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**Urban Commons**

**Moving Beyond State and Market**

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# Contents

<b>Preface</b> .....	7
<i>Markus Kip, Majken Bieniok, Mary Dellenbaugh, Agnes Katharina Müller, Martin Schwegmann</i>	
<b>Seizing the (Every)Day: Welcome to the Urban Commons!</b> .....	9
<b>Perspectives</b>	
<i>Brigitte Kratzwald</i>	
<b>Urban Commons – Dissident Practices in Emancipatory Spaces</b> .....	26
<i>Markus Kip</i>	
<b>Moving Beyond the City: Conceptualizing Urban Commons from a Critical Urban Studies Perspective</b> .....	42
<i>Majken Bieniok</i>	
<b>The Complexity of Urban Commoning from a Psychological Perspective</b> .....	60
<b>Community</b>	
<i>Tobias Kuttler, Angela Jain</i>	
<b>Defending Space in a Changing Urban Landscape – A Study on Urban Commons in Hyderabad, India</b> .....	72
<i>Didi K. Han, Hajime Imamasa</i>	
<b>Overcoming Privatized Housing in South Korea: Looking through the Lens of “Commons” and “the Common”</b> .....	91
<i>Manuel Lutz</i>	
<b>Uncommon Claims to the Commons: Homeless Tent Cities in the US</b> .....	101

## **Institutions**

*Daniel Opařo Ortiz*

<b>Creating and Appropriating Urban Spaces – The Public versus the Commons: Institutions, Traditions, and Struggles in the Production of Commons and Public Spaces in Chile .....</b>	<b>117</b>
---	------------

*Ignacio Castillo Ulloa*

<b>Acting in Reality within the Cranny of the Real: Towards an Alternative Agency of Urban Commons .....</b>	<b>130</b>
--	------------

*Agnes Katharina Müller*

<b>From Urban Commons to Urban Planning – or Vice Versa? “Planning” the Contested Gleisdreieck Territory .....</b>	<b>148</b>
--	------------

*Melissa García Lamarca*

<b>Insurgent Acts of Being-in-Common and Housing in Spain: Making Urban Commons?.....</b>	<b>165</b>
---	------------

## **Resources**

*Ivo Balmer, Tobias Bernet*

<b>Housing as a Common Resource? Decommodification and Self-Organization in Housing – Examples from Germany and Switzerland .....</b>	<b>178</b>
---	------------

*Sören Becker, Ross Beveridge, Matthias Naumann*

<b>Reconfiguring Energy Provision in Berlin. Commoning between Compromise and Contestation .....</b>	<b>196</b>
--	------------

*AK Thompson*

<b>The Battle for Necropolis: Reclaiming the Past as Commons in the City of the Dead .....</b>	<b>214</b>
--	------------

<b>Authors .....</b>	<b>236</b>
----------------------	------------

## Preface

This book is based on the conference *Urban Commons: Moving beyond State and Market* which took place at the Georg Simmel Center for Metropolitan Studies at the Humboldt University, Berlin on September 27 and 28, 2013. It is the product of a two-year-long process of revision and discussion. The result is a condensed publication about urban commons which provides both an overview on the state of affairs as well as an international range of specific case studies.

The editors of this book originally met in the Georg Simmel Center's doctoral colloquium, the Graduate Studies Group. This group consisted of PhD students from diverse disciplinary backgrounds such as architecture, psychology, geography, sociology, and planning, whose research all focused on cities and urban struggles. Nearing the end of our respective doctoral projects, the five of us met one night in summer 2012 to discuss topics and formats for further collaboration.

That night we decided to found the Urban Research Group and organize a conference on urban commons. After some reading and many discussions it occurred to us that this topic addressed a particularly current *zeitgeist*: the discourse on commons brings together valuable models of how to understand the city as a collective resource and offers possible approaches of how to use these resources, for example public space, collective housing and energy supply, in a way that shifts the focus from exchange value to use value.

The commons lens made it possible for us to dig deeper into many matters that were at stake both back in 2012 and today. In the shadow of the financial and euro crisis, the Arab Spring, the Occupy movements, intensifying gentrification in cities around the world (including Berlin), and a growing movement to remunicipalize former public services like water and energy supply, the debate around commons gave us both vital points of reference to address social and economic inequalities concretely in our cities and a lens to analyze and potentially create alternative models of urban resource use.

The conference "Urban Commons: Moving beyond State and Market," which was funded by the Fritz Thyssen Foundation, received considerable attention. Although we had to strictly limit acceptances, we were still able to host a geographically diverse group of researchers and case studies spanning the Americas, Europe,

Asia and Oceania, and including case studies in Germany, India, Chile, South Korea, Spain, Switzerland, and the United States.

