

**"The Power of Neighborhood"
and The Commons**

P.M.

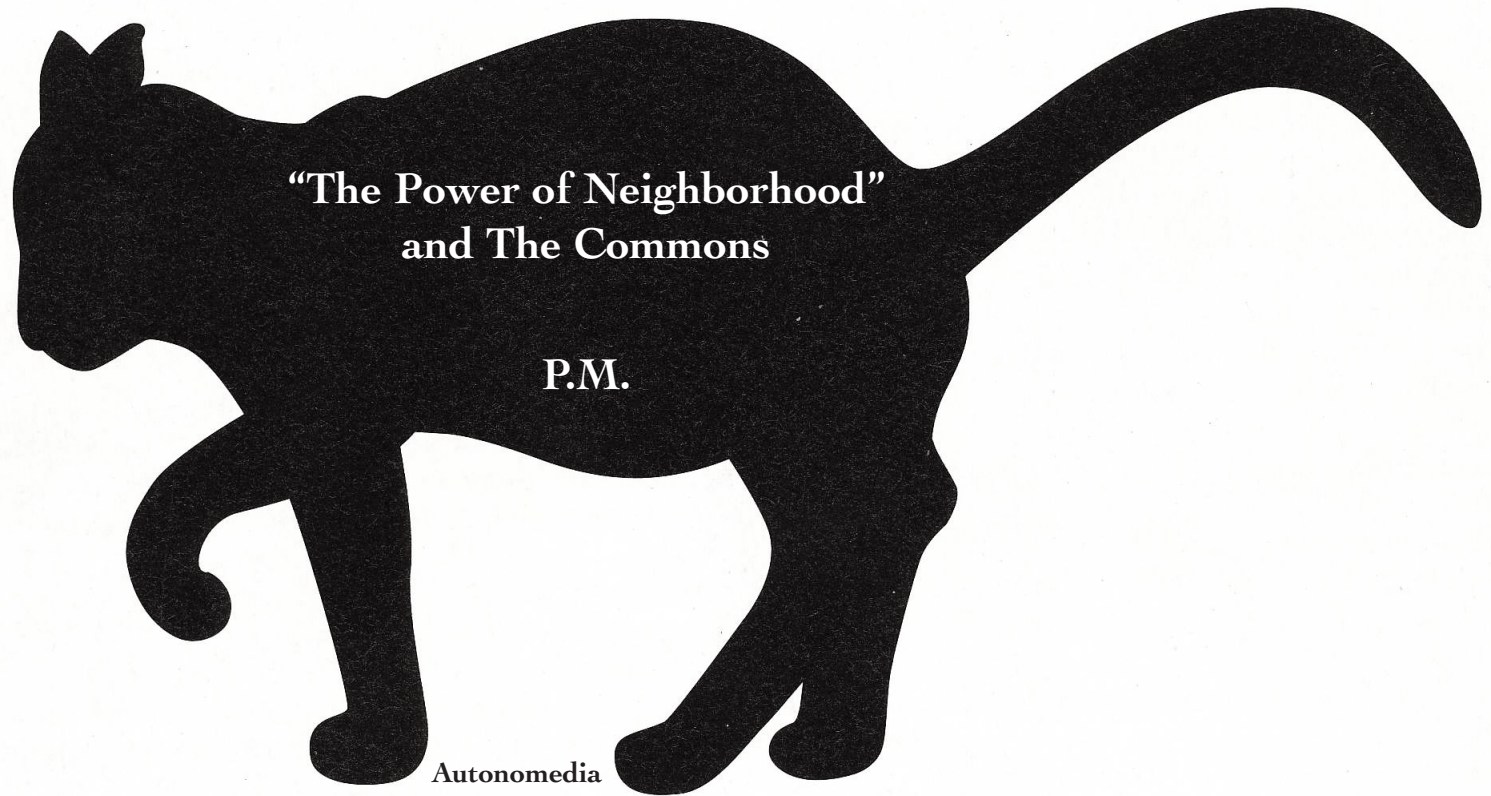




Also by P.M. from Autonomedia

Akiba
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Autonomedia



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“It’s class warfare; my class is winning, but they shouldn’t be.” — Warren Buffett, Interview with Lou Dobbs, CNN, June 19, 2005

“What makes waged work so attractive, that it doesn’t occur to anybody to outlaw it, as one outlawed slavery a long time ago?”
— Marianne Gronemeyer

“I’m going to tell you who my adversary is. My real adversary has no name, no face, no party, he will never run for office and will never be elected — and still he will rule. This adversary is the world of finance.”
— François Hollande, candidature speech for the French presidency, January 22, 2012.





