

Commoning – Perspectives on Conviviality

Commoners reply to the Convivialist Manifesto

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We see ourselves as commoners. Therefore we welcome the approach of the Convivialist Manifesto authors to bring together diverse persons and organisations, positions and discourses in a shared process. Such an attempt will always be emergent; but we consider this to be an appropriate approach to an ‘art of living together’ that is viable for the future. This emergent approach corresponds to the invitation to contribute to the ideas and suggestions outlined in the Manifesto. We are glad to follow this invitation, in the same spirit. Our text is the first result of our effort to think and write as a group. For us this means that we build on some analytical aspects of the Manifesto by adding our commoning perspective. It is inherent to such a process that our writing is “not-thought-through”. We see this as an invitation to reflect on the ideas we lay out in this text and pursue one’s own thoughts on the issues left open or controversial.

The term "con-vivere" (Les Convivialistes 2014 [in the following abbreviated as LC]: 24) can serve as an anchor point for deepening the Manifesto from the commons perspective. The connection between *con-vivere* and *com-mons* is obvious and visible in the first syllable. Marianne Gronemeyer states that ”our habits of hearing and speaking have turned us completely deaf [...] to the good sound of the [...] ,cum’, which appears as the preposition ,kon’ or ,kom’ in the German language.“ She regrets that ” [...] most of the composite words we form with these syllables have completely reversed their original meaning. The Latin preposition ,cum’, which once meant being together as equals in a shared activity, now increasingly serves to describe a harsh and unforgiving ‘against each other’ in the struggle for advantages, power and influence. Kon-kurrenten² (competitors) no longer run together, but are at war with each other over scarce resources; the English com-petition no longer stands for a common quest, but rather for the effort

¹All authors (listed alphabetically) are active in the Commons Institute, founded in 2014.

²Note: the German „Konkurrent“ comes from the same Latin root as the English „concur,“ but means „competitor.“

to strike each other down. Con-sensus is no longer a sense that we create together but rather an imposed equality. Con-sume no longer means that we use something thoroughly in sharing and consideration, but that we use it to raise envy in others by means of the things we consume.“ (Gronemeyer, nd.). And con-struction no longer means to layer words and their meanings on and next to each other, to distance oneself from the layers and reconnect them in new ways – as it happens in writing processes as well as commoning. Instead, since the 16th century this term has shifted from the realm of grammar to the technical realm of building.

“Being together as equals in shared activity“ – it appears as if this preposition was intended to sum up in three letters the essence of commoning and commons. In fact both terms point us to our always present option to shape our living in the spirit of the *cum/con*, which is as commonplace as it is repressed. These terms express what the prologue of the Manifesto declares to be the core of the conviviality debate: “the associative, civil-society-based self organization of people is a crucial element in the theory and practice of conviviality. Free and gratuitous exchange between people can serve as the basis for a convivial social order that distances itself from a version of prosperity and the good life defined in purely material and quantitative-cum-monetary terms” (LC: 13).

We want to use our contribution to bring into the debate on conviviality our thoughts on and experiences with commoning as a life practice *and* the commons as a structural precondition to enable such practice. At the same time we want to clearly point out that an argument which is mainly based on moral imperatives falls short. From our point of view it seems necessary to change the perspective: peaceful community and free self-actualization of individuals need not contradict each other. We can begin here and now to create the conditions that allow both to go hand in hand.

On Commoning and the Commons

Commoning is a social practice within a framework set by the commons as a structure and common arrangement. The commons can be seen as the foundation of a convivialist society, commoning as its living expression. Hence commons are not goods even though they are often described as such. And goods are not commons because of their ”natural” properties but because we treat them as such. Therefore we can essentially describe the commons as an institutionalised,

legal, and infrastructural arrangement for a practice – commoning – in which we collaboratively organise and take responsibility for the use, maintenance and production of diverse resources. The rules of commoning are (ideally) set by equal peers whose needs are at the focus of a shared process. Opportunities for individual growth and self-development are combined with the search for shared solutions, meaningful activities with extended and deepened relationships, and the creation of material abundance with the care for others and for nature. Living together like this was and still is practised to various degrees all over the world. In the process, commoning has to be repeatedly scrutinised, updated and rehearsed in order to remain embedded in every day life. This can never be taken for granted, and needs a suitable framework which we currently rarely find.

