

Defining and discussing the notion of commoning

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In particular, the present paper has contributed to Chapter 4 on 'Commoning', which focuses on the trends and pathways in relation to the governance, planning and provision of access to housing, land and basic services. Through the lens of 'commoning', the chapter explores how local and regional governments can promote approaches focused on collective action that contribute to urban equality.

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1. A critical introduction to the notion of commoning

1.1 A contested term

Commoning, or to common, is a contested term. For anti-capitalist thinkers and social movements, commoning refers to the struggle “within, against and beyond” both states and private capitalism.¹ Commoning indicates a strategy for collective action aimed at building a systemic and alternative mode of governing and production.² In this process, the means (to common) are as important as the ends (the commons).³ From this standpoint, **commoning is a social practice of radical transformation of property regimes and, therefore, social relationships.**⁴

Commoning is understood as a system change to exit capitalist production, as a process of self-determination and autonomy from the state and global markets.⁵ In this anti-capitalist framework, commoning has coincided with different historical struggles. Notably, it was commoners fighting against land enclosures in early capitalist England who inspired the formation of communist parties of the 19th century.⁶

Subsequently, the debate on commons was reignited by anti-colonial, civil rights, and autonomous movements of the 1950s and 1960s, to denounce the racist and sexist forms of environmental destruction and exploitation that marked post-war development, as well as the lack of adequate provision of public goods in rapidly urbanising cities across the world.⁷

As economic growth in the capitalist North relied on the dire exploitation of Southern labour and natural resources, colonial modes of imperialist production enclosed common land and urban space to establish global markets and accelerate international trade.⁸ The organised resistance to global forms of capital accumulation by dispossession arrived with struggles of national liberation movements that fought colonial powers and established democratic governments and socialist economies.

Meanwhile, in post-industrial cities of the North, workers’ struggles contributed decisively to the formation of the Right to the City discourse that marked municipal and socialist politics of the 1970s. Finally, it is with the alter-globalisation movements of the 1990s, following the collapse of Soviet countries and the rise of China and India as global powers, that capitalist dogmas were put into question and commoning projects reappeared as an alternative to the recipes of neoliberal institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation.⁹

Over the last decade, and alongside this radical agenda, strategies to build the commons have taken multiple routes. Emerging commoning projects are often not in direct opposition to the state but seeking instead active collaboration with governmental actors. Indeed, **commoning practices and instruments have shifted towards a more democratic approach and are increasingly co-produced by groups and communities in collaboration with state institutions such as municipalities and local governments.**¹⁰ This is the case, for example, of Municipalist initiatives in cities of Europe and Latin America, but also of successful collaborations between local governments, grassroots organisations and NGOs working on synergies to combat urban inequalities in Asia.¹¹ In these instances, commoning takes the shape of collaborations between commoners and municipalities to rethink how public and private assets can be delivered for the common good.¹²

Among these collaborative and experimental strategies between communities and local governments, commoning instruments notably comprise: community land trusts (CLTs) to address housing inequalities;¹³ public-common enterprises to commoning municipal and private companies and improve the provision of public services;¹⁴ digital and planning tools to increase the participation of

1. Barbagallo, Beuret, and Harvie, “Introduction”; Caffentzis and Federici, “Commons against and beyond Capitalism”; De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia*.

2. Stavrides, “Toward an Architecture of Commoning”; Jeong, “Introduction: The Growth of the Commons Paradigm and New Directions in the Study of Social Changes”; Foster, “Collective Action and the Urban Commons.”

3. Stavrides, *Common Space: The City as Commons*.

4. Alexander and Helliher, “A Feminist Perspective on Autonomism and Commoning, with Reference to Zimbabwe”; Caffentzis and Federici, “Commons against and beyond Capitalism”.

5. Caffentzis, “The Future of ‘The Commons’: Neoliberalism’s ‘Plan B’ or the Original Disaccumulation of Capital?”; Hardt, Michael; Negri, *Commonwealth*.

6. Bollier, “Reclaiming the Commons.”

7. De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia*; Caffentzis and Federici, “Commons against and beyond Capitalism”; Hamilton, “Re-Enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons.”

8. Bhattacharyya, *Empire and ecology in the Bengal Delta: The making of Calcutta*.

9. Klein, “Reclaiming the Commons”; Shiva, *Monocultures of the Mind: Perspectives on Biodiversity and Biotechnology*; Bakker, “The ‘Commons’ Versus the ‘Commodity’: Alter-Globalization, Anti-Privatization and the Human Right to Water in the Global South.”

10. Thompson, “What’s so New about New Municipalism?”; Iaione, “The CO-City: Sharing, Collaborating, Cooperating, and Commoning in the City”.

11. Russell, “Beyond the Local Trap: New Municipalism and the Rise of the Fearless Cities”; Agustín, “New Municipalism as Space for Solidarity”; Bookchin and Colau, *Fearless Cities: A Guide to the Global Municipalist Movement*; Ergenç and Çelik, “Urban Neighbourhood Forums in Ankara as a Commoning Practice.”

12. Foster and Iaione, “The City as a Commons”.

13. Sundaresan, “Planning as Commoning: Transformation of a Bangalore Lake”; Bunce, “Pursuing Urban Commons: Politics and Alliances in Community Land Trust Activism in East London”; Midheme and Moulart, “Pushing Back the Frontiers of Property: Community Land Trusts and Low-Income Housing in Urban Kenya.”

14. Milburn and Russell, “Public-Common Partnerships: Building New Circuits of Collective Ownership”; Milburn and Russell, “What Can an Institution Do? Towards Public-Common Partnerships and a New Common-Sense.”

citizens and communities in decision making and strengthen democracy;¹⁵ as well as other formal and informal agreements to increase access to key resources such as finance, land and food.¹⁶

One of the reasons behind the development of collaborative commoning practices is that commoning struggles continue to emerge as a response to new forms

of enclosures, capital accumulation by dispossession, and the privatisations of public assets. These processes have become wide-spread and, by and large, are increasingly associated with dynamics of urbanisation and rising urban inequalities. Critical urban scholars recognise in these forms of urban resistance the existence of a tension between **enclosures** and **commons**.¹⁷

1.2 Commons vis-à-vis enclosures

The tension between enclosures on one side, and the formation of commoning practices on the other, points at two important aspects of commoning. First, it shows the “ambivalence of commoning”.¹⁸ The institutionalisation of commoning practices face multifaceted barriers that require attention from both activists and policy makers. There are different degrees of antagonism and collaboration between commoners and state actors that further highlight the complexity of the issue. A second aspect relates to disputes about defining the notion of commoning. On this point – *what* and *how* is commoned – the literature is ample yet divided, especially over the defining nature of the commons.

First, looking at the ambivalence of commoning, some of the major critical accounts look at the transformations of the notion of commons. The revival of the commons that took place in the last decade makes it possible to critique neoliberalism, but also to offer other models for market participation that do not centre individualism and corporatism.¹⁹ Thus, commons can indicate cooperative relations, a practice of resistance, but also capitalist re-appropriation.²⁰

Against these conflicting understandings, the depoliticisation of the commons is seen by some authors as the “crisis of the common”.²¹ once understood as a space of post-capitalist economic practices, today commoning risks to be co-opted into a low-cost form of reproduction.²² In cities, small-scale commoning initiatives such as guerrilla gardening exist beside the free market, and are exploited, in turn, as a “driver of urban vitality”.²³ Nonetheless, it would be simplistic to imagine the commons in utopian terms. Commons are built in relation to social force and power relations, and thus are subject to co-optation.²⁴

Resistance to privatisations and the fight against poverty can thus be seen as forms of commoning that can exist alongside other property regimes,²⁵ or even be integrated by state institutions.²⁶ **The existence of commoning practices facilitated or enabled by local and national governments provides interesting insights about the varieties of strategies and instruments to build the commons.**²⁷ The empirical examples in the next session will provide evidence of this variety of practices.

15. Bollier, “Viral Spiral : How the Commoners Built a Digital Republic of Their Own”; Reijers and Osssewaarde, “Digital Commoning and Its Challenges”; Lynch, “Contesting Digital Futures: Urban Politics, Alternative Economies, and the Movement for Technological Sovereignty in Barcelona.”

16. Maughan and Ferrando, “Land as a Commons: Examples from the UK and Italy”; Foster, “Collective Action and the Urban Commons”; Simonneau et al., “Land-Based Commons for Housing and the Inclusive City. A Comparative Approach”; Bunce, “Pursuing Urban Commons: Politics and Alliances in Community Land Trust Activism in East London.”

17. Tsavdaroglou, “The Permanence of Land Enclosures”; Leitner and Sheppard, “From Kampung to Condos? Contested Accumulations through Displacement in Jakarta”; De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia*; Bresnihan and Byrne, “Escape into the City: Everyday Practices of Commoning and the Production of Urban Space in Dublin”; Cooke and Lane, “Plant-Human Commoning: Navigating Enclosure, Neoliberal Conservation, and Plant Mobility in Exurban Landscapes.”

18. Enright and Rossi, “Ambivalence of the Urban Commons.”

19. Caffentzis, “The Future of ‘The Commons’: Neoliberalism’s ‘Plan B’ or the Original Disaccumulation of Capital?”

20. Federici, “From Commoning to Debt: Financialization, Microcredit, and the Changing Architecture of Capital Accumulation”; Hardt, Michael; Negri, *Commonwealth*.

21. Oyarzun, “Common Spatialities: The Production of the Multitude.”

22. Caffentzis and Federici, “Commons against and beyond Capitalism.”

23. Thompson, “Between Boundaries: From Commoning and Guerrilla Gardening to Community Land Trust Development in Liverpool.”