Part One

FOUR ASPECTS OF A GENERAL CRISIS

Our economic system, that is the relationship between humans and nature and between humans and humans, is based on a misunderstanding that has — depending on the depth of the respective theory — lasted for 250¹ or 5000² years. This misunderstanding, which defines us as competitors, trading animals or market participants,³ has added up to a general crisis that can be characterized by four main aspects:

System

Our economic system is stumbling from one collapse to the next. Its latest strategy, called globalization, has been to export the external costs to the southern hemisphere. It has proved to be a failure, and the crisis has consequently returned to the old central regions.⁴ Our system is fundamentally flawed and destabilized by internal contradictions. To point out one of them: income can only be generated by work, but work is getting scarce at the moment and will become even scarcer in the future. Thus the “purchasing power” that capital needs to realize value is strangled by itself. These contradictions are being deferred into the future by financial manipulations.

Whereas the planetary GDP is around \$60 trillion, the combined financial derivatives have reached the astronomical sum of \$600 trillion. These checks are bouncing into our faces in different shapes and sizes at the moment: as financial crises, debt crises, state crises, currency crises. Things are simply not working out. The “tragedy of the markets” must be brought to an end.

Resources

While the incurred promises can only be kept if the economic volume increases, economic growth, the core mechanism of the system, is gobbling up the resources of the planet: the oil, the soil, the water, the rare earths etc.⁵ The market system is incapable

¹ That is, if we date the beginning of modern capitalism in the middle of the 18th century. Adam Smith (*An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 1776) provided the blueprint of a capitalist utopia that never really worked out.

² The beginning of centralized patriarchal civilizations. David Graeber, *Debt — the First 5000 Years*, 2011; Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation On A World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*. London: Zed Books (1999); Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and The Blade: Our History, Our Future*. New York: Harper & Row, 1989

³ “The propensity to truck, barter and exchange one thing for another is common to all men, and to be found in no other race of animals.” Adam Smith.

⁴ Robert Kurz, *Schwarzbuch Kapitalismus*, 1999; *Geld ohne Wert*, 2012.

⁵ On the level of phenomena the eight most important driving forces of growth are: pension systems and funds, health care, education (in some aspects), labor market, consumption, distributive justice, policy of firms, financial markets, banks, tax policy, state finances. Irmi Seidl, Angelika Zahnt, (ed.), *Postwachstumsgesellschaft*, 2010.





of allocating resources in a sustainable way. The logic of the system is its biggest growth constraint. We're using almost two planets at the moment, whereas we've only got one. "We're mining the planet." (Jared Diamond).⁶ In 2013 we had used up our yearly allowance of resources in August. As this has been going on for years, we should stop using *any* resources till the year 2020 just to get "even." Instead, we keep raiding the larders of our grandchildren.

Environment

The rapid consumption of our resources is ruining the biosphere; it poisons the environment and causes climate risks. The decoupling of growth and CO₂-emissions has failed. It was bound to fail.⁷ Immaterial growth is not feasible. Our economic sys-

tem is not compatible with the ecological limits of our planet.

Inequality

As resources are getting scarce, their distribution leads to conflicts, which in turn increase inequality.

The 20 per cent of the world population living in the northern hemisphere are using up 80 per cent of the resources. 1 per cent of the people living on this planet own as much as the remaining 99 per cent. The GNP/person in Bangladesh is a hundred times smaller than ours. Moreover, our societies themselves have become more unequal: 1 per cent of US households own 225 times as much as the average household; in 1962 it was 125 times, already then

a scandal.⁸ The result is unhappiness,⁹ social conflicts, a decay of democracy and state of law, civil wars, terrorism, forced migration. The losers are revolting everywhere, calling for justice and democracy for everybody. They're knocking at our doors. We shouldn't be surprised either.