The results of commoning traditionally consist of the sustainable use of natural resources such as forests, water or soil. For example this is the case with irrigation systems for which the people affected (commoners) give themselves rules for the shared use that enable a long-term fulfilment of needs (irrigation of fields, protection of water quality etc.). At the same time commoning can serve as the basis for the creation of something new: knowledge, hardware, software, food or a roof over the head. Basically there is nothing that cannot be thought of and designed as a commons. In the end our perspective may be to even view human society itself as the shared good – as our *Common Wealth* – which we have to make our own in practise and shape together according to our needs. However, at present, humanity seems to be very distant from this perspective.

Human Hubris or Structural Opposition?!

Under the title „The mother of all threats“ (LC: 23),³ the Manifesto identifies its central question, “how to manage rivalry and violence between human beings” in the context of the great problems of humankind. This question seems well justified as rivalry and violence are obvious features of our living together. They can neither be ignored nor explained away. However, if we do not delve down to their structural roots, we may get the impression that we should look for the causes solely in human nature. e.g. in the fact that “every human being aspires to have their uniqueness

³In the English translation, this appears as the “root” of all threats, but it is the “mother” in both the French original and the German translation.

recognized“, while a “healthy society” knows how “to prevent that desire from degenerating into excess and hubris” (LC: 25). Consequently the Manifesto poses the „moral question [...] what may individuals legitimately aspire to and where must they draw the line?“ (LC: 26). The authors point out that “we have to make conflict a force for life rather than a force for death. And we have to turn rivalry into a means of cooperation, a weapon [sic!] with which to ward off violence and the destruction it entrains“ (LC: 25). However, they do not address satisfactorily how such a transformation could be reached by means of moral imperatives or political measures.

Looking through the lens of the commons opens new perspectives because it poses the question *how we create* our material and social living conditions. This points to fundamental structures and logics for action – and thus sheds light on the question why our living in community so often appears in the form of *opposition*. To prevent us from remaining on the level of appearance, we take the daily creation of the basic conditions for our living-in-community as the starting point of our analysis. These basic conditions include everything that constitutes our society: household items, technologies, institutions, languages, ways of thought, world views, and forms of interaction with each other and with nature. On the one hand, these social *structures* are the result of past human activity while, on the other, they are also the foundation of our current and future actions. The relationship between structures and action is therefore a reflective one. The one feeds into the other again and again. This explains why historical processes can bring about a self-reinforcing dynamic which causes structures to fossilize and become independent of the many intentions to act.

When social structures governing our living-in-community define the opportunities and limits of their own change, people may perceive them as external and unchangeable although in fact they are human constructs and hence changeable. This occurs, for example, if we interpret structural constraints on human action that exist in our current social conditions as an expression of a transhistorical “human nature.” In fact, along with capitalism a vision of human nature has become dominant that makes agents appear “*as if they were* separate individuals, indifferent to one another and concerned solely to maximize their individual advantage“ (LC: 28).

Modern society is shaped by a self-reinforcing dynamic that leads to money becoming the pivotal point for our living together. Turning more and more areas of life into commodities creates an

ever increasing stream of goods which are predominantly meant for sale in *markets*. For the producers neither their activities nor the goods they produce serve to fulfil any actual need – they are mainly a means to earn money. At the same time the producers need the money to buy goods and services in their role as consumers. As the goods are produced by companies and self-employed people who compete with each other for a share of the sales, they have to constantly re-invest their gains in order to remain competitive. Money thus becomes an end in itself: it is invested to make *more money* which then needs to be re-invested so more money can be made in the future. In this function money becomes capital – so it's not without reason that societies that are based on this logic are called capitalist.