We'd like to express our deep thanks to the other members of the Urban Research Group who worked with us to conceptually develop and organize the conference: Dr. Zofia Łapniewska and Katarzyna Puzon. We'd like to thank all of the participants at the conference, whose commentary and involvement created a stimulating atmosphere which motivated us to pursue this edited collection. In a way, they can be conceived as the first peer reviewers, giving critical responses to the various papers and ideas presented. In addition, we'd like to extend our gratitude to the authors who contributed to this volume for engaging our criticisms and requests in several rounds of revisions. Your dedication and effort, sometimes at short notice, were essential in this co-production. We'd also like to thank Peter Neitzke, whose unwavering faith that this publication would be relevant in the contemporary and future discourse on cities and societies was critical in the realization of this project. We were much saddened by his passing shortly before publication.

Finally, we'd like to acknowledge the support of the Georg Simmel Center and its spokesperson, Wolfgang Kaschuba, for hosting the conference; the intellectual and technical support that we received, as well as the use of space and resources for the conference, editorial meetings, and editorial work were instrumental in this endeavor.

We'd be remiss not to extend our gratitude to our partners, friends, and families for their understanding. What started as an intellectual side project turned into a major undertaking requiring countless hours of overtime and late-night meetings. Their support was crucial in allowing us to bring this project to its successful completion.

Agnes, Majken, Markus, Martin and Mary  
Berlin 2015



*Markus Kip, Majken Bieniek, Mary Dellenbaugh, Agnes Katharina Müller,  
Martin Schwegmann*

## **Seizing the (Every)Day: Welcome to the Urban Commons!**

As a result of recent global financial and political crises, more and more people have been seeking out alternative economic and political models beyond market and state. In the face of aggressive austerity measures, the struggle for urban resources has become an explicit struggle over the commons. Many urban movements today have lost confidence in the state as the trustworthy steward for collective consumption, and in the market as the optimal (and equitable) provider of goods and services. The concept of commons has therefore gained popularity, as it promises participatory self-governance against state tutelage as well as more equity in addressing human needs.<sup>1</sup> It is also for this reason that we see alternative forms of commoning for health care, food, housing, or public spaces emerging most prominently in places devastated by austerity reforms.

Originally, the concept of commons derived from the rural experience of shared natural resources such as pastures, fishing grounds, water, and so on; this concept has, however, also been applied to other areas of human production and reproduction. Charlotte Hess,<sup>2</sup> for example, has used the term “new commons” to mark collective governance mechanisms in the production of things such as “scientific knowledge, voluntary associations, climate change, community gardens, wikipe-dias, cultural treasures, plant seeds, and the electromagnetic spectrum.” This rise of the new commons also coincides with an ongoing urbanization of the world population. It appears pedestrian to argue that cities are the foremost spaces (but clearly not the only ones) in which these new commons take shape. As such, the collective endeavor of the book has been to explore the link between these developments further. More specifically, this publication examines the struggle for urban commons and asks what, if anything, is specifically “urban” about them.

Research on urban commons has gained momentum in the last decade<sup>3</sup> and activists have increasingly taken up this notion to understand their problems in urban contexts. We, the editors, have witnessed the emergence of such commoning



Figure 1. Sidewalk in Berlin.

efforts in Berlin and elsewhere, which led us to wonder how these phenomena play into the political landscape and which urban research tools and methods might contribute to their understanding. These commoning efforts ranged from small-to large-scale and involved user groups of various sizes and compositions. As an initial approximation of the idea of the urban commons, we suggest that urban commons are about collectively appropriating and regulating the shared concerns of the everyday.

A first example presented itself when residents placed pots, boxes and old bathtubs on the sidewalk in front of their building in which to grow flowers and vegetables (Figure 1). This rather banal action was followed by a lively discussion within the neighborhood on whether those residents had the right to do so, and the aesthetic value of such actions. Is this an edible beautification of the streetscape for everyone to enjoy or an unsolicited privatization of public space? A few concerned citizens issued complaints to the local public affairs office (*Ordnungsamt*), but, interestingly, the landlord never forwarded complaints to the tenants in the house. Did he like the initiative of his tenants, was he merely indifferent to it, or did he hope to increase the value of his housing asset through tenant-led beautification efforts?