A further aspect of the crisis, linked with the rest, is the permanent global food crisis (e.g. corn turned into ethanol; cf. Vandana Shiva, 2008).¹⁰ At present a huge land grabbing process (to the extent of 80 to 240 million ha of fertile land)¹¹ is under way. As there are no official land titles, the land belongs to the state, and can thus be sold legally, but in fact in corrupt ways and neglecting customary law, to investors who turn it into plantations (Madagascar,

⁶ *Collapse. How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed.* Viking, New York 2005.

⁷ Tim Jackson, 2011.

⁸ Stiglitz, 2012, p. 36.

⁹ Richard G. Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*, Penguin, 2010; inequality in a society makes everybody more unhappy, including the rich.

¹⁰ *Soil Not Oil: Environmental Justice in an Age of Climate Crisis.* South End Press, 2008.

¹¹ Land grabbing is also happening in Europe, especially in the East European countries.





Ethiopia, Cambodia etc.). What are in fact expropriations are then presented as important investments in the infrastructure, and as a means to create jobs.¹² Since the eruption of the financial crisis safe investments have been sought after, and land has been rediscovered as a major option.

Privatization and commoditization are conquering more and more aspects of life. By mining and opening up of new oil or gas sources (including fracking), whole tracts of land and seashore have been and will be polluted. Oceans are still being overfished. Privatization reaches even deeper: genomes, seeds, organs, plants, animals and even humans (brain research) are being patented.

The markets have either no means or else lost the intent to restrain themselves. Whether we will be able to tame these forces has become a matter of survival.

We're heading for a megacrisis which will take the form of partial, regional collapses in the near future, and will eventually lead to a general collapse. According to the Club of Rome the collapse cannot be prevented — which means our task will consist in preparing for a soft landing.¹⁵ The metaphor of the train racing towards an abyss and the need to pull the emergency brake must spring to mind. Since the braking distance has meanwhile become longer than the distance to the abyss, we have to

think in terms of parachutes.¹⁴

Our system has grown unstable, fragile and volatile. It's self-destructive, too. So-called "creative destruction" (Schumpeter) has reached planetary dimensions — and we all know full well there is no second planet to resort to after such a "creative" operation.

What we need is a more robust, stable or sustainable household-system. We need plurality, redundancy, maybe anti-fragility.¹⁵ We need justice and equality, too, because injustice and inequality lead to instability. We must be more careful and transform the existing system into something that works out.

¹² Cf. Pearce, 2013.

¹³ "The sea level will rise by 0.5 m, the ice in the Arctic will disappear in the summer and the new weather will hit farmers and tourists," the expert Jorgen Randers says. Greenhouse gas emissions will reach their peak only in 2030. This will be too late to limit a global rise of temperature of 2° C, which is considered as the highest acceptable amount. Until 2080 the temperature will rise up to 2.8° C, which could trigger an accelerating climate change." *Spiegel-Online* 8th April 2012, about the presentation of the Club of Rome report "2052."

¹⁴ As suggested by Zolli (*resilience*, 2012).

¹⁵ Taleb, Nassim Nicholas (2012). *Antifragile: Things That Gain from Disorder*, New York. If a system is too stable and too robust it gets lazy and loses the capacity to deal with fluctuations. A little bit of trouble is always a good thing. Taleb is also making a case for local urban modules and small countries (like Switzerland or Lebanon).



Getting Back on One's Feet: Resilience

The method to achieve long-term stability is resilience.¹⁶

Resilience is a quality of systems. It helps us to recover from external shocks and to become resistant to crisis. The notion is also used in medicine for patients who survive illnesses more easily or recover sooner than others.

What we need are resilient social structures. Here are some features¹⁷ of resilient social systems:

TRANSPARENCY

The participants know of each other what they are doing and can react accordingly and cooperate instantly. There is no room for secret committees and boardroom politics.¹⁸

COMMUNICATION

The participants are ready to communicate effectively and inclusively, on-line (as it were) and as personally as possible.

COOPERATION

The participants benefit from the mutual use of their capabilities and talents. The over-all benefit of cooperation is larger than the mere addition of individual contributions.