24. Nightingale, “Commoning for Inclusion? Commons, Exclusion, Property and Socio-Natural Becomings.”

25. Enright and Rossi, “Ambivalence of the Urban Commons”; Engelsman, Rowe, and Southern, “Community Land Trusts: A Radical or Reformist Response to the Housing Question Today?”

26. Bingham-Hall and Mundi, “Future of Cities: Commoning and Collective Approaches to Urban Space.”

27. Arvidsson, “Capital. Commons.”

1.3 Commons and public goods

Expanding the analysis on the nature of the commons, the liberal democratic tradition emphasises the *public good* nature of the commons.²⁸ Commons like water, air and timber are free natural resources available to all, which can be managed sustainably provided groups and communities find a shared set of principles and rules to govern the commons.²⁹ This type of governance ensures a property regime beyond privatisation and state intervention with advantages for both public and private actors.

Heterodox economist and Nobel Prize winner Elinor Ostrom demonstrated that social groups can organise to manage resources effectively beyond the public/private divide by designing clearly defined rules and common pool property institutions.³⁰ These commoning practices have been identified as an effective and cost-efficient strategy for the achievement of sustainable development;³¹ the strengthening of urban resilience to mitigate climate change risks;³² the establishment of sustainable forms of food production;³³ public access to water and climate justice;³⁴ and community-led management of public resources such as urban space, lakes and parks.³⁵

In this position, commons are understood as public goods managed by organised local communities or trans-national networks instead of the state. Commoning practices by non-state actors can be successful where nations fail to manage global public goods like the environment that are universal in nature. Global challenges such as climate change are a good example where the collective responsibility of the international community must prevail over national interests through cooperative action.³⁶

Indeed, neoclassic economists often refer to the commons in 'negative' terms, by stressing either the 'tragedy' resulting from the overexploitation of poorly regulated free resources, as famously described by Garrett Hardin,³⁷ or by defining the commons as 'forgotten' public goods left behind by local and national governments. **When states fail to provide adequate levels of public goods and services, commoning practices by organised groups of citizens address these failures and thus enable public goods,**³⁸ often under the supervision of the state, in the case for example of security in neighbourhoods with vigilantes³⁹ or the institutional of protected natural parks.⁴⁰ While these community organised initiatives respond to meetings practical needs, there is also a risk of exclusion related to the boundaries of such groups.⁴¹

1.4 There are no commons without commoning

Although some argue that commons are public goods left uncontrolled by the withdraw of the state, others claim that commons can be named as such only when struggles for the commons activate them, mobilising the principle of changing the mode of production of goods and services. Notably, critical theorists such as Caffentzis, De Angelis, Federici, and Stavrides maintain that "there are no commons without commoning": commoning cannot materialise without the struggle for justice that names and builds radically alternative modes of production.⁴² This is an interesting take, as it **also widens the perspective**

on what can be called commons, including those practices that common, and not just the goods, material or immaterial, that can be commoned.

By expanding the notion of commons to the practice of commoning, it is possible to include a larger set of tools and instruments under the commoning framework and start linking them with the copious literature and resources of the Right to the City discourses. To do so implies rethinking participatory processes as a core element of the collective action that underpins both Right to the City and commoning practices.⁴³

28. Kaul, Grunberg, and Stern, *Global Public Goods*.

29. Bollier and Helfrich, *The Wealth of the Commons: A World beyond Market and State*.

30. Ostrom, "Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action."

31. Short and Winter, "The Problem of Common Land: Towards Stakeholder Governance"; Bell et al., "Diversity, Discrimination, and Persistent Inequality: Hope for the Future through the Solidarity Economy Movement."

32. Feinberg, Ghorbani, and Herder, "Commoning toward Urban Resilience: The Role of Trust, Social Cohesion, and Involvement in a Simulated Urban Commons Setting"; Petrescu et al., "Calculating the Value of the Commons: Generating Resilient Urban Futures."

33. Maughan and Ferrando, "Land as a Commons: Examples from the UK and Italy"; Bresnahan and Byrne, "Escape into the City: Everyday Practices of Commoning and the Production of Urban Space in Dublin"; Morrow, "Community Self-Organizing and the Urban Food Commons in Berlin and New York."

34. Bakker, "The 'Commons' Versus the Commodity: Alter-Globalization, Anti-Privatization and the Human Right to Water in the Global South"; Bond, "The Right to the City and the Eco-Social Commoning of Water: Discursive and Political Lessons from South Africa"; Sultana and Loftus, *The Right to Water: Politics, Governance and Social Struggles*; Dwinell and Olivera, "The Water Is Ours Damn It! Water Commoning in Bolivia."

35. Sundaresan, "Planning as Commoning: Transformation of a Bangalore Lake."; Foster, "Collective Action and the Urban Commons"; Vasudevan, "The Autonomous City: Towards a Critical Geography of Occupation."

36. Kaul, Grunberg, and Stern, *Global Public Goods*; Foster, "Collective Action and the Urban Commons"; Foster and Iaione, "The City as a Commons."

37. Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons."

38. Foster, "Collective Action and the Urban Commons."

39. Ungar, "The Privatization of Citizen Security in Latin America: From Elite Guards to Neighborhood Vigilantes"; Fabiyi, *Gated Neighbourhoods and Privatisation of Urban Security in Ibadan Metropolis*.

40. Leach, Mearns, and Scoones, "Environmental Entitlements: Dynamics and Institutions in Community-Based Natural Resource Management"; Bresnahan and Byrne, "Escape into the City: Everyday Practices of Commoning and the Production of Urban Space in Dublin."

41. Kubaczek and Avraham, "Urban Undercommons."

42. Caffentzis and Federici, "Commons against and beyond Capitalism"; Barbagallo, Beuret, and Harvie, "Introduction"; Stavrides, *Common Space: The City as Commons*; De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia*.

43. Thompson, "What's so New about New Municipalism?"; Ergenç and Celik, "Urban Neighbourhood Forums in Ankara as a Commoning Practice"; Arruzza and Gawel, "The Politics of Social Reproduction. An Introduction."

Observing community fora in Istanbul and Ankara, for example, Ergenç and Çelik reconceptualise urban commoning practices by including political processes that develop prefigurations of the city activists want to live in. By doing so, they show how the Right to the City discourse as articulated by urban neighbourhood

forums constitutes a form of urban commoning engaged with the social processes of local politics and histories.⁴⁴ Following this expanding perspective, it is possible to embrace more demands and practices under a commoning framework, where 'everyday commoning' intersects practices and production of space.⁴⁵

1.5 The three elements of the commons: pooled resources, community and commoning

The previous examples have indicated distinctive interpretations on the nature and role of the commons and presented political values and principles that characterise such trends. There is, however, a shared analytical perspective that unites different standpoints, that this paper uses to answer the following questions: *What is commoning? What is commoned? And who are the commoners?*

In general terms, the commons configure three elements:⁴⁶

- Common pool resources, which are non-commodified, and are used to meet the needs of a community;
- A community of commoners that defines uses, principles, and modes of production, reproduction and distribution of pooled resources;

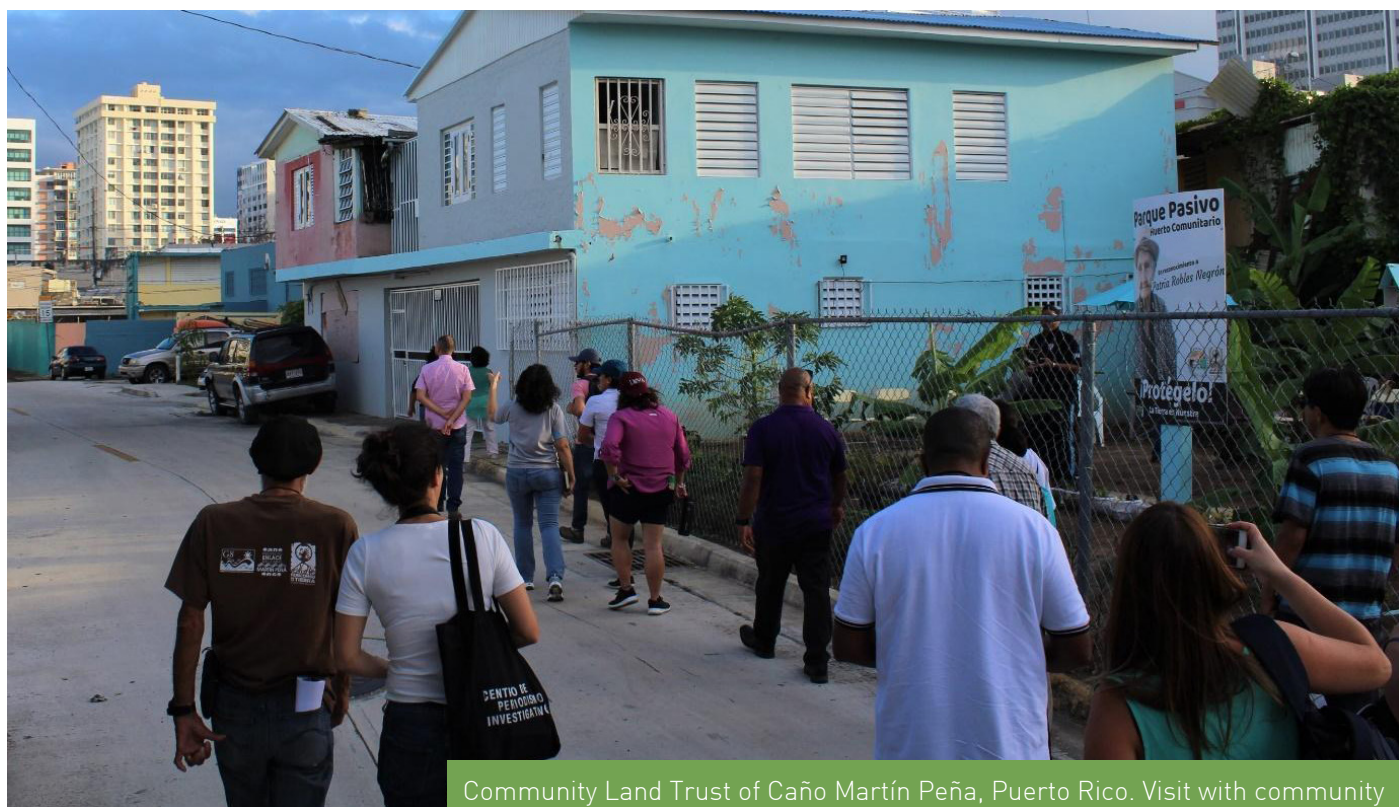
- Commoning practices to build, maintain, govern, protect, and reproduce the commons through forms of non-authoritarian and horizontal democratic governance.