The Tempelhofer Feld (the former city airport Berlin Tempelhof) might be considered a second example of a commons on a much larger scale, involving a larger area and more users (Figure 2). After it was closed, the former city airport was not immediately repurposed, and the unplanned open space became increasingly



Figure 2. Tempelhofer Feld.

popular among citizens who used it for various leisure activities such as biking, kite-surfing, picnicking, and gardening, or recognized its ecological value. As the real-estate market in Berlin began to recover from its post-2008 slump, the Berlin Senate made a plan to develop a part of this area and planned to allow private investors to construct upscale housing on its premises. Citizens' action committees like Squat Tempelhof and 100% Tempelhofer Feld were organized over the years; the local activists gained considerable public support in preserving the Feld in its unplanned, unbuilt state. The fight to preserve the Tempelhofer Feld as a common found its peak at the referendum (*Volksentscheid*) of 2014, which successfully blocked the Senate's plans.

The concept of commons may also be used as an analytical lens to understand the squatting practices of refugees in different German cities, like in Berlin at both Oranienplatz (Figure 3) and the Gerhart-Hauptmann-Schule between 2012 and 2014. The justification for these actions cannot be understood simply along the lines of public and private goods, services, and spaces. While a part of the protest certainly centers on survival and better housing conditions than in the German refugee camps (*Flüchtlingslager*), the squats are also a place from which to demand legal rights (for asylum), as well as the abolition of the *Flüchtlingslager* and compulsory residence (*Residenzpflicht*). But indeed the protests are also about collective self-determination as a marginalized group, the creation of a space for public communication about these issues, and the forging of a sense of *common* humanity between



Figure 3. Refugee camp at Oranienplatz in Berlin, November 7, 2013.

citizens and non-citizens. Without many resources to count on, after a year of occupation the living conditions at Oranienplatz became pretty miserable, especially in winter. From one perspective, the self-organized refugee camps both at Oranienplatz and the Gerhart-Hauptmann-Schule became a cheap way for the state<sup>4</sup> to let itself off the hook of supporting refugees economically, while at the same time consciously ignoring the stressful living conditions so as to fuel internal infighting in the camp. Nevertheless, when the local state decided to clear both areas with police force, it still encountered heavy resistance and protest.

The emphasis on (political and economic) autonomy, the rejection of state tutelage, and the occupation of public spaces that can be found in these examples connects them with other global movements such as the Arab Spring, the *indignados* or the Occupy movement.<sup>5</sup> The urban context of these contestations is striking. However, in what way does an urban setting influence or condition commoning efforts? From an abstract perspective, urban space might involve both the facilitation and hindrance of commoning efforts. On the one hand, the diversity and density that characterize the urban structure create a fertile field to mobilize like-minded people or to create and test new social strategies. These are important assets for the development of new collective resource management forms at different scales. On the other hand, the anonymity, indifference, and narcissistic differentiation that are also often connected with urban lifestyles can function as significant barriers to such commoning efforts. In this sense, this collected work seeks to explore in

greater detail how the historically and geographically specific urban condition has shaped the experience, development, and preservation of commons.

Bringing together a variety of case studies from different areas of the world, the aim of this volume is to examine the specific conditions surrounding urban commons, particularly how commons practices have developed in relation to state and capital while trying to push forward a political alternative beyond both. These intriguing cases have required us to question our previously held assumptions and imaginations of what commons are. Our book is premised on the idea that bringing theories of urban space and commons into dialogue with one another offers a new vantage point from which to consider the contentious constitution of the commons. In the following, we will highlight key aspects of the concept of the commons and the urban that set the foundation for the contributions in this book.

## Defining commons

A wide spectrum of theoretical background literature defines commons in conspicuously similar ways. Most definitions present commons as a construct constituted of three main parts: (a) *common* resources, (b) institutions (i.e. *commoning* practices) and (c) the communities (called *commoners*) who are involved in the production and reproduction of commons.<sup>6</sup>

For example, Andreas Exner and Brigitte Kratzwald, two commons activists and researchers, stated that:

commons [...] always consist of three elements, a resource (that may be material or immaterial), people who use the resource (often called commoners in the literature) and the process of negotiation on how to use that resource, thus the rules of appropriation.<sup>7</sup> [Translation: authors]

This parallels descriptions in the work of Silke Helfrich, the well-known researcher on commons in the German context, and Jörg Haas, a climate and energy expert, who describe commons as consisting of things (resources, objects, spaces), systems and practices (regulation, commoning), and the communities that are involved.<sup>8</sup> Using the same analytic triad, the political economist Massimo De Angelis outlines commons as follows:

[C]onceptualizing the commons involves three things at the same time. First, all commons involve some sort of common pool resources,

understood as non-commodified means of fulfilling people's needs. Second, the commons are necessarily created and sustained by communities [...]. Communities are sets of commoners who share these resources and who define for themselves the rules through which they are accessed and used. [...] [T]he third and most important element in terms of conceptualizing the commons is the verb "to common" – the social process that creates and reproduces the commons.<sup>9</sup>

Another definition of commons is given by geographer David Harvey, who sees commons:

as an unstable and malleable social relation between a particular self-defined social group and those aspects of its actually existing or yet-to-be-created social and/or physical environment deemed crucial to its life and livelihood.<sup>10</sup>

Even if not enumerated, the three constituent parts can still be recognized in Harvey's definition: (a) "an unstable and malleable social relation," or "institution" we might say, (b) "a particular self-defined social group," in other words a "community" and (c) "aspects of its actually existing or yet-to-be-created social and/or physical environment," i.e. a "resource."

The three prongs can even be found in Elinor Ostrom's well-known "eight design principles" for common-pool resources.<sup>11</sup> The Nobel Prize winner in economics included two elements of the triad in her first principle calling for "clearly defined boundaries" which relate to the boundaries of the *resources* as well as the *community* of users.<sup>12</sup> The following seven principles focus on the third element, the *institutions* (commoning), in particular to "match rules governing use of common goods to local needs and conditions" (2), "ensure that those affected by the rules can participate in modifying the rules" (3), "make sure that the rule-making rights of community members are respected by outside authorities" (4), "develop a system, carried out by community members, for monitoring members' behavior" (5), "use graduated sanctions for rule violators" (6), and to "provide accessible, low-cost means for dispute resolution" (7). In her last principle, Ostrom advises to "build responsibility for governing the common resource in nested tiers from the lowest level up to the entire interconnected system" (8).<sup>13</sup>

Where Ostrom focuses on the institutional aspects, David Bollier, another commons scholar, elaborates on the resource characteristics and their effects on governing commons. Bollier categorizes common resources based on four main characteristics:

(1) Depletability, which is related to the question “can the resource be ‘used up’ or not?”<sup>14</sup> An example would be an urban garden (which can be depleted through overuse) versus radio transmissions (whose use by one person or group does not reduce the amount of the resource available for others);

(2) Excludability, related to the question “can access be restricted?” An example here would be a collectively run child-care facility (excludable) versus clean air (non-excludable);<sup>15</sup>

(3) Rivalrous use, with the related question “does one user’s use of the resource take away from others?”<sup>16</sup> Too many visitors to a public park may impair the enjoyment or utility of other users, who appreciate the park’s silence (rivalrous). Squatting or participating in a road blockade, however, does not necessarily change the utility of such commons for other users (non-rivalrous) – to the contrary;

(4) Regulation, with the related question being “is the resource regulated? Are there rules governing the use of the resource?”<sup>17</sup> Providing households with electrical energy in self-governed fashion arguably involves a more explicit formulation of rules than hitting the dance floor at a neighborhood celebration.

In light of these four criteria, Ostrom’s principles regarding institutions, and the complex nature of use and negotiation surrounding the group characteristics of the commoners, it is easy to understand why the commons debate is so complex.

In sum, the definitions of commons have led us to three important questions to ask in the examination of a potential commons with regard to the nature of the resource, the institution, and the user group(s), namely:

- What is the common resource?
- What are good practices and relevant relationships between commoners and different commons?
- Who belongs to the “we” of the community?

These three questions are relevant for both traditional commons such as fisheries, as well as the complex setting of urban commons discussed in this volume. The urban condition, as will be discussed in depth in the following section, may present particular complexities in the commons debate. For example, Elinor Ostrom’s idea that clearly defined resource boundaries are a fundamental prerequisite for any

commoning effort (as discussed in the eight principles above) may be challenged by the urban condition. Urban commons are not just local; they are often constituted by processes at several scales.

## Defining the urban

As various authors note, “the urban” also entails promises framed as the right to the city that could form the basis of resistance to the enclosing forces of state and capital.<sup>18</sup> Lefebvre’s idea of the right to the city in fact draws on an understanding of the city as an *oeuvre*, as an ongoing and collective work of art, created, used, and reshaped by its inhabitants, an idea with striking similarities to the idea of the commons. The more mainstream concept of “the urban” has a very different ideation of space. “The urban” is widely taken as a synonym for “the local,” and the city is understood as an “entity,”<sup>19</sup> at times also including aspects of density and scale. Criticizing the global paradigm of urbanism, also referred to as the discourse of an “urban age,” Brenner and Schmid argue that the range of variation, various measurement techniques, and local and national thresholds involved in international aggregate statistics of global urbanism make the definition of a space as a “city” more or less arbitrary.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, these definitions are based on the fundamental assumption that “global settlement space can and must be divided neatly into urban or rural containers.”<sup>21</sup> Other accounts identify the city as having a specific form and shape, such as the density and height of built structures, or the presence and particular order of various functional areas (i.e. housing, business districts, commercial districts), famously divided into dwelling, work, leisure, and circulation (see also Le Corbusier’s version of the Athens Charter published in 1943). Another strand of urban studies has latched onto the concept of global cities<sup>22</sup> as the epitome of what it means to be a city.

