



Manifesto

Commons are resources that are collectively owned and managed by a community and not dependant on either the market or private property. Be it local parks, managing of natural resources or online communities – commons are as effective as they are diverse. We understand commons as a political and economical matter. Commons aim at satisfying the needs and interests of individuals and collectives based on the principles of solidarity, participation, transparency, inclusion and responsibility. Commons are fair – they provide to everyone what they need for a good life. Commons are built to endure – future generations should also be able to profit from our collective wealth, both material and immaterial. Commons solutions are always bottom-up and highly adapted to and dependant on the local context, values and customs.

In a commons-based approach to the management of resources, the community is the main decision making body. It needs to be politically active and must insure a fair distribution of both the tasks and responsibilities as well as the goods and services produced. Commons can vary in scale – they can be anything from a small local park to the internet or the global climate. In order to ensure the endurance of their commons, communities should develop institutions and procedures that are as inclusive as they are robust and which take a holistic approach to the management of resources.

Commons are both ancient as well as contemporary. Many of today's problems could be solved if we applied the principles of commoning to areas nowadays controlled or threatened by profit-oriented private enterprises and authoritarian governments. The commons is both a unifying principle as well as a collection of very diverse methods. Commons principles can be applied in almost all spheres of human economic and social life: the management of natural resources, the administration of public spaces, the provision of public services and the creation and use of culture and knowledge.

Natural Resources

Nature is both a resource to human beings as well as essential for the provision of many services. A lake can for example be used to produce fresh water, fish or other foods, but it can also serve as a means of transportation or a place to spend leisure time. A healthy natural world with a balanced ecosystem is essential – it determines the fate of the whole planet. Sustainability is inherent in the commons approach and we understand that respect for nature is crucial: we must treat the environment with the utmost care so that we do not disturb the balance underlying life on this planet. In order to retain this balance, we should use resources/services in a sustainable way no matter if it we are talking about some local pond or the global atmosphere.

To achieve sustainable governance of natural resources, we need to educate ourselves and those around us about the true value of natural resources/services – and not only their immediate material and economic worth. Nature does not solely exist for human profit and no-one has a valid claim to exploit natural resources for their exclusive private gain. It is certain that there are profits, both material and immaterial, coming from the use of natural resources and we believe that all these profits should stay with the community which should be allowed to use and govern their natural environment.



Public spaces

Public spaces are spaces available for everyone regardless of social status. They are diverse - anything from parks, squares, benches to the internet or even malls can be public spaces. Public spaces as a commons can even come into being when the public reclaims a private space for community use. The essential aspect defining public spaces as commons is management by the community. Public services are services available to the community. Public services can be education, healthcare, municipalities, public transport, prisons, police or the army.

A public space gives people a common collective identity regardless of their background. When public spaces are privatised there is often a loss in democratic engagement and freedom of expression within the space. How this affects culture and city life is an important topic. When something is not a commons there is always the issue of surveillance, censorship and privacy. In a society where people are dominated by the state and private companies, public spaces are essential for preventing atomisation. When people do not see themselves as a collective with common interests they cannot fight their oppressors as a group and often start clashing with each other instead.

Media, especially the Internet, is an important educational tool for creating commons but can be also a public space itself. Through sustainable stewardship, the feminising of spaces and a change of working conditions many public spaces and even companies could be turned into a commons.

Culture and knowledge

It is often said that what makes us human is that we have culture. Since the first humans taught their daughters and sons how to make a fire, the sharing of knowledge and culture has been something both essential to our survival as well as to our identities. Culture and knowledge encompass much: from folklore to modern science, from languages to music - culture and knowledge are everywhere. The most basic principle of culture and knowledge is that they are based on sharing and improving what others have built before us.

Three principles we deem most important: Firstly, culture and knowledge should be freely accessible so that the largest possible number of people can benefit from it. Secondly, everyone must be allowed to change cultural works, so that culture and knowledge can benefit from the full force of human creativity. Thirdly, we must implement alternatives to the current intellectual property regimes. It is essential that the creators of content are enabled to live decent lives – the current system fails at this. Many schemes are possible, from voluntary payments to creators, to state-instituted subsidies, cultural flatrates, crowdfunding, basic income and more. We need to find out which of these ideas work.

First steps that could dramatically improve the current situation are a reduction of the currently ridiculously long copyright terms, a general copyright exception for non-commercial uses and a change of the patent regime so that enables the global south access to cheap medicine.

Commons have a proven and successful track record and have been used to organise resources for centuries. It is time that we advance commons as a viable alternative to authoritarian political systems and dysfunctional markets that are in such a dominating position today.