These elements combine political principles that are alternative to those of capital, with value practices that are interlinked by a network of commoners. By and large, commoning implies that commoners share and govern commons, establishing practices and relations in line with the political principles of building common wealth. As this paper will discuss, the identity, experience and situated knowledge of commoners are therefore critical to identify what is shared, as well as the relevant commoning practices that expose who is excluded or included in the use of certain resources.

⁴⁴ Ergenç and Çelik, "Urban Neighbourhood Forums in Ankara as a Commoning Practice."

⁴⁵ Bresnihan and Byrne, "Escape into the City: Everyday Practices of Commoning and the Production of Urban Space in Dublin."

⁴⁶ De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia*.



Community Land Trust of Caño Martín Peña, Puerto Rico. Visit with community leaders and grassroots organisations. Author: Pierre Arnold, May 2017.

1.6 Commoning as a framework for urban equality

Following this three-fold framework of *common pool resources*, *community of commoners* and *commoning practices*, the review that follows is divided into three parts. It begins with **urban commoning**, providing an overview of the commons in the Right to the City approach. In doing so, commoning is explained against the interpretation of urban spaces as a commons. It elucidates urban political mobilisation as forms of commoning enabled by city dynamics, problematising the notion of urban commons. Commons are not open for everyone and may not be implicitly horizontalist and universalist. This section presents a framework for the support and design of collective action that promotes and advances urban equality.

A second section maps out **who are the commoners**. Through a review of existing literature, this section explores communities of commoners, their identities and principles. This section illustrates why and how civil society organisations, workers, housing action groups, women and indigenous land struggles have sought the active production of commons. Their collective action highlights how issues of class,

race and gender interlink with practices and strategies to build commons for equality and inclusion. The contribution maps existing boundaries to discuss the 'positive' transformative potentials of commoning practices as well as the 'negative' forms of commoning that limit urban equality.

Finally, the review considers a range of **urban commons pathways**. This section links the experiences in the contribution, by looking at what is commoned, and the role of commoning pathways in addressing urban and territorial inequalities. It describes the ways in which local and regional governments (LRGs) have engaged or could engage with the experiences described. In particular, the section summarises trends and pathways in relation to the commoning of housing, land, food, and basic services; and the action plans, policy frameworks, and development strategies that use the concept of commoning. It finally recaps key messages in relation to the institutional challenges and lessons in relation to LRGs role in securing the commons to further advance urban and territorial equality.

2. Urban Commoning

2.1 The city as commons: between the Right to the City approach and urban political mobilisation

Within the Right to the City approach, urban commoning practices look at the city as a set of pooled resources that urban communities, activist groups, citizens and residents' association re-claim in the name of the use value of urban space. Neo-Lefebvrian approaches tend to argue that the commoning of urban resources in large metropolis is greater because of the denser concentration of people and higher degree of exploitation taking place in cities.⁴⁷

Studying the organising tactics of housing associations in Washington (US), Huron explains that **commons are becoming predominantly urban**

because of the density of settlements that characterise cities.⁴⁸ Not only cities enable practices of commoning at larger scale, but they also represent a bigger arena for accumulation via privatisation of public goods and new enclosures, which, in turn, provoke the rise of antagonistic struggles to reclaim the city.⁴⁹

In contrast to this view, development scholars and anthropologists question whether successful examples of commoning are more prevalent in urban settings or in high-income economies. Southern approaches often indicate, on the contrary, that indigenous and community resistance

47. Ergenç and Çelik, "Urban Neighbourhood Forums in Ankara as a Commoning Practice"; Adianto, Gabe, and Zamel, "The Commoning of Public Goods by Residents of a Jakarta Apartment Complex."

48. Huron, *Carving Out the Commons: Tenant Organizing and Housing Cooperatives in Washington, D.C.*

49. Holston, "Metropolitan Rebellions and the Politics of Commoning the City"; Dikeç, *Urban Rage: The Revolt of the Excluded*.

to forms of primitive accumulation led by public or private enclosures dispossessing rural land, such as those taking place in Africa and Latin America, are equally good examples of commoning practices.⁵⁰ Crucially, “neoliberal environmental policy has not led to ubiquitous privatisation but a proliferation of hybrid forms of property rights created by new enclosures of commonly-held resources without the elimination of more public rights and responsibilities”.⁵¹

Accordingly, the variety of forms of property rights, commons and customs is linked to a plurality of urban practices too. These include, for example, the collective understanding of urban space and use value that characterise popular economies in Latin America cities,⁵² or informal economies in Sub-Saharan and Asian cities.

These observations on forms of property and social organisation operating beyond the binary of state

control and private property, and on the urban/rural dichotomy, are very important. They are particularly relevant for addressing the challenges created by mixed institutional forms and property institutions that engage with complexities beyond the analytical oppositions formal/informal, free/commercial, individual/collective, and public/private.

A related challenges relates to the reproduction of new urban commons. An important critique to the commons argues that a focus on ‘long-term commoning’ is essential to maintain urban commons in a sustainable fashion.⁵³ Urban commoning is a social process that doesn’t stop with the reclamation of commons. It rather requires the construction of relevant infrastructures beyond the demands of Right to the City approaches. A common property agenda thus highlights the need to create an institutional framework for urban commons transitions.

2.2 Cities as commons in the making

For commoners, the city as a whole is a social system in which assets and resources can be transformed into collaborative and cooperative networks that materialise the commons with collective action. As Stavrides notes, the reinvention of cities through commoning has great potential for the future but requires not only the realisation of ‘common space’, but also a process of ‘space-commoning’, which in itself is a practice of urban transformation, of tools and subjects.⁵⁴

Across the world, global movements as distinct as Occupy and Extinction Rebellion share ideas and actions to reclaim urban space and build an urban commons-based society. Together with these movements, a myriad of urban political mobilisations claim access to basic needs and inclusion, articulating Right to the City demands.

Over the last decade, particularly in cities of the so-called Global North, LRGs have struggled in large part with fiscal austerity and other social crises that have limited investments in public services and infrastructure

maintenance.⁵⁵ To overcome these problems, radical municipal administrative configurations emerged to develop social-justice mechanisms that ensure equitable access to urban resources such as land, housing, and even data.⁵⁶

Cities of the so-called Global South face different challenges, as the provision of basic service falls short of levels of need, and access to housing, finance, and land face multifaceted barriers. Accordingly, new interventions are needed to address global urban challenges and rethink how goods are produced, consumed, and distributed, as well as how public services are managed and accessed. In light of this scenario, commentators see a rise of a new egalitarian horizon to co-produce cities for urban equality.⁵⁷

Against the backdrop of global crises, the commons present an alternative and collaborative approach to the management of cities. This is particularly relevant in the context of debates about the role of cities in addressing the impact of climate

50. Turner, “Political Ecology III: The Commons and Commoning.”

51. Turner.

52. Gago, “What Are Popular Economies? Some Reflections from Argentina.”

53. As argued by Federici, in Tummers and MacGregor, “Beyond Wishful Thinking: A FPE Perspective on Commoning, Care, and the Promise of Co-Housing”; Federici, *Re-Enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons*.

54. Stavrides, *Common Space: The City as Commons*.

55. Tonkiss, “Austerity Urbanism and the Makeshift City.”

56. Thompson, “What’s so New about New Municipalism?”; Agustín, “New Municipalism as Space for Solidarity”; Bookchin and Colau, *Fearless Cities: A Guide to the Global Municipalist Movement*.

57. Piketty, *Capital and Ideology*; Osuteye et al., “Knowledge Co-Production for Urban Equality.”

change, lack of adequate and affordable housing, access to land and food, and rising inequalities. In development planning and political economy literature, cities are considered to be uniquely positioned to improve the

incentives for the collective control of public goods.⁵⁸ Furthermore, pursuing common good objectives is an important function of city-level institutions, and this is why 'commoning the city' matters.⁵⁹

2.3 The co-city that facilitates commoning

The last decade has seen a proliferation of grassroots initiatives for municipal coalitions that aim to build urban commons from the local level and to change how politics is done. Municipalist initiatives spurred in Barcelona and Madrid (Spain), Bologna, Naples, and Turin (Italy), Ghent (Belgium), Beograd (Serbia), Amsterdam (Netherlands), Preston (UK) but also in Rosario (Argentina), Beirut (Lebanon) and in municipalities in autonomous region of Rojava.⁶⁰

While distinct from this so-called Municipalist wave, cities and local administrations in other regions of the world that seek collaborative agenda with civic society organisations share with the first group an ambition to facilitate processes that can promote and achieve urban equality. They also share serious challenges caused by either structural adjustment programmes, deregulations and policies of marketisations, or they are constrained by a legal framework that concentrate powers in the hands of national governments.