DEMOCRACY

The participants create a system of collective benefits on the basis of equal rights. The actual democratic systems are all oligarchic, as the so-called private economic sector is excluded (about 60 per cent of the social reality). Democracy makes identification and a sense of responsibility possible. Dictatorships and other hierarchical systems are notoriously unstable.

MODULARITY

Resilient systems consist of well-defined interchangeable modules which support each other. Redundancy is enhanced by modularity.

DECOUPLING CAPACITY

Modules can survive on their own for a certain period of time. Defects can be repaired without endangering the whole system.

DECENTRALIZATION

Decoupling presupposes decentralization. Local self-sufficiency within a defined context makes democracy more manageable.

RELOCALIZATION

Multifunctional local systems correspond to local needs. Modules need proximity to support each other and to create local/temporal synergies.¹⁹ Transportation must be

¹⁶ Zolli (2012); Hopkins (2012); Paech (*oya* 7/11).

¹⁷ These features constitute a package, no cherry-picking please, e.g. no cooperation without democratic participation.

¹⁸ Transparency must go both ways: our bosses would very much like us to be transparent whilst remaining as opaque as possible themselves.

¹⁹ The famous seven "Rs": "re-evaluate, reconceptualize, restructure, redistribute, *relocalize*, reduce, re-use, recycle." (Serge Latouche in: Seidl, *Postwachstumsgesellschaft*; p. 203).

minimized because it consumes energy and therefore fuels.

ECOLOGICAL DESIGN

Sustainable systems can only work with a new ecological design of the things used by them. Instead of planned obsolescence²⁰ robustness, repairability, re-usability (“cradle to cradle”), combinability etc. are the basis of ecological engineering. According to Stahel,²¹ the material throughput could be reduced by a factor of ten and still achieve the same level of utility. Such products/processes are poison for growth, of course, and have been kept off the market so far. Our future will not be based on low-tech or on a return to the middle ages (or the Paleolithic). It will be based on a kind of modular

high-tech, that we have yet to see. Once we have overcome the capitalistically stunted form of technology, the real technological age will begin at last.²² Instead of consumer goods for strictly individual use, we’ll develop tools, machines and other goods suited for communal and cooperative use, for the synergetic luxury of neighborhoods.²³

ADAPTED SIZE

Size must be adapted to function. “Big” is not always the most effective. Just as “small” is not always beautiful. On the whole we could speak here of adaptive basic patterns.²⁴

COGNITIVE DIVERSITY

A variety of methods, ways of thinking

and cultures is needed. Diversity itself is an important feature of stable systems.²⁵ Our current monomaniacal system (valorization of capital) must be replaced by a variety of relatively independent systems.

GRADUATED COMMITMENT

Resilient organizations are based on grades of varied intensity of commitment. There is always a core group with a higher degree of commitment, surrounded by circles of varying participation. Not everybody must do everything. Division of labor can be a good thing.

BELONGING²⁶

The feeling of belonging to a community improves resilience. This also goes for

²⁰ Latouche, *Bon pour la casse, les déraisons de l'obsolescence programmée*, 2012.

²¹ productlife.org.

²² Technology is derived from Greek techne=art. What we need is an extended concept of art.

²³ The furniture, the ingenious agricultural machines and the practical household items of the Shakers come to mind. Or William Morris’ vision of a new renaissance.

²⁴ Alexander, Christopher, Sara Ishikawa and Murray Silverstein: *A Pattern Language Which Generates Multi-service Centers*, (1968).

²⁵ Think of nature and biodiversity.

²⁶ When real, personal belonging is lacking, people resort to fictive or mythic forms of belonging: nationalism, brands, religious or political fanaticism, football-clubs, racism, fashion, lifestyle trends etc. that can easily be misused by demagogues or business agents.



health and happiness.²⁷ They can be religious, ethnic, cultural or other communities of a certain stability.²⁸

Resilience is based on cooperation and is incompatible with an absolute imperative of competition. There is nothing wrong with a certain amount of competition at the right time and in the right context, though.²⁹

THE COMMONS AND THEIR INSTITUTIONS

Cooperating and sharing are very old forms of human behavior, and most humans cooperate and share, provided they are not hindered by adverse conditions. It is an old method that arose in situations of

need and scarcity. Isolated individuals, for example, could never have survived in the Alps of the Valais.

