with a Future. Berlin.



- ▶▶ Green European Foundation (2016) 'Finding Common Ground,' Green European Journal, 14



- ▶▶ Gross, L. et al. (eds) (2016) Game On! Toolkit. Berlin: finep and wigwam.



- ▶▶ Helfrich, S. and Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (eds) (2009) Genes, Bytes and Emissions: To Whom Does the World Belong? Berlin: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung



- ▶▶ Helfrich, S. and Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (eds) (2012) Commons: Für eine neue Politik jenseits von Markt und Staat. Bielefeld: Transcript.




Hess, C. (2008) 'Mapping the New Commons,' in 12th Biennial Conference of the International Association for the Study of the Commons.

Holemans, D. (2017) The City Taking the Commons to Heart. Green European Journal, 16, pp. 76–81.

Kratzwald, B. (2012) 'Commons und das Öffentliche,' in Helfrich, S. and Heinrich Böll Stiftung (eds) Commons – Für eine neue Politik jenseits von Markt und Staat. Bielefeld: Transcript, pp. 79–84.



 Lederach, J. P., Neufeldt, R. and Culbertson, H. (2007) [Reflective peacebuilding: A planning, monitoring, and learning toolkit](#). Notre Dame: The Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame.

Lefebvre, H. (1996) *Writings on Cities*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Lohmann, R. A. (2016) 'The Ostroms' Commons Revisited,' *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 45, pp. 27S-42S.


Ostrom, E. (1990) *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.




Ostrom, E. and Hess, C. (2007) [Private and Common Property Rights](#). Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis.




 P2P Foundation. (2019) [The Commons Transition Primer](#).

 Parker, P. and Johansson, M. (2011) 'The uses and abuses of Elinor Ostrom's concept of commons in urban theorizing,' Presented at the International Conference of the European Urban Research Association (EURA) 2011-Cities without Limits (23–25 June 2011 in Copenhagen).

 Parker, P. and Schmidt, S. (2017) 'Enabling urban commons,' *CoDesign*, 13(3), pp. 202–213.

Putnam, R. D. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc.




 Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung (2010) [Moderation und Grossgruppenbegleitung](#). Berlin: Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung.


- Schwegmann, M., Kremer, E. and Surwitto-Hahn, A. (2017) [Actors of Urban Change Newspaper 3: Urban Commons](#). Stuttgart/Berlin: Robert Bosch Stiftung GmbH/MitOst e.V.
- ➔ Shareable (2017) [Sharing Cities: Activating the Urban Commons](#).
- 🍷 Seeds for Change (2013) [A Consensus Handbook: Co-operative decision-making for activists, co-ops and communities](#). Lancaster: Seeds for Change.
- 🍷 Seeds for Change (2019) [Facilitating meetings. A guide to making your meetings effective, inclusive and enjoyable](#). Lancaster: Seeds for Change.
- 🍷 Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Umwelt Berlin (2012) [Handbuch zur Partizipation](#). Berlin: SenStadtUm.
- 🍷 Social Reporting Initiative e.V. (2014) [Social Reporting Standard - Guide to results-based reporting](#)
- ➔ Stavrides, S. (2016) *Common space: The city as commons*. London: Zed Books Ltd.
- 🍷 Sterne, R., Heaney, D. and Britton, B. (2009) [The Partnership Toolbox](#). Godalming: WWF-UK.
- 🍷 Tactical Technology Collective (2014) [Visualising Information for Advocacy](#). Berlin: Tactical Technology Collective.
- 🍷 [The 7 Ps Elaborated Canvas: Framework for Successful Meetings](#). This canvas is a helpful tool for making the considerations behind successful meetings explicit.





 Transparency International Deutschland e.V. (2019) [Initiative Transparente Zivilgesellschaft](#)



 van den Bosch, S. and Rotmans, J. (2008) [Deepening, Broadening and Scaling up. A framework for steering transition experiments](#), Knowledge Centre for Sustainable System Innovations and Transitions (KCT). Delft/Rotterdam.

Visotschnig, E. and Visotschnig, V. (2016) Einführung in Systemisches Konsensieren. Graz: Institut für Systemisches Konsensieren.

About us

Mary Dellenbaugh-Losse is an independent urban researcher and policy consultant who has been working on the urban commons since 2013. She is the co-editor “Urban Commons: Moving beyond State and Market,” author of “Städtewandel durch Kultur” and “Inventing Berlin: Architecture, Politics and Cultural Memory in the New/Old German Capital Post-1989,” and the owner of the blog Urban Policy.



<https://urban-policy.com/>

Nils-Eyk Zimmermann is an author, program manager, and expert for topics related to civil society. He is the co-author of “Diversity Dynamics - Activating the Potential of Diversity in Groups,” “Initiative Cookbook,” “Creativity Handbook,” and other books geared at activists and facilitators. He is owner of the blog Civil Resilience.



<http://civilresilience.net/>

Nicole de Vries works in the field of public participation and sustainable (urban) development.

Imprint

Authors:

Mary Dellenbaugh-Losse, Nils-Eyk Zimmermann,
and Nicole de Vries

Proofreading and editing:

Mary Dellenbaugh-Losse

Illustration and Layout:

Mandy Blaurock & Luisa Le van, Atelier Hurra

ISBN: 978-3-00-065193-9



This work is proudly licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License. You are welcome to:

- **Share** — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format
- **Adapt** — remix, transform, and build upon the material

Under the following terms:

- **Attribution** — You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.
- **Share Alike** — If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original.
- **No additional restrictions** — You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

The authors would like to thank the team at Shareable (www.shareable.net) for their support in realizing this project.

Which ingredients of a cooperative community project most help it succeed? What are urban commons and how do they fit into current activist and civil society debates? And what tools and methods do commoners need to strengthen their work? These are the three questions at the heart of *The Urban Commons Cookbook*, a handbook for those interested in starting, growing and supporting community-led projects.

This book represents a first attempt to bridge the gaps between individual urban commons projects across resource types and geographical distances in order to show their commonalities and help them and new projects learn from each other's experiences. Through a reader-friendly overview of urban commons theory, interviews with eight commons projects outlining the growth of their projects, the challenges they faced, and the methods they employed to surmount them, and a wealth of practical tools and policy suggestions, we hope to support commons projects and the cities that they enrich.



9 783000 651946