In this sense, cities and local governments can learn from each other how to promote and activate participatory processes and collaborations that facilitate commoning practices to expand urban equity. As discussed, these urban commoning practices are formal – named after the commons – or informal – in which commoning practices might not named as such but can be recognised under a Right to the City framework. Despite these differences, cities that encourage people working together to benefit from urban spaces and resources share a desire in facilitating collaborative commoning practices.

For example, the notion of the 'co-city' that has emerged with the recent revival of urban commons is helpful to

recognise how to respond to the new demands of citizens as commoners.⁶¹

A report examining pacts of collaboration in European cities between citizens, local governments, and commoners identified in the 'partner city' an institutional adaptation that can accommodate basic collaboration processes for urban commons transition.⁶²

The collaboration process between institutions and commoners sees the city as the convenor or facilitator of commons-oriented citizens initiatives.

Shaped after the *Bologna Regulation for the Care and Generation of the Urban Commons*, the city prepares a 'Commons Accord' that stipulate new forms of community self-organization centred on commoning practices of solidarity and cooperative production.⁶³

As described by Micciarelli in one of the case studies produced for GOLD VI, the co-city approach in Turin innovated the public-private partnership formula with the institution of 'pacts of collaboration', a legal tool that offers the collective right of use by re-interpreting the social function of the right of use over the right of property.⁶⁴ These legal tools enabled the non-illegalisation of occupations of abandoned buildings in the city by cultural workers and led to the 'declaration of rights' by the occupiers, a political move that regulated the interactions between citizens as commoners and local administrations.⁶⁵

These regulatory tools provide principles for collaborative sub-local governance, in that citizens and local administrations manage together the city's urban commons: public space such as squares and streets, urban green spaces and parks, but also abandoned buildings and other infrastructures. Forms of co-governance that are institutionalized

58. Zhang, "The Rationale and Scope for City-Level Public Interventions."

59. Iaione, "The CO-City: Sharing, Collaborating, Cooperating, and Commoning in the City"; Holston, "Metropolitan Rebellions and the Politics of Commoning the City".

60. Agustín, "New Municipalism as Space for Solidarity"; Bookchin and Colau, *Fearless Cities: A Guide to the Global Municipalist Movement*; Thompson, "What's so New about New Municipalism?"; Milburn and Russell, "What Can an Institution Do? Towards Public-Common Partnerships and a New Common-Sense."

61. Iaione, "The CO-City: Sharing, Collaborating, Cooperating, and Commoning in the City."

62. See De Tullio, *Commons. Between Dreams and Reality*.

63. Mattei and Quarta, "Right to the City or Urban Commoning: Thoughts on the Generative Transformation of Property Law"; Bauwens, M.; Niaros, "Changing Societies through Urban Commons Transition. P2P Foundation."

64. Case-based Contribution produced by Micciarelli for GOLD VI.

65. Ibid.

have the advantage of being supported by a framework of support to maintain and protect the commons in the long-term.

It also opens up possible applications of commoning principles to design polycentric governance tools. As studied by Iaione, the co-city enables collaborative sub-local governance in three directions:⁶⁶

► ‘Everyday commoning’: the enabling of collaborative and commoning behaviours, habits, and urban civic duties.

► ‘Wiki-commoning’: with the creation of communication networks and web tools. These consist in public communication initiatives such as advertising campaigns and promotional activities about events directed to all citizens.

► Collaborative urban planning and policy making as a strategic innovation in urban development.

These participative citizenship tools call for the development of peer-to-peer production and new commons domains.⁶⁷ They also indicate a process of ‘commonisation’ of labour taking place in cities with the rise of digital sectors: “ideas, networks, concepts and communication structures have

gradually become the products of labour”.⁶⁸

Participative citizenship tools and the commonisation of labour highlight the role played by commoning practices in shaping urban citizenship: struggles over public space are a “constituent element of public life” which problematise citizenship and the establishment of rights.⁶⁹ Understanding participative citizenship tools as urban commons captures the ‘fluidity of commoning’ within urban practices towards new forms of political experience.⁷⁰

Re-conceptualising commoning practices enables the integration of participatory neighbourhood improvement among commoning literature.

This is the case of *Proyecto Urbano Integral* (PUI), a case study of upgrading in Medellín (Colombia), which is one of the most well-known examples of participatory neighbourhood improvement in Latin America. First implemented as a pilot project, the PUI model is now a national and long-term strategy that combines multiscale projects concentrated on the neighbourhood scale. The case study of PUI illustrates that participatory neighbourhood improvement programmes can also be part of these new common domains.

66. Iaione, “The CO-City: Sharing, Collaborating, Cooperating, and Commoning in the City.”

67. Bollier, “Viral Spiral: How the Commoners Built a Digital Republic of Their Own.”

68. Lemmens, “The conditions of the common: A Stieglerian critique of Hardt and Negri’s thesis on cognitive capitalism as a prefiguration of communism.”

69. Stavrides, “Toward an Architecture of Commoning.”

70. Ergenç and Çelik, “Urban Neighbourhood Forums in Ankara as a Commoning Practice.”



Escalators in Comuna 13 (Medellín) The escalator in Comuna 13 is divided into six sections and ascends nearly 384m
Source: Cristian Viariso, www.flickr.com/tesking/, under License Creative Commons

2.3 The co-city that facilitates commoning

As discussed, commoning comprises three intertwined elements: common pool resources, a community of commoners, and commoning practices. In its city-level declination, urban commoning requires the existence and positive interplay of urban commons – from urban space to digital infrastructures – facilitated by urban commoners such as citizens and local administrations, that design principles and tools to govern cities' common stock. A third but key component is urban political mobilisation as a form of commoning enabled by city dynamics.

Analysing recent urban uprisings in Brazil and Turkey sustained by digital communication technologies, Holston identifies in urban occupations and processes of city-making a way to common the city and experiment with direct democratic engagement.⁷¹

As Karyotis points out analysing Greek urban struggles over the past decade, "city dwellers may define their desire for full participation in the city's socio-political life as a right to the city to be reclaimed against authorities, or they may dive right in and self-manage the urban space as a commons, or they may do both. In turn, these urban struggles—along with the frameworks used to make sense of them—will constitute them as collective subjects".⁷²

In reference to the rise of a wide range of social movements – from left-wing #MeToo, *Ni Una Menos*, Fridays for Future, Black Lives Matters, and anti-austerity struggles, to right-wing mobilisations against migrants and nationalist uprisings – commentators argue that these mobilisations can be understood as forms of urban commoning.⁷³ These practices, however, are not necessarily universalist, and can more simply indicate that cities have become more unequal, while, at the same time, advertising openness. For example, insurgent citizenship practices can be inclusive, such as in the case of groups of dwellers demanding adequate housing in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil);⁷⁴ or exclusive, as with right-wing defensive forms of citizenship against migrant populations.⁷⁵ These considerations indicate again that cities are spaces of rebellion and antagonism, in that the common wealth that is produced with the collective efforts of urban populations, is appropriated with new forms of enclosures. Protesting gentrifications or the lack of security, residents reconsider the city as a collective common they co-produce. This aspect of urban commoning – the role played by urban space and space-commoning in shaping citizenships – leads to the next part of this paper: who are the commoners?

3. Who are the commoners?

3.1 Alter-globalisation movements

Commoning's recent history overlaps with the development of the alter-globalization or anti-globalisation movement, a movement that according to Klein is formed by 'coalitions of coalitions', and their call for radical strategies to save the planet.⁷⁶

The 'alter-globalization' movement started in 1990s – from the World Social Forum of Porto Alegre to the 1999 Seattle WTO protest – and opposed the commodification of everyday life by

grounding common models of resource management into the mainstream discourse. In doing so, it disrupted debates over the public/private binary that marked the discourse on globalisation and has since relentlessly created space for discussing the construction of alternative economies.⁷⁷

Resisting the privatization of public space, education, healthcare, and natural resources with direct action and civil disobedience, the many different

71. Holston, "Metropolitan Rebellions and the Politics of Commoning the City."

72. Karyotis, "Moving Beyond the Right to the City: Urban Commoning in Greece."

73. Kalb, "Afterword: After the Commons-Commoning!"

74. Holston, "Metropolitan Rebellions and the Politics of Commoning the City."

75. Yiftachel, "Epilogue-from 'Gray Space' to Equal 'Metrogenship'? Reflections On Urban Citizenship."

76. Klein, "Reclaiming the Commons."

77. Bakker, "The 'Commons' Versus the 'Commodity': Alter-Globalization, Anti-Privatization and the Human Right to Water in the Global South."

campaigns of the alter-globalisation movement have reclaimed the commons and the communal spaces that sustain them. Analysing a process of privatisation of water in South Africa, for example, Bond registers that “these alter-globalization proposals counterpose various forms of the commons to commodity-based property and social relations”.⁷⁸