The fashionable term for cooperation is commons or commoning, a social metabolism that is based on the production, preservation and use of communal goods and services.³⁰ In fact it comprises almost everything: land, food, housing, medical care, as well as immaterial goods like knowledge, culture and know-how. Traditionally only agricultural or natural commons were included, but today also our “second nature” developed over a period of 250 years of industrialization, belongs to the commons in forms of railroads, factories, hospitals, universities, canals, power stations, public services.

Not every common works in the same way. You can’t download potatoes and feed more people by sharing them. Knowledge on the other hand even expands when shared and generates more knowledge in the process. The number pi for example doesn’t become less true when more people get familiar with it. It’s a cultural common of humanity.³¹ That’s why it’s understandable that artists and writers insist on copyrights as long as they can’t live on free common goods. If you can’t get potatoes for free, you must be in a position to buy them. The development of both types of commons (immaterial, material) must be parallel and combined.³²

²⁷ “Not surprisingly, a headache will make a person miserable, and the second best predictor of the feelings of a day is whether a person did or did not have contacts with friends or relatives. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that happiness is the experience of spending time with people you love and who love you.” Kahneman, p. 395.

²⁸ Cf. Gladwell, Malcolm, *Outliers*, The miracle of Roseto, 2005; Seligman, 2012; Tarnutzer, Bopp, 2012.

²⁹ Comparing and competing are elements of play. In a temporally and locally well defined context they are even enjoyable. See: Huizinga, Johan, *Homo ludens*, 1938.

³⁰ On the history of the commons: Linebaugh, Peter, *The Magna Charta Manifesto*, 2008.

³¹ Cf. Silke Helfrich, 2012, p. 85: “The difference of rival and non-rival resources is of a qualitative nature and cannot be reduced to more basic notions.”

³² On the ecological impact of computer use and the Internet: p. 44. There’s no limitless “open source!”

The types of commons differ in respect to their accessibility. Their important common feature is that they are motivated by the common welfare to different degrees rather than the individual profit.

Among others we distinguish:

- public goods (sunlight, air, nature, oceans, streets, parks, education), open access, for free;³⁵
- public services (health service, transportation, energy, water), open access under certain condi-

tions, for free or for “politically reduced fees”;

- institutions of public utility (housing cooperatives, trusts, NGOs), restricted access, cost-based rents or prices, or gifts;
- club commons (associations, clubs, societies, guilds), only for members, but of public utility, no individual profit.

Thus commoning does not mean anything new; it is just an overall shift from private

property to collective property/use. Whereas private property is essential for private purposes — from clothes, books, furniture, to jewelry, one’s personal stock of vintage wines and cigars — it is dysfunctional, when it interferes with collective uses, such as land, natural resources, means of collective production, banks etc.

Alone we achieve practically nothing. We couldn’t survive for three days without social institutions or support. This means that we must extend the traditional, restricted concept of the commons (common goods like land, water, forests etc.) to everything we need to live a good life, to the so-called goods of subsistence (see further down).

³⁵ The term “commons” is not only fashionable among those people looking for alternatives to the market economy. “Since at least the early 1990s, the language of the commons has been appropriated by the World Bank and the United Nations, and put at the service of privatization. Under the guise of protecting biodiversity and conserving ‘global commons’, the Bank has turned rain forests into ecological reserves, has expelled the populations that for centuries had drawn their sustenance from them, while making them available to people who do not need them but can pay for them, for instance, through ecotourism.” (Federici, 2012; p. 139–40) Commons can become a reserve of resources waiting to be exploited by the market economy, if there are no powerful institutions of the commons that put them into the hand of communities of different sizes (see below, and also de Angelis on the *Big Society*, p. 70). Like Stiglitz, some economists have become nervous, as their system seems to be showing suicidal symptoms, and they’re asking themselves if market economy could be rescued by complementing it with commons-based schemes.