In the *exchange of equivalents* the market participants (to which the people are at times reduced) are indifferent to each other – just as money is indifferent towards them. Bread costs the same to the poor as it does to the rich. The loss of one is the gain of another. As competitors (in the non-convivialist meaning of the word) people are even potentially an existential threat to each other. Cooperation and partial alliances are not rendered impossible, but these often serve the purpose to survive the competition more successfully than others. This competition takes places on several levels at the same time: companies compete for customers on the market,⁴ consumers compete for the best deal, applicants compete for jobs, colleagues compete for promotion prospects etc. In such roles people have to aim to get the most out of every exchange (such as a material or immaterial good, or human labour) at the expense of others. Personal relationships are preformed by this predicament. “Every area of life, down to emotions, friendships, and loves, found itself subject to the logic of accountancy and management” (LC: 28). In this system one progresses by pushing the other down. Being "greedy", "corrupt", “excessive” and "unscrupulous " is a functional behaviour which is often promoted by society. This logic of indifference, of structural opposition and atomization is based on the severed way we produce the conditions of our lives: before you can sell something as a good it first has to have been withdrawn from those who have a tangible need. This exclusion usually works legally based on the concept of *property*, which is essentially a right to exclude. By means of this principle the freedom of the one becomes the limit for the other, and the participation of the one becomes the exclusion of the other. This is why we

⁴In this context, “market” refers to the anonymous market mechanism, which supposedly leads to an equilibrium based on supply and demand, as if following a natural law.

call this mechanism of asserting-yourself-at-the-expense-of-the-other as a *logic of exclusion*.⁵

Relationships of solidarity require explicit struggle against the logic of producing goods for the market, and are therefore always precarious – they only survive as long as they are an insignificant hindrance to survival on the market. The coercion to act which stems from this logic of exclusion – and which can eliminate any good intention in an instant – can hardly be counteracted by demands for more ethical and moral values. The fear to be outsmarted and exploited can lead to well-founded mistrust, related security-oriented strategies and various forms of exclusion that maintain divisions according to social markers such as class, gender, sexual preference, skin colour, age, education, and language. Because the logic of exclusion rewards exclusionary behaviour, even legal equality cannot truly overcome these divisions. If claims that there is equality of opportunity are used to justify privileges in the name of a so called meritocracy, and to attribute the responsibility for failures individually to the losers, then formal equality can even consolidate actual inequality.

The Tragedy of the Markets

The exchange and money system we described contributes to the necessity for growth as lamented by the Manifesto, which is at its core a coercion to extract monetary value in a competitive environment. Capital has to “pay off“, meaning that it has to grow. This can only succeed if one’s own market share is secured or expanded – at a cost to others – by managing to equal or undercut the market price by lowering production costs. This in turn is often achieved by raising productivity by means of technical innovation and – which is often the reverse side of the coin – lower work input. The increased productivity produces more goods which have to be sold in order to maintain or increase the return on investment. In this way more and more things are produced with less and less effort, using increasing amounts of resources and energy – despite or even because of the increase in energy efficiency. Because every competitor on the market does this, is indeed forced to do this in order to secure his existence, this process results in a coercion for growth which the individual actors within these structures cannot evade. Hence we can speak of the “tragedy of the market”.

⁵The fact that this logic has become deeply ingrained in people's every day activities nevertheless does not prove it to be “natural.”

Trapped in the capitalist model, humanity has entered a phase of structural debilitation – of resources, of nature and of people and their communities. Therefore we should not criticise the excessiveness but rather the model of only following one standard: the structurally imposed, one-dimensional standard of monetary valuation and the prerequisite that goes with it to reduce everything into countable and measurable units. How many pupils can a teacher manage? How much time can be allowed for combing the hair of a woman with dementia? What is the value of a lost butterfly species? Living together under such conditions is not living in community, nor *con-vivere*, but a collective life in opposition to each other and against nature. It is not sustainable and poses an immediate threat to our very existence in the 21st century.