Other examples of alter-globalisation movements reclaiming the commons included the *Movimento Sem Terra* in Brazil and the Indian farmers protesting the exploitation of land and labour of multinational corporations such as Monsanto; indigenous and Zapatistas movements in Mexico protesting the NAFTA agreements; or human rights and environmentalist

activists in Nigeria and North America fighting against the oil industry.⁷⁹

With the 2008 financial crisis, a new wave of urban struggles took forward the seeds planted by the alter-globalisation movement, this time under the name of Occupy – from the US to Turkey, from Hong Kong to Spain – and more concentrated on a critique of the financial system.⁸⁰ As Federici notes, “Debt has become ubiquitous, affecting millions of people worldwide who for the first time are indebted to banks, and it is now used by governments and financiers not only to accumulate wealth but also to undermine social solidarity and the efforts that movements are making globally to create social commons and alternatives to capitalism”.⁸¹

3.2 The solidarity economy movement

Following the 2008 financial crisis, urban initiatives to restore factories, support the unemployed and the poor have mushroomed in cities. The solidarity economy movement, an umbrella term for a global movement to build a just and sustainable economy, “can be seen as a transformative political response to these dynamics aiming to replace exploitation with cooperation, exclusion with participation and marginalisation with practices of inclusion”.⁸²

The solidarity economy illustrates ‘a politics of commoning’ working across five dimensions of commons-sociality: “who can access a common resource, how and how much to use it, how commons are to be cared for and where responsibility lies and for whose benefit is a commons constituted, used and cared for”.⁸³

Examples of solidarity economy practice include food banks and cooperatives. Stone Soup, a cooperative incubator in Worcester, Massachusetts (US), purposely creates common spaces to strengthen worker cooperatives and thus broadening politics of solidarity. CERØ, a workers-owned commercial composting cooperative in Boston (US) acts as a commoning infrastructure by sustaining a network of food-based solidarity cooperatives.⁸⁴

India has some of the largest cooperatives in the world and has had them for decades. Dairy cooperatives are some of the most successful examples of small rural milk cooperatives turned national enterprises and have millions of members. They compete successfully in national markets and in many cases work closely with the state. India’s dairy cooperatives expanded horizontally across villages and vertically through sections of the industry by collectivising input and output markets, sharing transportation costs, and in so doing realising higher surpluses that are reinvested.⁸⁵ In terms of incentive design, individual members of a cooperative are required to sell below market prices in exchange for access to finance, transport, and infrastructure.⁸⁶ While these cooperative institutional arrangements do not fully collectivise ownership of resources and capital, they thrive in competitive capitalist markets, making space for poverty alleviation by means of cooperation.

In Buenos Aires (Argentina), *popular* economies of barter exchange and neighbourhood assemblies emerged in the market of La Salada after decades of recession and economic crisis. Initiated by a broad coalition of groups of unemployed workers, popular initiatives turned to abandoned factories to recuperate and reclaim production of goods and services from below.⁸⁷

78. Bond, “The Right to the City and the Eco-Social Commoning of Water: Discursive and Political Lessons from South Africa.”

79. Klein, “Reclaiming the Commons”; Shiva, *Monocultures of the Mind: Perspectives on Biodiversity and Biotechnology*.

80. Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*.

81. Federici, “From Commoning to Debt: Financialization, Microcredit, and the Changing Architecture of Capital Accumulation.”

82. Healy et al., “Commoning and the Politics of Solidarity: Transformational Responses to Poverty”; Agustin, “New Municipalism as Space for Solidarity.”

83. Gibson-Graham, *Take Back the Economy: An Ethical Guide for Transforming Our Communities*.

84. Healy et al., “Commoning and the Politics of Solidarity: Transformational Responses to Poverty.”

85. Patibandla and Sastry, “Capitalism and Cooperation: Cooperative Institutions in a Developing Economy.”

86. Seabright, “Managing Local Commons: Theoretical Issues in Incentive Design.”

87. Gago, “What Are Popular Economies? Some Reflections from Argentina.”

In Jackson, Mississippi (US), a cooperative network called Cooperation Jackson build broad-based solidarity economies to fight unemployment and system racism with 'economic democracy' strategies. In doing so, Cooperation Jackson has constituted a network of worker cooperatives, a cooperative incubator, a cooperative education and training centre, and a cooperative bank.⁸⁸

As the COVID-19 pandemic spread, solidarity economy platforms helped also with the distribution of goods and smoothed logistics issues.

In Rosario and Santa Fe (Argentina), counter forms of logistics organised by municipal movements and agencies configured neighbourhood infrastructures for producing and distributing goods and services. To overcome the structural problems affecting Latin American urban settlements, municipalist-led solidarity projects offer popular education in informal settlements, promote popular and indigenous

medicine for public health, and intervene with anti-inflation initiatives, cutting intermediaries between producers and consumers of food by using public warehouses.⁸⁹

These examples point towards the existence of a strong nexus between urban commons and models of solidarity economy or economic democracy. The rise of cooperativism to develop autonomy of production addressing workers' needs contributes, at the same time, to the reproduction of a set of common resources maintained democratically by a community.

The diverse forms of collective ownerships offered by cooperativism invites to rethink the economy by asking how a city reproduces itself and to think of the urban as a site of the commons comprised of services and infrastructure for common use which provide for the reproductive labour of workers and people as a broadly conceived urban community.⁹⁰

3.3 Squatters

Another community of commoners is squatters. Autonomous forms of urban dwelling and occupations of buildings and public space are a global political process that often seek Right to the City alternatives by seeking 'common spaces for political action'. The appropriation of space for housing, assemblies and protests can be understood as a form of radical infrastructures made possible by the act of squatting.⁹¹ In most urban settings, squatting represents an informal set of practices, and "a makeshift approach to housing and as a precarious form of inhabiting the city".⁹²

The geography of squatting is global and helps to combat poverty for the most vulnerable people. For example, a small

NGO has helped a group of women squatters in Yangon (Myanmar) to start savings groups, purchase inexpensive land, and build low-cost houses with basic infrastructure. Today, 835 families that started housing actions by squatting land have built a community-driven housing model that won support from the local government. Although in most contexts the squatting of land takes place due to the lack of affordable housing alternatives, and brings enormous costs related to exposure to risks and threats of eviction, in certain contexts squatting practices have allowed scaling up collaborative housing delivery models based on collective land tenure, which could be seen as forms of commoning.

88. King, "Building Power in a Frontline Community: The Cooperation Jackson Model"; Bell et al., "Diversity, Discrimination, and Persistent Inequality: Hope for the Future through the Solidarity Economy Movement."

89. Minuchin et al., "Municipal Logistics: Popular Infrastructures and Southern Urbanisms During the Pandemic."

90. Johansova and Wolf. "Economic democracy: A path for the future?"; Cumbers. *The Case for Economic Democracy*.

91. Vasudevan, "The autonomous city: Towards a critical geography of occupation."

92. Vasudevan, "The makeshift city: Towards a global geography of squatting."

3.4 Feminist commoning

In examining feminists' engagement through the commons and feminist political ecology literature, there is a variety of commoning practices that are significant to answer the questions who the commoners are. Feminists argue that the gendered infrastructure of capitalism coalesce the connection between women and commoning.

As women have been enclosed by patriarchy, often into the spheres of social reproduction, women have played a prime role in defending or creating new commons.⁹³

In the case of Milpa Maguey, a women-led cooperative in rural Mexico that uses a collectively managed private property, feminist practices to reproduce knowledge commons such as the agave plant constitute a type of commoning centring care among cooperative members and other nonhumans webs.⁹⁴

Kinning Park Complex, a social centre in Glasgow (UK), tackles gender exclusion and unemployment by promoting cooperative social enterprises that built and manage an urban space for feminist commoning.⁹⁵

Studying land occupations in Zimbabwe, scholars argue that despite women

are often confined to domestic responsibility and do not fully engage in political mobilisations, there is evidence that groups of women occupied land as women to advance their social security.⁹⁶

Strategies involving women-related activities use identity to build communities of commoning and demonstrate how commoning relations are shaped by the lived experiences of commoning subjects. Through the lenses of feminist commoning is also possible to re-centre anti-racist and feminist care at the heart of urban commoning strategies, following the devaluation of care work and the exploitation of care taking place in cities.⁹⁷

These examples reveal how the commons emerge from power relationships. As a set of practices, commoning naturally changes and fosters new relations and new subjects. As Nightingale affirms, "commoning creates socionatural inclusions and exclusions, and any moment of coming together can be succeeded by new challenges and relations that uncommon".⁹⁸

3.5 The boundaries of community of commoners

'For whom', 'by whom', and 'with whose interest' is commoning desirable?⁹⁹ To support or reclaim the commons, it is paramount to consider the extent to which commoning is possible on principles of equality and without excluding certain groups from the benefits of managing resources collectively.¹⁰⁰ **In other words, it is important to understand the boundaries of a community of commoners.**

Following previous discussions on the ambivalence of commons, the enclosure of resources is often invoked in the pursuit of 'collective interests' that can address local as well as global problems. This is the rationale behind the formation of 'sustainable' natural reserves and 'community-based solutions' to protect the environment from climate change¹⁰¹ or

the construction of gated communities to combat crime and ensure property rights.¹⁰² The notion of commoning must be therefore contextualised to understand how community of commoners manage the unequal distribution of and access to resources.

A critique of the exclusivity of commoning comes from Critical Race Theory. For example, in the context of cities, commoning is often based on "homogeneity as the foundation of society and community".¹⁰³ If commoning is 'exclusive' as it is based on shared characteristics of the demos or a community of commoners, an alternative for those who are excluded is to build 'undercommons', or strategies of flight from the enclosures deriving from institutional racism and relations of production.¹⁰⁴

93. Alexander and Helliker, "A Feminist Perspective on Autonomism and Commoning, with Reference to Zimbabwe"; Hamilton, "Re-Enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons"; Sato and Soto Alarcón, "Toward a Postcapitalist Feminist Political Ecology" Approach to the Commons and Commoning"; Tummers and MacGregor, "Beyond Wishful Thinking: A FPE Perspective on Commoning, Care, and the Promise of Co-Housing."