All experts agree in that there is enough food for everybody on this planet. At the moment we are wasting 50 to 60 per cent of the food before consumption, we're using 40 per cent of the globally produced food for animal fodder and we are also using a substantial amount of crops for fuel production. We could easily feed the double of the actual world population, which is not to say that population growth must be one of our goals. There is enough energy for a good life for all, there is enough water, there are enough minerals and metals, particularly if we include the big heaps of scrap metal that are still moving and standing around in our streets in the form of cars. The new form of mining will be urban mining, our treasure troves will be our waste deposits.

As recent research suggests, humans cooperate if they are not prevented from it. Even biologists now recognize the role of cooperation in evolution.³⁴ The struggle of all against all is a myth.

Commoning therefore means:

PRODUCING TOGETHER, ENJOYING TOGETHER

The term “producing” does not imply the current type of industrial production, but rather creating, cultivating useful goods and services in harmony with nature and society.³⁵ The circle of production and consumption must be closed by means of social institutions. The solitary consumer must be replaced by what we prefer to call the prosumer who participates in the production of goods, particularly food.

SHARING INSTEAD OF TRADING

Humans must not be reduced to “trading animals” or to “rational market participants.” David Graeber (2011) finds in his research that traditional societies share food.³⁶ Even chimpanzees do, although after some fuss.³⁷ Exchange, commerce, money and debt only arise by force under conditions of oppression. Primordial bartering is a myth. Its only purpose consists in justifying the introduction of money as a “handy” means of exchange. In actual fact money was misused as a means of control by the ruling classes as a form of tax and as salaries for their mercenaries and functionaries.

Sharing is only sustainable in stable communities that can establish it on a fair and long-term basis (→ democracy, belong-

³⁴ “Group selection” in evolution used to be an equally dirty word for biologists as “group sex” in churches still is for Catholics. Cf. E. O. Wilson, 2013; Nowak, 2011; Frans de Waal, 2011.

³⁵ Cf. Sennett, *The Craftsman*, 2008.

³⁶ Cf. also Diamond, *Legacy*, 2012.

³⁷ Frans de Waal, 2011.

ing). What we primarily need are functioning communities of sharing rather than so-called alternative systems of exchange. Sharing without community — as it is proposed in many forms on the internet — will not lead to egalitarian uses of the commons and to mutual support, but will privilege those who have something to share, and ultimately is just a new form of business. (The mayor of San Francisco is already pondering about how to tax the emerging networks.)

**EACH CONTRIBUTING WHAT S/HE CAN,
EACH GETTING WHAT S/HE NEEDS**

This is the original organizing principle of cooperatives. It does not preclude that contributing and receiving can't be institutionally regulated and monitored. States follow the same principle (progressive taxes, social security).

DEMIURGICAL PRINCIPLE

(From the Greek: *demos*=community + *ergos*=work).³⁸ This means that we'll be communal workers, mutual employees, rather than competing private entrepreneurs. It won't be the producers that determine what they want to produce and to throw unto a (failing) market, but the producers and consumers (the same persons in different roles) deciding together what to produce for the benefit of the community. To bring about this change, intensive communication (→ resilience) and participatory planning (crops, industrial production) are essential.

**EMBEDDING SMALLER SPHERES
OF COMMONS INTO LARGER ONES**

No commons-based community can exist entirely on its own; the whole planet is a common.

**Result:
*Greater Individual Benefit³⁹
Through Common Usage.***

There is no fundamental difference between these principles and those of *buen vivir* or *vivir bien*. The idea of the commons helps to revive and transform certain traditions, for example alpine corporations in Switzerland or *ejidos* in Mexico or other Latin-American countries.⁴⁰

Commons can't be run like self-service supermarkets without cashiers. In small groups they may function spontaneously, for example in our households, or in traditional farmer villages, or in clubs. The price of informal structures can be very high: domination by patriarchs, factions, mafias, and other extreme forms of social control. The "power to do" can easily be perverted into "power over" if institutions and social

³⁸ In ancient Greece craftsmen like blacksmiths or cobblers were hired by the whole village community to ply their trade. They weren't independent small businessmen.

³⁹ This notion is of course tautological: there can only be *individual* benefit, or well-being, in the end.