Opposed to this “productive“ system of exclusion, accounting, monetisation and exploitation stands the “reproductive“ inclusiveness of helping and caring relationships. As a matter of fact the so-called reproduction, the production and maintenance of the basis of our existence, is the basis of every society without which even capitalist structures could not persist. As it is incompatible with the market system of competition and exclusion, this type of work is delegated to the – mostly female – private domain (household). A convivial society which promotes living-in-community would have to place the foundations of life into the centre of its activities. This includes the natural foundations of our existence which in capitalist contexts are resources that primarily exist to be exploited and commodified. Humans are part of nature however and cannot live in opposition to it without harming themselves. Therefore, human reproduction in the broader sense can only work if it respects the ecological logic of natural material cycles as a precondition and inherent part of the fulfilment of human needs.

Questions for a Change of Perspective

Searching for fundamental alternatives and sharpening our senses for a new “art of living together” we have to look for new categories and terms which depart from the basic assumptions and terms we have just criticised in order to approach a society based on positive-reciprocal structural logics. In doing so we have to address fundamental questions: How do we create our living conditions in a way that leaves no-one behind – including people of future generations? And how can all those affected participate in this process? The “big questions” (LC: 26) which

the Manifesto divides into moral, political, ecological and economic categories, are united by this approach because it does not consider them as independent but rather as interlinked with each other, just as we encounter them in the real world.

The Manifesto formulates four principles of the “*only legitimate kind of politics*“: “common humanity, common sociality, individuation and managed conflict” (LC: 30). Even though it is debatable whether the “social nature of humanity” encompassed by the first two principles is truly a definition of the human condition or a political principle, it certainly makes sense to us to bring to mind that we are *one* humanity and that people are social beings. Likewise we support the aim connected with “*individuation*” to allow “each of us to assert our distinctive evolving individuality as fully as possible by developing our capabilities, our potential to be and to act without harming others' potentials to do the same, with a view to achieving *equal freedom for all*” (LC: 31). And last but not least the term “*managed conflict*” means to “be individual while accepting and managing conflict” (LC: 31).

It is critically important that these four principles are not mistaken as *prerequisites* to action in the sense of moral imperatives. Given favourable structural preconditions, actions tend to *bring about* these principles. Experience in many projects shows that commons work best when they not only allow *inclusive action* which cares for others and their concerns, but actually facilitate such action and make it difficult to act otherwise. In this way, commons gain a meaning that goes beyond their specific concerns. In the following section we want to illustrate that in successful commons-practice, *positive-reciprocal relationships emerge* which make it necessary to resolve conflicts peacefully and constructively. Such a culture of relationships enhances individual freedom because the process of commoning foregrounds the unique characteristics of the people involved and the deeply felt fairness in cooperation. People are simply different from each other, they are special individuals, each and every one of them. Hence it does not help to assume abstract or formal equality.

The neo-liberal discourse, too, draws on this thought, but it mistakes the individual particularity to only be a factor in the fight of all against all. The alternative to a *competitive* development of individual potentials is not found in equalizing the unequal, but in the development of everyone in all their particularity in a way that does not leave anyone behind. In a practice based on a logic

of exclusion, this appears neither thinkable nor achievable. In this logic, the freedom of the other is the *limit* of one's own freedom and the transgression of these boundaries lets rivalries escalate on a regular basis in the violent expression the Manifesto rightfully laments.

