

Introduction

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In context of the economic and financial crisis, which has profoundly reshaped cities and regions around the globe, alternative forms of social and economic organisation are increasingly discussed in urban and regional research and practice. Particularly commons are (again) hotly debated as an alternative way to organize the production, distribution and consumption of certain resources. Recently, a number of urban, regional and planning studies are devoted to the analysis and evaluation of commons in spatial development, using a range of different theoretical rationales. These include amongst others research inspired by the pioneering work of Elinor Ostrom (1994) to political-economic (David Harvey 2012) and socio-political coined strands of thought (Armutskonferenz 2012). Most of the research strands basically underline that commons are made through socio-spatial practices of the commoners. Kratzwald (2015) reminds that commons include a certain resource, the commoners as actors, and the rules of appropriation and use of the resource, which are defined by the commoners themselves. Commoning generally refers to relational processes and practices of collectively self-regulating the production/appropriation and/or distribution, and/or maintenance and/or consumption of resources, often with the aim of improving social cohesion and solidarity in societies.

From a planning perspective commons are frequently interpreted as a new way of steering and coordinating collective action beyond state and market, of improving the efficiency of production and consumption of environmental resources, of facilitating the accessibility of basic goods and services, of empowering local residents, of improving social cohesion by building social capital or of strengthening citizens' participation and self-organisation in planning projects. In the respective scientific literature commons are seen and interpreted from different perspectives: economic theory ("theory of goods"), governance (as a form of self-governance), urban politics (actors' interests and processes of dealing with conflicts), and from the perspective of transforming economy and society more generally (with an anti-capitalist attitude).

However, commons are also critically discussed as part of neoliberal spatial development or as niche for a small urban elite. Furthermore, the goals of promoting and strengthening commons are intrinsically linked to the motives and interests of the actors involved. For the local state, support of urban commons could be a welcomed measure to, on the one hand, strengthen the self-organisation of civil society actors concerning the provision of certain resources, and on the other hand, to financially unburden the local state. Gradually, local state actors instrumentalise urban

commoning practices for improving the image of the city in an increasingly competitive environment, in other words to become more attractive for tourists and foreign capital. For civil society actors urban commons may serve as a way to actively take part in urban development, to claim their "right to the city", to build up social capital and solidarity, and to emancipate from hegemonic structures established by neoliberal urban development policies. However, commoners have to reflect on the impacts of their practices, particularly concerning inclusion and who is benefitting from it, how they might induce further privatisation of urban resources, and concerning the question how to deal with co-optation efforts by the local state. Simultaneously, commoning requires particular socio-political preconditions that incentivize engagement, such as openness and mutual trust. Commoning is embedded in existing actor constellations, power relations and structures of social inequality while running danger of re-producing these relations and structures. From a governance perspective it is important to consider the question how the practices of commoning can be "upscaled" (e.g. on the city regional level) without losing their emancipatory power emanating from the micro-level. In order to keep the management of the common pool resource effective, stable internal governance mechanisms are necessary in the form of internal manifestos or even legal statutory.

This special issue wants to contribute to this discourse by critically reflecting on as well as empirically and theoretically questioning the potentials and challenges of commons and commoning practices, particularly in the fields of urban planning, housing, urban renewal, and urban green space.

The first contribution by Nina Vogel develops a transformative planning approach which combines traditional, more top-down oriented planning with urban commons and forms of co- or self-organisation. She argues that commoning offers an alternative perspective on governance. Her governance approach in planning called DINE combines three spheres: a well formalised "dynamic master plan", "In-between uses" temporarily allowing for delegation of power, and "Emergent arrangements" that occur in an informal and bottom-up way. According to her commoning can be situated in the last two spheres. Vogel offers a governance approach which takes the plurality of urban societies into account and therefore contributes to a more just, sustainable and democratically strengthened urban planning.

Arvanitidis and Nasioka look at commons and common resources, in this case urban green space in Volos, Greece, from commoners' or users' perspective. In analysing qual-

ities, property rights and the willingness of residents to get involved in self-governance of urban green commons, their text looks at basic preconditions for involvement in collective management arrangements. Arvanitidis and Nasioka thus help explain why residents may refrain from joining in collective resource management efforts and which preconditions are necessary to foster collective action in neighbourhoods.

Katherina Hammer and Romana Brait use the commons as a theoretical framework to analyse the Viennese “Grätzloase” program, introduced by the city government in 2015 and aiming at fostering the participation of citizens in shaping public space in their neighbourhood. For them commons mainly figures as an alternative way to organize economy and society. In their analysis of different initiatives and projects supported within this program they point to severe forms of exclusion, mainly institutional and socio-economic. Spatial distribution of these initiatives in Vienna shows patterns of inequality, and some projects have a commercial motive, contrasting the idea of commoning.

The impact of commoning on local planning is in the focus of Delsante and Bertolino’s contribution to this issue. Delsante and Bertolino understand commons as a relational practice using Milan’s M^AC^AO (Macao) commoning collective as an example. They show how bottom-up initiatives as Macao can influence urban development of brownfields and vacant spaces in the city. Macao’s commoning activities brought vacant buildings under common management providing citizens with much needed space and their common pool resource manifesto is recognized in Milan’s urban development policy.

A similar influence of commoning activities on urban planning policies is drawn by Laura Belik in her analysis of the ramifications of the initiatives advocating for transforming the Minhocao highway in Sao Paulo into a commonly

managed space. Thereby, she specifically looks at the side effects of commoning activities on the neighbourhood: to what extent are commons fostering gentrification and the displacement of the poor? In her contribution, she opposes concepts of urban democracy to commoning activities, highlighting the fuzziness of the border between bottom-up empowerment through commons and incentivizing forces of gentrification in neighbourhoods. In a Marxist tradition, Belik is arguing how casually practices of commoning may be subjected to a capitalistic logic of the production of urban space.

Sabine Gruber dwells on the principles of governing characteristics for commons and the market in the policy field of housing. She basically interprets commons as an alternative of governing compared to the market and the state. In order to understand governing principles Gruber looks at co-housing projects especially in Vienna, which are a self-determined form of governing for her. At the end she discusses how the governance principles of commons like sharing resources and taking part in collective action could be transferred to a macroscale and argues for a “gradual approach” concerning equal distribution between social groups on such a scale.

Grigoryan and Paulsson shift the focus to the legal framing of common spaces in apartment buildings. More specifically, their contribution looks at management issues related to common spaces in multi-apartment buildings in post-socialist countries. Common rooms are the common pool resource at stake here. While showing that each case study built its regulatory system from local traditions, Grigoryan and Paulsson aim at laying out propositions to improve legal framework for collective management of common spaces in apartment buildings in order to avoid the tragedy of the commons.

References

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