As urban scholars rooted in the critical lineage of urban studies, we conceive of the urban at a higher level of abstraction than the (local) city. The differentiation between “the city as a local entity” and “the urban” is not easy, but it is crucial particularly with respect to the challenge of the commons. Two particular insights on “the urban” can be derived from the existing literature in critical urban studies.

First, the urban has been conceived in terms of its multi-scalar constitution and its linkages to other spaces and places. This idea was predominantly drawn from a



critique of political economy and conceives of urbanization as a global process that links various places and scales with each other, from the body to the global. Drawing on the work of Henri Lefebvre, Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid even claim that we are living in a situation of “planetary urbanization;”<sup>23</sup> urbanization is allegedly the prevailing mode of existence for our societies.

Second, the urban can also be understood as the realm of (modern) everyday activity. Imagined as a cultural process of mediating individual and everyday experiences with the requirements of capital accumulation and political hegemony, “the urban” functions as a prism to scrutinize how the logic of capital and state power seeps into the various experiences and tactics for coping with day-to-day life. The anonymity inherent with large and complex urban agglomerations may be at odds with the ideals of decentralized commons in which commoners know each other face-to-face. Several urbanists<sup>24</sup> however, value just these aspects of urban culture (i.e. anonymity), as they also embody liberation from forms of peer pressure and other kinds of social control, and function as a facilitator for diverse urban cultures.

Capturing the urban character of change and diversity, David Harvey succinctly states: “the city is the site where people of all sorts and classes mingle, however reluctantly and agonistically, to produce a common if perpetually changing and transitory life.”<sup>25</sup>

Having conceptualized the wide range of dimensions of the urban, we might sum up “the urban” as a spatial organization of society. It is comprised of structural aspects, i.e. the acceleration and densification of connections, which are materially embodied in the development of the built environment, but also cultural aspects, i.e. ways of dealing with difference and complexity, which are based in the micro-physics of the everyday encounter rather than sovereign planning. In order to circumvent the prevalent method of deriving theory from a set of urban experiences which are limited to the Global North, which view ‘Third World’ cities “as problems, requiring diagnosis and reform,”<sup>26</sup> we have made a concerted effort to also consider cities of both the Global North and Global South in our reflections. We have aimed for a perspective on “ordinary cities”<sup>27</sup> though we are also aware that the majority of our case studies are located in metropolitan centers.

The challenge of the urban commons is that any such commoning effort is subjected to the urban condition, albeit in different ways and to different degrees. On the one hand, urban commons have to deal with the challenge of devising strategic scales and boundaries for collective action. On the other hand, the ongoing

urbanization of society, with its mobilities, ephemerality, and diversity of subjectivities, constantly undermines and challenges boundaries. The question is: what kinds of institutions are needed in such a context of diversity and (at least partial) anonymity? And how should we think of the process of collaboration between these diverse urban actors? In the end, a shared set of common values and norms for any kind of social institutionalization seems inevitable.

Boundaries that create a sense of community at one moment may be perceived as a form of (unjustified) exclusion at another moment. Accusations of exclusivity thus might be raised against some commons. And clearly, any commons project that seeks to overcome state and market will need to consider these accusations seriously so as not to reproduce social divisions. Alternatively, boundaries could also be challenged from within; urban commoners might leave commoning endeavors, whether due to geographical mobility or because they lose a sense of identification with the community. A commons with a shrinking number of participants, however, is also likely to face challenges to reproduce itself. Committed participants may be desperately needed to keep up that neighborhood park or to hold (and renovate) that squat. Besides topographical mobility, commoners as urban actors are also likely to develop interests and identities in different directions. In this situation, urban commoners thus constantly need to negotiate and rearticulate the “we.” Given such ongoing changes and developments, how can commoners still maintain collective interests and identities?

Another challenge of boundaries refers to the interrelation of different commons. Harvey pointed out that we should acknowledge the limits of horizontality as an organizational principle between commons.<sup>28</sup> In such a view, decentralization and autonomy are primary vehicles for producing greater inequality through neoliberalization, and therefore the interaction between autonomous (commons) units has to be regulated by rules which have to be established, asserted, enforced, and actively policed by a higher-order hierarchical authority.<sup>29</sup> Drawing on the work of Murray Bookchin, Harvey<sup>30</sup> has suggested a federated structure among various commons.