Taking Responsibility and Being in Relation

As outlined above, the main feature of the *logic of exclusion* inherent in the production of commodities is the fact that only those advance who push ahead at the expense of others and establish partial alliances along the way. In contrast to this, the *logic of inclusion*⁶ is the determining feature of the commons. Within this logic, the condition for growth is to find sufficient and suitable co-operators. Its fundamentally *voluntary character* - totally contrary to the necessity to market oneself in the logic of commodities – requires structures to be inviting and motivating. Commons projects can only sustain themselves if people feel good in them and can contribute in a way that they subjectively find fulfilling and meaningful. This generally means that it is in the commoners' interest to consider the concerns of others because this is the only way they can reach their shared goal. The logic of inclusion of the commons is geared towards the *development of the unique qualities of the individual person as a prerequisite for the flourishing of all people*. If this succeeds in the context of the commons it could look like this: a person learns a new skill which he or she can then contribute. This will help everyone because tasks at hand can be done better, more easily or by more people. The larger the pool of skills which can be used collectively, the better. This type of relationship of *positive reciprocity*, of potential promoting reciprocal referentiality, differs fundamentally from that of *negative reciprocity* in the structurally exclusive logic of commodities. Rather than creating isolation it creates a *structural communality* (Meretz 2014).

Another essential difference consists in the fact that the production of commodities is essentially determined by *external purposes*. Commodities have to be designed to be sellable. Commons serve *own purposes*. The fulfilment of *needs* can thus also succeed when market or state fail or are blind to particular areas of life. For “the market” the fulfilment of needs is a mere side effect

⁶The logic of inclusion does not rule out exclusions, but they lose their central function. In conditions of the logic of exclusion, inclusions are only a means to a different end – that is, to outcompete others more effectively. On the contrary, the conditions of a logic of inclusion mean that each inclusion promotes further inclusion and is an end in itself. Exclusions are only a negotiable mechanism for the purpose of (preserving) inclusion if the logic of inclusion is not the predominant principle in society as a whole.

and only relevant when it is “marketable” or can be made so. Needs which do not contribute to sales are left unfulfilled. They are *externalized*. In capitalist structures the *transmission of needs* on a societal level takes place via the market or the state *ex post*, that is *after* goods and the attributed benefits and damages have been produced and brought to market. Such conflicts of needs cannot be resolved in hindsight. This isolation of the various needs from their fulfilment (and of each satisfaction of needs from the others) brings each and every one of us into a situation of a *structural absence of responsibility*.

We cannot compensate for these structural deficits individually. No-one can know all externalities which are promoted by ones shopping, never mind avoiding or eliminating them. If even the “ecological” detergent contains palm fat from monocultures, the limits of ethical consumption become evident. Hence the efforts to “shop correctly” fail to bring about the intended effect. Subjectively there may be a “better than” feeling, but that does not make the action emancipatory and self-determined. One might also put it this way: the factual impossibility to act responsibly results in *structural self-hostility*. In fulfilling one need I harm another – of my own or of someone else. And vice versa others unintentionally harm me. Automotive mobility stands against the local residents’ need for quiet, employment against a clean environment, CO₂-reduction “here” against rain forest preservation “there” etc. In the end our actions turn against ourselves because they are subject to conditions in which needs are not brought into mutual reference. *Structural self-hostility* manifests itself in the opposition of differing *partial interests* which cut through and divide the person.

The problem becomes even clearer when we take another look at the logic of the commons. In this logic people have the opportunity to *internalize* their various needs and *communicate them ex ante*. *Internalising* means to integrate all needs and to look for a way to fulfil them comprehensively. If this happens *before* or in the course of production, of a project or process, it becomes possible to co-ordinate the different ideas and wishes, and to negotiate conflicts in a way that no-one asserts himself at the expense of others – e.g. due to power imbalances. This is not easy and the prevailing restrictive conditions mostly put spanners in the wheels of people who are involved in such projects. Fundamentally though, the logic of inclusion in the commons provides a framework for the *structural ability to be responsible*. This is no guarantee for good solutions. Nevertheless, only those who have at their disposal the productive means and resources

for *self-determined* production of living conditions, even have the option to act responsibly with regard to the whole.

Designed Social Relations to Nature

On the one hand, externalisation combined with the necessity to continuously expand the return on capital investment leads to a systematic exploitation of natural resources as if they were infinite. The recognition of their limitation merely leads to continuously increased sophistication of exploitation methods. In the market system, solutions to ecological problems are sought in various ways; market instruments such as emissions trading are currently in favour. The protection of nature is supposed to be achieved by turning it into yet another tradeable commodity. However, in this process nature is subjected to the same commodification mechanisms from which the social sphere already suffers.