94. Sato and Soto Alarcón, "Toward a Postcapitalist Feminist Political Ecology" Approach to the Commons and Commoning."

95. McLean, "Spaces for Feminist Commoning? Creative Social Enterprise's Enclosures and Possibilities."

96. Alexander and Helliker, "A Feminist Perspective on Autonomism and Commoning, with Reference to Zimbabwe"; Helliker and Bhattacharya, "Inside the Land Occupations in Bindura District, Zimbabwe."

97. Morrow and Parker, "Care, Commoning and Collectivity: From Grand Domestic Revolution to Urban Transformation."

98. Nightingale, "Commoning for Inclusion? Commons, Exclusion, Property and Socio-Natural Becomings."

99. D'Ignazio and Klein, *Data Feminism*.

100. Caffentzis and Federici, "Commons against and beyond Capitalism."

101. Leach, Mearns, and Scoones, "Environmental Entitlements: Dynamics and Institutions in Community-Based Natural Resource Management."

102. Leitner and Sheppard, "From Kampung to Condos? Contested Accumulations through Displacement in Jakarta."

103. Kubaczek and Avraham, "Urban Undercommons."

104. Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*.

3.6 Community of commoners as planners

Considerations on the boundary of a community of commoners illustrate that the different struggles for urban commoning involve the 'making and unmaking of communities'. **Commoning practices become, in turn, critical in the formation of communities of interest.**

Studying the community struggle for commoning a lake in Bangalore (India), Sundaresan argues that by claiming the public sphere of planning, communities produced the very possibility of commons, identifying that 'planning is commoning', as "claiming the commons involves claiming planning".¹⁰⁵

Along similar lines, another community that plans the urban commons is represented by refugees and migrants, when they occupy public space or buildings and claim a right to the centre of the city.

Observing migrant struggles in Athens, Thessaloniki (Greece) and Istanbul

(Turkey), Tsavdaroglou identifies in the actions of refugees escaping the brutal conditions of overcrowded state-run camps in the outskirts of cities and peri-urban neighbourhoods a commoning practice that challenges state policies.¹⁰⁶ According to this view, "refugees enact the production of collective common spaces, occupying abandoned buildings in the urban core and claiming the right to the centre of the city".¹⁰⁷

In the neighbourhood of Tarlabasi in Istanbul (Turkey) or Exarchia in Athens (Greece), newcomers from the Middle East and Africa collaborate with local and international solidarity groups to establish social centres and collective kitchens. These examples of commoning practices in the form of mutual help and transnational solidarity are at the heart of common struggles between refugees and local activists claiming the right to a more democratic and inclusive city.

4. Urban Commons Pathways

4.1 Commoning resources: land, food, water

Some of the most significant efforts for democratic and just societies combine fights for land as a common with climate action. Food insecurity, environmental degradation, and resource depletion are just a few of the outcomes of an unequal land ownership system.¹⁰⁸

Looking at examples of collectivisation of land facilitated by the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR), "collective land ownership works as a protection against market forces and strengthens the community's ability to ensure everyone keeps their housing and can pass it on to their children, no matter what happens. Besides greater security, collective land leads to other benefits and other collective systems for community members to look after each other".¹⁰⁹

Commoning natural resources are emerging strategies to reduce risk and increase livelihood support. As analysed by Perkins in a study about collective strategies for climate resilience, communities can be categorised across a 'commons readiness' principle: different collectives are better prepared to face climate changes challenges according to how well they do across a wide range of social variables including the openness/boundaries of the community, historical experiences and aptitudes with collective governance, social networks and social learning, political and economic interconnectedness, diversity, income distribution, and cultural elements.¹¹⁰

Furthermore, the history of common land in England and Wales reveals that its governance tends to be regional and reliant on tradition and practice. Such

¹⁰⁵ Sundaresan, "Planning as Commoning: Transformation of a Bangalore Lake."

¹⁰⁶ Tsavdaroglou, "The Refugees' Right to the Center of the City and Spatial Justice: Gentrification vs Commoning Practices in Tarlabasi-Istanbul"; Tsavdaroglou, "Reimagining a Transnational Right to the City: No Border Actions and Commoning Practices in Thessaloniki"; Tsavdaroglou and Kaika, "The Refugees' Right to the Centre of the City: City Branding versus City Commoning in Athens."

¹⁰⁷ Tsavdaroglou, "The Refugees' Right to the Center of the City and Spatial Justice: Gentrification vs Commoning Practices in Tarlabasi-Istanbul."

¹⁰⁸ Maughan and Ferrando, "Land as a Commons: Examples from the UK and Italy."

¹⁰⁹ Case-based Contribution produced by ACHR for GOLD VI.

¹¹⁰ Perkins, "Commoning and climate justice."

reliance necessitates governance that is built on the inclusion of stakeholders through consensus-building methods. To achieve sustainable practices, Short and Winer find that land managers and policy makers should not come up with comprehensive national legislation for common land. Instead, given the importance of common land for agriculture and nature conservation, a flexible policy framework for commons that is sensitive to the context of local stakeholder governance is particularly important.¹¹¹

Looking at commoning food, both food sharing and food commons have been suggested as potential solutions to unsustainable and inequitable urban food systems. Examples of food commoning illustrate how tools for commoning present benefits for the creation of urban food commons.

For example, the organisation 596 Acres in New York (US) has created an interactive map of vacant land to help citizens locating land to access. Unoccupied land can be managed in a self-organised fashion and as a common to develop projects of urban gardening. Similarly, *Foodsharing.de*, a Berlin-based non-profit, programmed an open access platform to decentralise and democratise food redistribution, using peer-to-peer logistics and the use of communal fridges.¹¹²

In Mumbai (India), a community of fisherman fought back the spatial segregation caused by surrounding urban development through a political project of indigenous reclaiming. By reclaiming alienated lands, the fishermen community contested borderlands and therefore redefined commoning, drawing new boundaries between land and sea beyond notions of property as private or public.¹¹³

Furthermore, struggles over water – in the forms of fights against privatisation or for re-municipalisation and commoning of water – are perhaps among the most well-known examples of commoning struggles.¹¹⁴ The example from the 2000 Cochabamba Water War in Bolivia provides the context that impelled a victory for the commons movement over privatisation. Indigenous community coordinating successfully using ethnic networks organised to manage water as commons at the community level. Confronted by these successful commoning campaigns, the progressive government of Morales used a ‘public ownership’ discourse to reclaim water from the popular control Bolivian water committees and established national sovereignty over the commons pricing water and offering it as a commodity. In this way, the government intervened to limit local autonomy, a decision that is continued to be oppose the state’s attempt to manage the commons to protect local sovereignty and autonomy.¹¹⁵

4.2 Land based commons for housing and inclusivity

Issues of urban land for housing in the Global South are more severe than ever. There are legal and/or reasonable provisions in place to promote urban poor access to good housing and to prevent speculation and exclusion over time. These projects are gaining increasing attention, particularly from the United Nations, as alternative forms to private individualisation of property (such as titling and subdivision of land) can be adopted for housing and/or upgrading of existing precarious neighbourhoods.

Research on eight case studies concerning urban land-based commons examine how communities have informal and legal rights to access common land and housing. In these contexts, commoning practices are defined as a set of circumstances in which a piece of land has a social function of communal character with land-use rights organised by the community. The following cases shown in the table stress the innovative character of new urban land-based commons, where commons are seen as alternatives to private property and as a means of accomplishing housing for all.¹¹⁶