In each case, urban commons must be constantly vigilant in order to negotiate and revise their boundaries and institutional dynamics. In each instance, commons must keep the influences of state and market at bay while at the same time “leading the dance”<sup>31</sup> with them. Depending on externalities for accumulation, both capital and state have consciously latched onto urban life as a source of revitalization.<sup>32</sup> New forms of collaboration, social and cultural reproduction, technological inno-

vations, fashion, and so on are important impulses for reinvigorating capital accumulation.<sup>33</sup> Initiatives to create “commons,” such as networks of small entrepreneurs, subcultural producers, initiatives offering direct services to the marginalized and urban gardening, are welcomed and even facilitated by governments in order to (re-)valorize urban space and lessen the impacts of economic restructuring.<sup>34</sup> However, at the same time, the creative and reproductive potential of the urban commons is undermined by new attempts to exploit and control (i.e. enclose) them, which themselves are compounded by austerity politics.

## The challenge of urban commons

Spelling out this challenge for the three dimensions of commons, we should note:

- Urban commoners’ involvement in ongoing processes of mobility and social differentiation requires a rethinking of Ostrom’s requirement for clear boundaries of commoners and their *communities*. Urban commoners thus should be thought of as engaging in constant boundary negotiation.
- Urban commons *institutions* thus confront the challenge of developing processes for such boundary-drawing and this negotiation of the relationships among commoners with different identities, mobilities, needs, and abilities. This task, in combination with the large-scale and multi-scalar constitution of the commons, increases the complexity for governance, making face-to-face relations virtually impossible.
- Urban commons *resources* should be considered from the perspective of the multiple scales involved in producing and consuming commons. Also, it should be carefully distinguished that an urban resource may mean different things to different people. Not taking resources as a “given” also requires closer scrutiny at the various ways in which resources are consumed, used or reproduced.

These are serious challenges of the urban commons for which we still lack any clear principles or rules. The fact that none are readily available, but will need to be developed in a process of negotiation, could be interpreted as inherently urban. The contributions in this collection tackle these challenges in different ways, offering different accounts of how urban commons have emerged, and been contested, enclosed and/or protected.

## Overview of the contributions

The edited collection is divided into four sections. The *first section* provides a variety of conceptual perspectives on the urban commons. *Brigitte Kratzwald's* contribution considers urban commons as “dissident practices in emancipatory spaces.” Kratzwald sets the conceptual foundation of commons for this volume and argues that cities have become hotbeds for political contestations around collective goods exacerbated by neoliberal austerity measures. Nevertheless, she also points out that “the theoretical discussion of urban commons is a relatively new phenomenon and must first create its own foundation.” Assessing the historical emergence of the commons in rural England, she argues with Silke Helfrich that “common goods don't simply exist, they are created.” In this vein, Kratzwald highlights the constant need for commons to reaffirm themselves vis-à-vis state and capital, and critically appraises Ostrom's principles for durable commons.

In his contribution, *Markus Kip* focuses on the concept of urban space by drawing on discussions from the field of critical urban studies. Considering the recent academic hype around “urban commons,” he identifies the lack of an explicit take on what makes commons urban. Kip argues firstly that the negotiation of boundaries and solidarities requires greater analytic attention, as the multi-scalar constitution of urban space as well as processes of social differentiation present commoners with a constant challenge to establish a common ground for collective praxis. Secondly, he asserts that urban commons can only survive and prevail if their expansion matches that of capital.

Such expansion, however, is accompanied by several complexities, as *Majken Bieniok* outlines in her contribution. From a psychological perspective, Bieniok stresses the significance of social dilemmas, i.e. “situations in which the decision that has to be taken either supports the fulfillment of short-term self-interests or long-term collective interests.” Psychological research provides interesting insights regarding the motivational, cognitive, and perceptual aspects involved in commoning efforts. Bieniok finds that the complexity characteristic of an urbanizing world poses difficulties for social cooperation and goes on to critically engage Vincent Ostrom's and David Harvey's proposals for cooperation among commons.

The following three sections are loosely grouped according to the three commons dimensions. Although each of these dimensions never exists in isolation from

each other, the various contributions concentrate on the three dimensions to differing degrees.