⁴⁰ viacampesina.org; www.bit.ly/ejido.

processes/relationships are not carefully monitored.⁴¹ Nowadays we need cool, formally defined institutions, good rules, and transparency.

After extended research Nobel-Prize-winning economist Elinor Ostrom found the following eight rules for institutions that should guarantee the success of commoning:

Elinor Ostrom's 8 Principles For Managing a Commons⁴²

1. Define clear group boundaries.
2. Match rules governing use of common goods to local needs and conditions.
3. Ensure that those affected by the rules can participate in modifying the rules.
4. Make sure the rule-making

rights of community members are respected by outside authorities.

5. Develop a system, carried out by community members, for monitoring members' behavior.
6. Use graduated sanctions for rule violators.
7. Provide accessible, low-cost means for dispute resolution.
8. Build responsibility for governing the common resource in nested tiers from the lowest level up to the entire interconnected system.

These rules are not exactly what you'd call friendly. They are rather tough but fair. People can't have access to everything. There is no way around monitoring and sanctions. (Sanction not being synonymous with pun-

ishment, can also mean help in fulfilling a function or in recommending a better-suited group.) Nothing works spontaneously.⁴³

Rules 4 and 8 are particularly important. They imply the embedding (see above) of smaller modules into larger ones. They make sure that local microcosms do not become isolated and rather compete or rival with each other. Cooperatives are at risk to define themselves as single companies, as it has happened in many cases. Company egoism may arise in self-managed firms, too, since inner democracy is not equivalent to outer democracy. The rules also give each individual member access to arbitration outside their own community, thus relativizing the implicit or explicit social control within. "Small" is not always beautiful.

⁴¹ "Power to do" is the capacity of using communal resources, "power over" are command structures that arise in hierarchical institutions. See: Holway, John, *change the world without taking power*, 2002.

⁴² *Governing the Commons*, Ostrom, 2011.

⁴³ The same goes for markets, by the way. Historically they were instituted by ruling classes and they have only survived till today because of extensive regulations, violent new enclosures (e.g. slavery, colonies), massacres, wars and periodic bailouts. Cf. Graeber, 2011; Karl Polanyi: *The Great Transformation*, 1957.

It is obvious that these rules by themselves do not guarantee access to a good life for everybody. A definition of boundaries may imply the exclusion of women, members of other castes or ethnic groups and religions, or be based on legal status (e.g. immigrants). Only when they are combined with the right to general subsistence (see below), or human rights in general, do they govern the real commons. If this isn't the case what we get is just a form of collective enclosures.

Institutions of the commons fall and stand with clear and permanently enforced management principles. Proper bookkeeping, regular auditing, regular elections, publicly accessible minutes, fair facilitation of meetings — the whole institutional orchestration — are essential. The unsung hero of the cooperative is the bookkeeper or archivist.⁴⁴ Striving to upkeep these rules

usually means making sure the timid and the rhetorically less resourceful are included. A possible recourse to outside instances (larger institutions of the commons, public institutions like courts, police etc.) may also prove helpful.

Rules are there to neutralize the three big poisons of cooperatives (also rampant in some of the Swiss alpine corporations):

- corruption
- favoritism
- intimidation

The objective social relationships (differences of class, wealth, education, age, sex) within a group can't just be managed away. Rules do help, but as long as these differences matter, managing an institution (of the commons, or other) means permanent engagement and watchfulness. And

what's more: keeping book is not much fun when there's no money.

Monitoring is not only accounting of monetary movements, but also of goods and services. Transparent information on stocks, flows of energy, work and other "things" is essential for collective decision-making, planning and ecology. It prevents waste and inefficiency. In the course of the development of a community and of commoning a form of "collective attention" will develop, the community will become a self-regulating organism and the flow of goods and the information on it will become one. Monitoring can eventually be reduced to a few strategic fields; everyday life communities can become largely demonetarized, more relaxed, self-regulating organisms. And a lot of not very attractive work (controlling, counting, accounting, monitoring) can be saved.

⁴⁴ Institutions are made of words. Cf. John R. Searle, *Making the Social World. The Structure of Human Civilization*, Oxford University Press, 2010. Animals have no institutions. Accounting and its methods is also a common: our latest cooperative is called *contoloco*, where accounting software and skills are shared between the members, all of them cooperatives and associations.