On the other hand, an approach which focuses exclusively on “nature protection” is often accompanied by the displacement of people who have lived for centuries in territories which are now declared as nature reserves. Their presence is seen as harmful to nature. It is absurd, however, to protect nature *against* or *from* people. If humans and nature are understood as belonging together, nature can only be protected along *with* the people. Ever since people have existed, many communities have lived with their non-human environment under diverse conditions. They were not intruders but part of this natural environment and did not only take from nature but also gave back to it and shaped it. Such a relationship between humans and the non-human environment which does not endanger the latter, and therefore humans, is indispensable. But under the current structural conditions it is hardly achievable.

The capitalist economy in its commodification and growth compulsion has taken on a life of its own in opposition to ecology. However, in its original Greek meaning of prudently managing a household, the term economy refers to striving to fulfil everybody's needs using available resources. If such an economy is not to destroy its own foundations, consideration for the interactions between human needs and the non-human ecology that satisfies them has to become the basis for all actions. Permaculture, which aims to embed food production in self-maintaining natural cycles, follows this idea. Self-regulatory processes in ecosystems are actively

strengthened and used in order to achieve and improve the basis for a sustainable fulfilment of human needs instead of maximising nature's exploitation in the short term. The prerequisite for this is to consider all ecological and social aspects which are necessary for this kind of relationship to nature. The commons offer a suitable structural framework, because the inclusive and future-oriented mode of action of commoning is all about securing the fulfilment of needs not only in the moment but also in the long-term.

Commons on All Levels

As the examples we presented may suggest, commons are mainly associated with local action in specific projects in which people know each other and can interact with each other directly. An extension of such action frameworks to regional and supra-regional levels hardly seems imaginable due to the necessary (communicative and other) efforts. However, in our view, the time required for the direct – and often redundant – communicative effort to negotiate different needs is regarded as “inefficient” primarily in the context of *enforced time saving* due to the permanent price pressure in partitioned private production. Instead, a mode of production of living conditions founded on the commons is likely to be more efficient when we look at it from the point of view of society as a whole. It is efficient in the sense that it aims towards *prevention, maintenance and avoiding damage* rather than towards *follow-up repair, deterioration and coping with damage*. People also experience commoning to be more individually rewarding because *quality of life* emerges from the actual *time spent* in productive activities because they are voluntary, rather than being outsourced into the split-off realm of family, marriage, leisure time, vacation etc. From a commons perspective the path to a future-oriented social system is not built on renunciation; on the contrary it is paved by a permanently good and fulfilled life for all which, due to the comprehensive inclusion of *all* needs in life, also includes respecting planetary limits.

Let's give some examples to illustrate the great variety of commons projects and their potential to create global networks of cooperation. *Wikipedia* (wikipedia.org) is an online platform which allows us to create and use encyclopedic articles and thus out-cooperated the proprietary, exclusive counterparts such as the *Encyclopedia Britannica* or its German equivalent, the *Brockhaus*.⁷ *Wikispeed* (wikispeed.com) is an open project for the production of cars which are

⁷Free projects can expand their networks of cooperation far more broadly than proprietary businesses. Everyone can participate and use the results freely.

designed modularly, need few resources and hand back the power over the goods produced into the hands of the users. Farm Hack (farmhack.net), Wikihouse (wikihouse.org) and Opendesk (opendesk.cc) are global online platforms to which people all over the world can upload blueprints for machines, houses and furniture that others can then adapt according to their needs and re-create using available locally resources. This exemplary choice of projects could be expanded ad infinitum. There are exciting developments in all fields of production: electronics, pharmaceuticals, bio-tech, robotics, medicine, clothing, etc. All these projects make their blueprints freely available. Open Source and open cooperation are the design principles which result from this practice and without which such collective activity would be impossible.