The *second section* includes three contributions that offer insights and questions on the issue of community. In their study of the Begum Bazaar in Hyderabad, India, *Tobias Kuttler* and *Angela Jain* take a rather unconventional perspective on the negotiations of street space as a form of commoning. They found no strict group boundaries of commoners and no explicit sense of identity as a community. Kuttler and Jain's ethnographic research on appropriation and negotiation patterns suggests that "the creation of commons [...] is realized successfully in the everyday appropriation of physical space and the production of social space." This real-existing commons, however, is marked by hierarchies and social inequalities and thus is far removed from the ideal model that Ostrom and others have conceived.

The contribution by *Didi Han* and *Hajime Imamasa* takes us to the recently established and currently expanding commune project *Bin-Zib*, with various "guest" houses in Seoul, South Korea. Han and Imamasa situate the emergence of this community in the context of the heated real-estate market in Seoul, which has created severe housing shortages and inequities. What is particularly striking about this community is its radical openness to newcomers and the absence of a "political ideology, program or bureaucratic structure." Beyond creating simply a housing commons, the residents also generate new forms of "being-in-common," through living arrangements and engagements with their social environment.

*Manuel Lutz* considers homeless tent cities in the US as an "uncommon" form of commons that has seen a dramatic increase post-2008. Although these tent cities may be described as "intentional communities," their intentionality relates primarily to shared resources and basic survival. In view of the larger political economic system that produces homelessness, one might suspect it to be a community-against-its-own-will. Lutz, however, emphasizes the agency and self-affirmation of these tent cities as communities resisting prevalent modes of governing the homeless. Against state modes of disciplining homeless people through shelters and specifically tailored services aimed at "rehabilitating" the homeless to become "housing ready," the mere existence of these communities already suggests that the real problem lies not in the homeless but in sub-standard housing.

The *third section* assembles contributions that offer intriguing insights into the practices of commoning and their contested institutionalization. *Daniel Opaço Ortiz* discusses the events around the "*toma de Peñalolén*," the appropriation of land for an

informal settlement in Santiago de Chile, Chile. A former private lot was taken over in 1999 by *pobladores* (slum dwellers), drawing on a long history of such praxis in Chile. Opazo suggests looking at this settlement as a commons that was cut short. In 2005, the state purchased the land and evicted the residents, with the official argument that such form of (citizen) appropriation is not constitutional. The state thereby discursively transformed “the *pobladores*’ struggle for the right to the city and housing into an organized pressure group with a sort of ‘privatizing agenda.’”

The case study of *Ignacio Castillo Ulloa*, by contrast, exhibits a more successful outcome of a commons struggle. Using the works of Foucault and Lacan as theoretical scaffolding, Castillo scrutinizes how an urban movement in San José, Costa Rica was able to claim an elementary school, a public library, and a park for its own purposes. Although the neighborhood was relegated to the “excluded periphery” by state plans and dominated by centralized authorities and traditional political parties, Castillo advances the argument that this case of “radical commoning” became possible due to the “crannies of the Real.” “The Real” of planning and control devices, as Castillo shows, has not been able to fully absorb (the lived) “reality” thus allowing for the “perennial possibility for counteraction, for the insurrection of local knowledges and languages, for the imagining an alternative future in present tense.”

*Agnes Katharina Müller* looks at the contestations around the Gleisdreieck territory in Berlin. She tracks the legacy of these contestations from its former marginal location adjacent to the Berlin Wall to its post-reunification transformation into a coveted real-estate location. Throughout this history, various actors with different stakes in this territory formed coalitions to intervene against official plans. Müller proposes the consideration of these coalitions as commoning efforts that were able to disrupt official planning procedures to implement a more participatory “bottom-up” process. These coalitions were able to safeguard the Gleisdreieck territory as a common space to a certain extent, and pushed the municipal government to officially recognize it as such.

A case study on commoning as an “insurgent act” is also presented by *Melissa García Lamarca*. Looking at the 2007 bust of real-estate speculation in Spain and the resultant housing evictions, her chapter takes a closer look at a movement organizing against such evictions called the “Platform for Mortgage Affected People.” Since 2009, the PAH has expanded to 200 branches nationwide, has successfully blocked 1,130 evictions, and “rehoused” 1,150 people in thirty recuperated buildings. García relates the movement’s “being-in-common” to the “collective recuper-

ation of housing, through the relationships built between the occupying group and their social and physical environment as they dwell together and organize themselves.” Considering its future, she raises the tricky question of how such a movement can become both emancipatory and prevail in the long-run.