111. Short and Winter, “The Problem of Common Land: Towards Stakeholder Governance.”

112. Morrow, “Community Self-Organizing and the Urban Food Commons in Berlin and New York.”

113. Kamath and Dubey, “Commoning the Established Order of Property: Reclaiming Fishing Commons in Mumbai.”

114. Sultana and Loftus, *The Right to Water: Politics, Governance and Social Struggles*.

115. Dwinell and Olivera, “The Water Is Ours Damn It! Water Commoning in Bolivia.”

116. Simonneau, Denis, and Valitutto. “Land-based commons for housing and the inclusive city. A comparative approach.”

Case study	City, Country	Context and dynamic under process
Community Land Trust	Voi, Kenya	A Community Land Trust (CLT) can be defined as “a not-for-profit community-controlled organization that owns, develops and manages local assets for the benefit of the local community” (Diacon, Clarke and al., quoted in Cabannes, 2013). The CLT in Voi was created as part of a slum upgrading project financed by the German cooperation. It does still exist now, however with a fragile community (no regular meetings, rules are not enforced, distrust within residents and their elected committee).
Housing cooperatives	Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso	The national law makes provision for developing housing cooperatives in the country since 2008 but does not provide details on cooperatives creation and development. Only one housing cooperative exists in Ouagadougou (with 600 members, approximately 100 houses built or under construction). 42 households from the cooperative have already got access to a house in the periphery of Ouagadougou, through to a lease-purchase system.
Mutual aid housing cooperatives	Montevideo (and other cities) Uruguay	The national law makes provision for developing housing cooperatives in the country since 1968. They are defined by three pillars: i) collective and indivisible ownership; ii) mutual aid for building through the joint effort of every beneficiary family; and iii) self-management (the cooperative allocates resources, including a public subsidy, and manages all aspects of the project, without intermediaries). There are 390 mutual aid housing cooperatives in the country, benefiting 20,000 households and 70,000 people. The system is still vivid, and the national federation of mutual aid housing cooperatives (FUCVAM) is contributing to disseminate the model.
Commoning practices for reclaiming land	Bangalore, India	Three categories of sites are included: i) ‘Akraka-Sakrama’ (AS) used in mostly central city locations of low and middle mixed-use residential neighbourhood; ii) Occupancy Certificate (OC) procedures for relatively upscale apartment complexes in what was a decade back Bangalore’s outer regions now incorporated into its urban administrative boundary; iii) Conversion of wetlands into settlement built-up through the Akrama-Sakrama provision in outside the metropolitan Bangalore limits. These collective struggles for land create political space defined by property relations. The cases generally lead to individual land rights.
Collective acquisitive prescription (usucapio)	Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	Positive or acquisitive prescription (also known as usucapion) refers to the possibility of becoming the owner of a property following a long period of (often illegal) occupancy on a continuous and non- conflictual basis. In Brazil, the City Statute of 2001 enables the lowest-income households to obtain the right to collective ownership in occupied areas where it is difficult to identify individual land parcels. In that case, all members of the group are considered to be co-owners of a single, indivisible property. This provision is very rarely applied on the ground, due to practical reasons (access to information) and a lack of legitimacy.
Environmental urban commons under rehabilitation	Nagpur, India	Public authorities in Nagpur aims at reinforcing the city’s resilience to environmental and climate challenges, through the rehabilitation of the local ecosystem of the riverbanks and the development of benefits for city dwellers. A legislative provision defines a buffer zone of 15 meters on each side of the river – called a non-development zone in urban planning documents. This land issue affects 50 hectares, both public and private. Some land is also occupied (around 1200 buildings, including 1000 dwellings). Currently, the rehabilitation of Nag riverbanks has to deal with two contradictory issues: environmental commons preservation and unauthorized occupation of the riverbanks.
Urban development on traditional land-based commons	Diverse cities, New Caledonia	According to traditional (kanak) land-based commons, land is inalienable and non- transferable. Kanak communities start to valorize and development their land through three ways: i) housing construction for the community; ii) partnership with social housing institutions in a perspective of rental income; iii) economic development projects.
Ejidos	Mexico City, Mexico	Ejidos are areas of communal land for agriculture. Farmers have individual use rights on their parcel, and they maintain ejidos together. Ejidos date from the Zapata revolution but since 1992 they can be privatized and sold. Ejidos are particularly valued by developers for social housing construction at the outskirts of Mexico City since they are quite affordable compared to the rest of the city.

Figure 1. A table describing eight innovative case studies of urban land-based commons.
Source: Simonneau et al., “Land-Based Commons for Housing and the Inclusive City. A Comparative Approach” (2019) adapted and edited by the author.

4.3 Community Land Trusts and Housing

Community land trusts (CLTs) are increasingly presented as a model for managing housing commons.

There is substantial evidence that collective property structures sustained by appropriate institutional architecture provide an innovative way to facilitating impoverished groups' collective access to cheap housing and urban land. In CLTs literature, the role of collective action to collectivise land or finance to acquire land is understood as a form of commoning.

Studying the first CLT in Brussels (Belgium), the CLTB Vandenpeereboom project, ethnographic evidence suggests that commoning practices enable collective action that benefit communities and citizens beyond housing. However, the scaling up of housing projects require adequate political interventions to sustain community-based housing organisations in the long-term. In this project, commoning appears as a political process of negotiation that results in its institutionalisation, pointing at the 'mixed' nature of CLTs and illustrates the significance of policy support in the form of participation of public housing associations in scaling up CLTs, with subsidies and the provision of legal support.¹¹⁷

In Liverpool (UK), a study of a CLT campaign in the low-income neighbourhood of Granby finds that commoning is acted by cooperative social relations rooted in place. The campaign sought to acquire empty homes to open space for grassroots organisations and thus providing material support to the community but also enabling their social mobilisation. In this sense, a CLT model can represent "an effective institutional solution to urban decline in the context of private property relations".¹¹⁸

In the same city, Thompson finds that a group of citizens that organised into a cooperative to fight against eviction illustrates that in Liverpool successful housing projects are initiated with a strong grassroots support and not by policymakers. This can indicate **the need for local administrations to map and reach out to existing housing groups, rather than initiate projects from scratch.**¹¹⁹

CLTs examples illustrate that commoning practices are rooted in their urban context and affected by local housing dynamics, a process that Noterman defines of 'differential commoning', calling for place-based housing solutions.¹²⁰

In Berlin, the CLT movement is building a *Stadtbodenstiftung* (A City Land Foundation) adapted to the local needs as local problems and what residents and neighbourhoods need differ from city to city. "Firstly, CLTs are about community-organising and community-led development on community-owned land. Secondly, the movement tackles land ownership, the securance of long-term land ownership for social purposes. Thirdly, trust is understood as trusteeship. CLTs act as trustees for the land they hold and make sure it is used by and for people or communities who are currently less able to access land. This includes people with lower incomes, social and cultural institutions, or generally disenfranchised neighbourhoods".¹²¹

A study of the Tanzania-Bondeni CLT in Voi (Kenya) finds that CLT is an innovative housing solution for low-income families that is effective in avoiding evictions. The study highlights the need to change the property framework to end the social exclusion affecting the urban poor in Kenyan cities. Property rights reform are needed to accommodate social needs that are evolving with dynamics of urbanisation. In the case of the CLT in Voi, a key challenge has been the establishment of the trust as this was not easily recognisable by the Kenyan legal context. With the recent Community Land Act, however, prescriptive forms of property of individual tenure as the archetypical form of property can now exist with alternative forms of landholding such as communal forms with greater benefits for the urban poor living in cities.¹²²

In Latin America, where land pressure is high and land titling can induce market-driven displacement, CLTs are also adopted. As a well-documented Puerto Rican case demonstrates, the adoption of the CLT model to the Caño Martín Peña area of San Juan (Puerto

117. Aernouts and Ryckewaert, "Beyond Housing: On the Role of Commoning in the Establishment of a Community Land Trust Project."

118. Thompson, "Between Boundaries: From Commoning and Guerrilla Gardening to Community Land Trust Development in Liverpool."

119. Thompson, "From Co-Ops to Community Land Trusts: Tracing the Historical Evolution and Policy Mobilities of Collaborative Housing Movements."

120. Noterman, "Beyond Tragedy: Differential Commoning in a Manufactured Housing Cooperative."

121. Sacharow, "The Community Land Trust, Stadtbodenstiftung, in Berlin on Turning Land into Commons."

122. Midheme and Moulart, "Pushing Back the Frontiers of Property: Community Land Trusts and Low-Income Housing in Urban Kenya."

Rico) provides land regularisation and tenure security for dwellers of informal settlement. In collaboration with the governments of Porto Rico and San Juan, a community upgrading process initiated in 2002 now homes 25,000 people.¹²³

Finally, other experiences point at the collective dimension of the housing-finance nexus via collaborative municipal partnerships. In Nepal, a context where private sector finance does not lend to low-income families,

a Community-Led Infrastructure Finance Facility (CLIFF) which aids housing projects in informal settlements, lent US\$ 1.94 million to fund the construction of 1,109 homes in five Nepalese cities. The initiative was possible thanks to the collaboration between local municipal administrations and the housing group Lumanti, which together brokered the negotiation with the bank on behalf of the communities to be housed.¹²⁴

4.4 Perspectives on co-housing and common goods

An ethnographic study of *obshcheye* – a Russian term similar to commons – also questions the semantic values of urban commons for contexts in which the public assumed different meanings, like in post-soviet Russia,¹²⁵ but also in other post-socialist countries such as Serbia.¹²⁶ In contrast to commons, *obshcheye* communal life refers to different societal concerns about “(not wanting to be ‘Soviet’), ownership (worrying about what is ‘no one’s’), affective connectivity (one sits and waits for a conversation), and the act of caring for people and for spaces”.¹²⁷

Using a feminist political ecology lens and drawing on extensive research on four co-housing projects in the Netherlands and the UK, Tummers and MacGregor find that in co-housing aspects such as the sharing of consumer goods constitute a radical commoning practice. However, co-housing projects per se do not build a post-patriarchal society: “Changing

the spaces and structures in which people live together cannot achieve gender justice or resolve the care crisis by itself; fundamental change in the patriarchal-capitalist gender order will require radical cultural change”.¹²⁸

A study of rental apartment complex in Jatinegara, East Jakarta (Indonesia) shows that people who were evicted from high-density kampung settlements re-configured public spaces of rented apartments in mass-produced buildings into common goods. These new apartments provided a variety of socio-spatial issues for low-income inhabitants and the study investigated changes in the configurations of hallways brought by the renters on several of the building’s floors. Researchers discovered that **commoning of shared space was a practice to accommodate the social needs of the tenants and a practice agreed among neighbours to avoid competition over these resources**.¹²⁹

4.5 Commoning Trends

New forms of commoning are also emerging alongside the digital revolution. Literature on data as commons reflect upon the characteristics, limits and potentials of digital commons. On the one hand, digital commons emphasise the nexus between free access and innovation that has spurred the creation of new tools for civic engagement, transparency, and democracy, or even local digital currencies to build community wealth. On the other hand, the digital arena

is a clear example of the exploitation of common pool resources by private companies and financial markets, when commons are free labour or capital produced cooperatively but then privatised, bought and sold for profit.¹³⁰

The city of Barcelona (Spain) has developed a right to the digital city approach that puts transparency and democratic ownership of data at the centre of its digital strategies. This cornerstone chart for the right to the

¹²³. Case-based Contribution produced by CoHabitat Network for GOLD VI.