The differences in the physical qualities of the resulting products compared to their commercial counterparts are remarkable. The products not only look different, but they are normally designed to be modular, accessible, documented, repairable, durable and produced with efficient use of resources. Criteria that are usually ignored under marketing principles became the guiding design principles from the early stages of development. Nevertheless we do not want to idealise such projects. All currently existing commons projects have to address problems and sometimes do so in contradictory ways. It has become evident that all these beginnings have to survive in the *structurally hostile environment* of the capitalist market economy. Therefore financing the projects is an issue time and again. Within the real world settings, they keep having to ask themselves the difficult question, to what degree they will engage with the market logic or manage to resist exchange logics even in their financing (e.g. by crowd-funding, foundation financing or donations).

Polycentric Self-Organisation

Clearly, we consider reforms to alleviate specific excesses of capitalist structures to be insufficient, regardless of whether they are based on the market or on moral appeals. Instead we consider it necessary to think differently and change the structure of our *mode of production* and of the creation of our living conditions. Commons open up possibilities for such changes, theoretically as well as practically. But can they be generalised? Is it possible to develop a perspective for society as a whole on such a basis? Can we produce the necessary goods, services and social structures as commons and not as commodities? There are a range of indicators that suggest that this questions can be answered with a “yes”.

We can think of a society based on commons as a *social macro-net* in which the decentralised commons-units represent nodes distributed throughout the net. In the process of internal differentiation, large social networks divide into functional clusters and hubs that are highly connected. This allows them to be flexibly restructured and to tolerate mistakes, so that partial nets that get cut off can maintain their function when important hubs fail (e.g. in disasters). These properties have already been observed in big commons structures like irrigation systems and have been described as *polycentric self-organisation*. In contrast to hierarchical systems with a single decision-making centre at the apex, commons structures create many centres which take on the differentiated functions that a society with an advanced division of labour needs (re-/production, infrastructures, co-ordination, planning, information etc.). The decisive factor is that these specialised functions remain embedded in the negotiating network of society as a whole, as well as being organised as a commons. Social negotiation therefore would work according to a different logic and would no longer be disconnected from re-/production: society is neither governed by the “invisible hand” of the market nor by a state-run planning administration; instead it plans and organises itself guided by its real needs.

A change of perspective is necessary: instead of alienated planning and organisation of the production processes, our aim is self-planning and self-organisation by the people – producers and users alike. Instead of planning and organising these processes for others, the affected people need to create the conditions and infrastructures themselves. The question is therefore not *whether* there is planning, but for and by whom, how, where and guided by which criteria. In this sense every society is a “planned society.” Hence market systems activate and demand self-planning, but they do so under the conditions and the logic of exclusion, at full own risk and not based on voluntary engagement and security. In contrast to market systems, central planning systems have society as a whole in mind, but due to their inflexible hierarchical structure they can only react slowly to changes. People are basically secure but their creative capability to act is restricted by planning specifications. Control by others and threats to existence suppress creativity and motivation. The change in perspective consists in realising that people can take up their own affairs successfully if they enjoy the appropriate conditions for development, which rarely exist under the conditions of a commodity society – whether market, centrally planned or mixed forms. Replacing the commodity form of goods by the commons can create the

preconditions for a societal negotiation based on polycentric self-organisation which in turn can create the precondition for general human self-determination and flourishing.

Conclusion

We are confident that commons can embody the “mode of living together [...] that values human relationships and cooperation and enables us to challenge one another without resorting to mutual slaughter and in a way that ensures consideration for others and for nature” (LC: 25). However this is not because commoners are better people or follow ethics that others have not yet understood, but because commons are a qualitatively different way of creating living conditions – a way in which it is functional to be inclusive instead of exclusive, resource efficient instead of wasteful, guided by needs and not by return on investment. Such living conditions are neither the Land of Cockaigne nor free of conflict, but they provide the prerequisites to live our differences and negotiate our conflicts in a way that does not push anyone down.

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