The *fourth section* centers on the resource dimension of urban commons. It starts off with *Ivo Balmer* and *Tobias Bernet’s* examination of housing models in Germany and Switzerland from the perspective of commons. The authors scrutinize these models on the continuum formed by two criteria deemed crucial for the assessment of commons, namely the degree of decommodification and the degree of self-organization. Although public policy interventions in the housing sector are considered necessary and justified, Balmer and Bernet point to their political vulnerability in view of strategies of privatization. As an alternative, they favorably assess a “creative hack” of property rights in order to provide housing as a kind of common resource, namely the organization of collectively owned housing in the form of a private company.

Another central urban resource is the infrastructure related to electricity supply. *Sören Becker*, *Ross Beveridge* and *Matthias Naumann* follow the recent citizen campaigns to recomunalize Berlin’s electricity network which was privatized in 1997. The issue of energy provision galvanized citizens’ initiatives due to its relevance to various popular issues, including environmental protection, preservation of resources, democratic participation, and social equity. The two campaigns considered involved different commons politics; one was based on a cooperative ownership model, the other on a model of public control and accountability.

Last, but not least, *AK Thompson* concludes the volume with a fundamental and provocative consideration of the commons. “The Battle for Necropolis” expands the scope of what is ultimately at stake in any commoning effort. Thompson writes that, “it is precisely to the themes of *politics as war* and the *persistence of the dead* that we must turn if we hope to advance our struggles for the commons beyond their current state of wishful anticipation – a state that stimulates our longing for social transformation even as it thwarts the realization of our aims.” In this fashion, Thompson unravels “the past” and “territory” as crucial resources that commoning projects need to claim if they want to have any political significance.

We hope that this volume inspires further rigorous discussion about the meaning and practice of collectively seizing the everyday. We are excited to be part of this commoning process.

## Notes

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- 2 Charlotte Hess, "Mapping the New Commons", SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, July 1, 2008); <http://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=1356835>.
- 3 See chapter by Kip, this volume.
- 4 "The state" is a generalization in this example and does not describe the often antagonizing forces on district, regional, and national level.
- 5 George Caffentzis and Silvia Federici, "Commons Against and Beyond Capitalism," *Upping the Anti*, no. 15 (September 2013): 83–97.
- 6 Yochai Benkler, "The Political Economy of Commons", in *Genes, Bytes and Emissions: To Whom Does the World Belong*, ed. Silke Helfrich (Berlin: Heinrich-Böll-Foundation, 2009), 1, 3. <http://us.boell.org/2010/10/06/genes-bytes-and-emissions-whom-does-world-belong-economic-governance> (accessed January 26, 2015).
- 7 Andreas Exner and Brigitte Kratzwald, *Solidarische Ökonomie & Commons: Eine Einführung* (Vienna: Mandelbaum, 2012), 23.
- 8 Silke Helfrich and Jörg Haas, "The Commons: A New Narrative for Our Times," in *Genes, Bytes and Emissions: To Whom Does the World Belong*, ed. Silke Helfrich (Berlin: Heinrich-Böll-Foundation, 2009), 1. <http://us.boell.org/2010/10/06/genes-bytes-and-emissions-whom-does-world-belong-economic-governance> (accessed January 26, 2015).
- 9 Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides, "On the Commons: A Public Interview with Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides," *An Architektur & e-flux journal*, no. 17 (August 2010): 4–7.
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- 11 Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
- 12 Ostrom, *Governing the Commons*, 91.
- 13 Jay Walljasper, "Elinor Ostrom's 8 Principles for Managing A Commons," *On the Commons*, October 2, 2011, <http://www.onthecommons.org/magazine/elinor-ostroms-8-principles-managing-commons> (accessed December 15, 2014).
- 14 David Bollier, "The Commons: A Neglected Sector of Wealth-Creation," in *Genes, Bytes and Emissions: To Whom Does the World Belong*, ed. Silke Helfrich (Berlin: Heinrich-Böll-Foundation, 2009), 5. <http://us.boell.org/2010/10/06/genes-bytes-and-emissions-whom-does-world-belong-economic-governance> (accessed January 26, 2015).
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Benkler, "The Political Economy of Commons," 1.
- 18 See, for example, Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, ed. and transl. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996); Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Andy Merrifield, *Dialectical Urbanism: Social Struggles in the Capitalist City* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002).
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- 21 Ibid., 14.
- 22 Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).
- 23 Brenner and Schmid, "Planetary Urbanization."
- 24 See, for example, Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).
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- 27 Jennifer Robinson, *Ordinary Cities: Between Modernity and Development* (London: Routledge, 2006)
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- 29 Ibid., 83.
- 30 Ibid., 81.
- 31 John Holloway, *Crack Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2010); see also contribution by Kratzwald, this volume.
- 32 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 154–156.
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