¹²⁴. Case-based Contribution produced by ACHR for GOLD VI.

¹²⁵. Chernysheva and Sezneva, “Commoning beyond ‘Commons’: The Case of the Russian ‘Obshcheye.’”

¹²⁶. Kucina, “Commoning of the Uncommonness: Developing Urban Commons in Post Socialist City.”

¹²⁷. Chernysheva and Sezneva, “Commoning beyond ‘Commons’: The Case of the Russian ‘Obshcheye.’”

¹²⁸. Tummers and MacGregor, “Beyond Wishful Thinking: A FPE Perspective on Commoning, Care, and the Promise of Co-Housing.”

¹²⁹. Adianto, Gabe, and Zamel, “The Commoning of Public Goods by Residents of a Jakarta Apartment Complex.”

¹³⁰. Reijers and Ossewaarde, “Digital Commoning and Its Challenges”; Lynch, “Contesting Digital Futures: Urban Politics, Alternative Economies, and the Movement for Technological Sovereignty in Barcelona”; Arvidsson, “Capital. Commons.”

digital city is an example of digital democracy and digital sovereignty centred on '**City Data Commons**'.¹³¹ This chart, which can be adopted and integrated by other cities have five guiding principles and tools:

1. Owning Platforms and Protecting Data ('Technological sovereignty')
2. Supporting citizen-led initiatives using participatory digital tools
3. Regulating aggressive digital platforms
4. Implementation of a technological Code of Conducts
5. Using Open-Source Software¹³²

Another trend is the creation of **local currencies as commons**. Community currencies share substantial characteristics with urban commons, such as community development and the incorporation of solidarity and cooperative principles into money. The failure of the market and the state to issue money in a decentralised

manner prompted the action of civil society organisations to create and embed money in communities. Parallel currencies that circulate in defined urban neighbourhoods and across a network of shops for examples, such as in the case of the Brixton Pound in London (UK), constitute examples of commoning finance by treating digital currencies as commons good.¹³³

Moving away from public-private partnerships, promoters of economic democracy strategies in the UK, look at innovative municipal examples to common companies and form new forms of **public common partnerships**.¹³⁴ In such arrangements, as shown in the figure below, three entities work together to democratise the production of services at the urban level, maintaining public and common control and oversight over common and public goods. These are: a Local Authority representative of electoral politics; a Joint Enterprise formed by members of the local authority; and a Common Association self-regulated by their own decision-making processes.

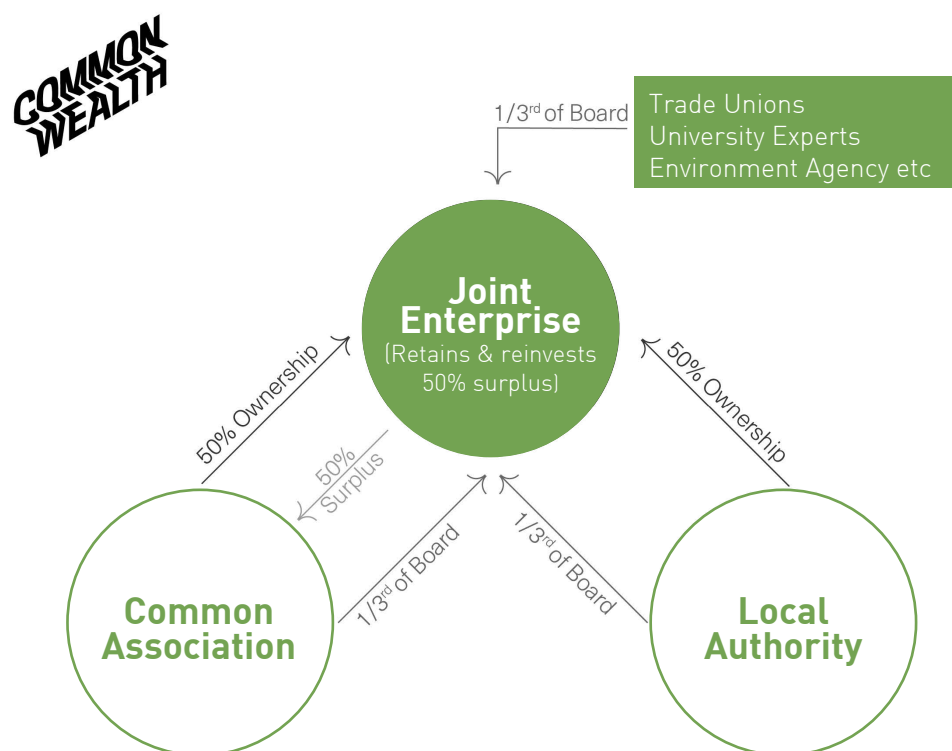


Figure 2. The structure of a joint Public-Common-Partnership enterprise.
Source: Milburn and Russell, "Public-Common Partnerships: Building New Circuits of Collective Ownership" (2019).

131. Calzada and Almirall. "Barcelona's grassroots-led urban experimentation: Deciphering the 'data commons' policy scheme."

132. Morozov, Evgeny, and Francesca Bria. "Rethinking the smart city."

133. Taylor, "Being Useful' after the Ivory Tower: Combining Research and Activism with the Brixton Pound."

134. Milburn and Russell, "What Can an Institution Do? Towards Public-Common Partnerships and a New Common-Sense."

Public common partnerships can act as catalysts for the formation of commons association in sectors such as energy, food or housing, where cooperatives of urban communities of commoners can be scaled up with the support of LRGs. Many commentators see potential for these partnerships, especially for a green transition and Green New Deal policies.¹³⁵

Public common partnerships are largely inspired by Wolfhagen's energy partnership (Germany). In this partnership, shareholders of the cooperative benefit from annual dividends which are reinvested back into the cooperative's energy saving fund. The fund is supervised nine cooperatives that form an Energy Advisory Board, along with one representative from i) the local energy agency; ii) the municipal utility company (*Stadtwerk*); and iii) the municipality. Such fund is thus oriented towards the mission of the enterprise and, in this case, to support energy efficiency projects such as uptake of electric bikes and programmable radiator thermostats.

Finally, an urban common that does not cease to develop lies in the **creative and cultural spaces** of cities. The literature on this topic is vast, and case

studies continue to grow world-wide, from the cultural activism and anti-eviction protest of artists transforming urban spaces in Seoul (South Korea)¹³⁶ to occupations of cultural spaces in Sao Paulo (Brazil) and the pacts of collaborations between cultural workers and local administrations in the Italian cities of Bologna, Naples and Turin.¹³⁷

Cultural commons are particular prominent in many parts of Europe and Latin America because of the self-proclaimed role assumed by community of commoners in this field. A recent report notes that "cultural and creative commons ([such as] independent cultural centres, formerly occupied theatres, abandoned spaces re-appropriated by communities) are born as a self-organised way to share and mutualise means of production, in order to make creative work more sustainable and cost-effective".¹³⁸

While cultural urban commons spread across cities of the world, commoning scholar Micciarelli points out that practices are often seen as "the problem, rather than the solution".¹³⁹ For local administrations the question is therefore how they can support these projects and the value they produce without interfering with their autonomy.

¹³⁵. Milburn and Russell, "Public-Common Partnerships: Building New Circuits of Collective Ownership".

¹³⁶. Shin, "Urban Commoning for Jarip (Self-Standing) and Survival: Subcultural Activism in 'Seoul Inferno'".

¹³⁷. Case-based Contributions on Brazil and by Micciarelli for GOLD VI.

¹³⁸. De Tullio, *Commons. Between Dreams and Reality*.

¹³⁹. Ibid.

5. Key concluding messages

For commoning practices to be sustainable and work towards greater urban equality in cities, three elements need to work altogether: the reproduction of existing and new urban commons, a community of commoners that is inclusive, and commoning practices that are democratic.

Commoning indicates a strategy for collective action aimed at building alternative modes of governance and production, where the praxis of commoning is as important as the object to be commoned. Commoning is thus a social practice of radical transformation of property regimes and, therefore, social relationships.

Some communities of commoners will seek collaborations with private or public actors, including LRGs. While other commoners won't collaborate with state actors following a "in and against" strategy, it is nonetheless important for cities and local administrations to recognise their struggles in producing and maintaining commons that address urban inequalities.

Provocations arising from commoning struggles such as occupations should be welcomed and not repressed if they promote inclusivity of the most marginalised, as urban political mobilisations are important for space-commoning and citizenship formation, particularly for poor women, refugees and migrants.

In these circumstances, the role of LRGs may be one of mediator between communities and the legal framework. Another important function for local

administrations is to understand how critical their support can be (both formal or informal), in amplifying the agency of community of commoners and strengthen the formation of commoning practices, for example when communities need financial support to acquire land to build houses, or when workers' cooperatives need space to expand into new sectors.

Finally, commoning should not be seen as a cost-effective practice of governance, but rather understood as a pathway to combat urban inequalities starting from the expansion of collective forms of property.

There are also trends to look out, as these are some of the new commoning domains that will represent exiting potentials but also challenges for the cities of the 21st century. These are:

- ▶ Data commons and the right to the digital city
- ▶ Community participation as planning for urban commons
- ▶ Cultural spaces as commons
- ▶ Public Common Partnerships
- ▶ Refugees commoning Right to the City demands

Ultimately, commoning practices make clear the importance of re-thinking alternative modes of property regimes and urban governance. Recognising the radical dimension of commoning practices is an essential part of the urgent action towards urban equality.

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