Rules shouldn't be seen as an expression of distrust. Of course, every community is based on trust, but if it's *only* based on trust, it is bound to fail. (Don't trust anybody, who says: "Trust me!") Humans are (besides being rational agents) explosive bundles of emotions, resentments, fears and ambitions. Rules (and laws, at least in principle) protect the weak or impulsive and prevent the development of cliques and favoritisms. Although delegates or board members are elected democratically and are often friends, some of the members soon begin to feel left out and powerless towards them. A formal committee of mediation (rule 7) can often prevent conflicts by its sheer existence, by giving every member the feeling (and right) to be heard and supported.

As mentioned before, such institutions are not utopian; they have existed for a long time and do still exist, in the form of cooperatives. I'm quoting from the statutes of an existing housing cooperative in Zurich:

"The goal of the cooperative consists in providing its members with low-cost space for lodging, working and communal activities by common self-help and shared responsibility. The cooperative establishes sustainable structures, which guarantee self-managed, safe, ecological and collective forms of housing, working and living."

The year 2012 was the UN-year of cooperatives. 800 million people, one tenth of the world population, are currently members of cooperatives and know how they work, at least in principle.⁴⁵ There is nothing exotic about cooperative organization. Shared responsibility and self-help — it's

not hard to see the potential of this principle. It's equally feasible that it works out.

It also works in the field of food-production:

"For us, agriculture is a form of caring for plants and animals, not a business. We produce food, as it grows seasonally, not standardized supermarket vegetables. We harvest what we grow, not what is profitable. We detract an important aspect of life from the sphere of speculation and profit, and work against the dominant economical logic of growth. We establish a feasible alternative economic organization that

⁴⁵ Fabricius, Wolfgang: *Kapital ohne Kundschaft*, 2009.

is based on productive cooperation instead of counter-productive competition.” (ortoloco, Zurich, Switzerland)⁴⁶

This sounds convincing. But let us not be too naïve either. Having instituted the legal form of a cooperative does not mean that it will help to create a stable ecological and socially fair society. In Switzerland a number of banks, insurance companies, super-market chains and even the organization for the disposal of the radioactive waste of nuclear power plants are cooperatives. Cooperatives can have evil goals. States are in a way cooperatives waging war against each other.

Still, cooperatives are based on some very attractive general principles: the voting

power is not dependent on the value of the shares. Whether you put in 1000 or 100,000 dollars, you only have one vote.

(The same goes for modern states.) It is understandable that this feature is not very appealing to very wealthy people as they don't like to give other people the right to decide how to spend their money. They feel hostile toward the state while at the same time need it to protect their property. Cooperatives therefore only work in societies or social sectors of relative equality.⁴⁷ Cooperatives at least have a mitigating effect on social inequality. However, in times of great insecurity cooperatives can become an interesting option even for the rich: what you lose through renouncing power you gain in security. Sharing wealth to support the commons can become an option when the going gets tough. Warren

Buffett may have won the class war, yet it may not have been the final word on the matter. As a respected member of a cooperative he could at least live his advanced age in peace.

Public or collective property (that is the management of such goods) has been known to degenerate into neglect and decay although the public authorities are supposed to take care of them. Neither private ownership (Enron, Lehman Brothers, GM) nor anonymous state ownership (decaying public infrastructure, USSR) has a good record of responsible management. Cooperatives of diverse sizes, being interconnected (rule 8, “nested tiers,” see also below) offer a good answer to this dilemma: the responsibility is not handed to the state, but still collective and not profit-orientated. It is known who is con-

⁴⁶ A gardening cooperative; www.ortoloco.ch (lo=local; co=cooperative) The members pay the operating costs plus the wages of 1.4 employees beforehand. The harvest is then distributed among the members, who also participate in the farm work. The risks (weather, pests) are shared by the members. What is supported is not farming as a small business, but agriculture as a form of the commons. ortoloco produces vegetables for 200 households (2013).

⁴⁷ Historically they are a form of working-class organization, the so-called “social left.” Cf. Sennett, *Together*, 2012. They were much ridiculed by the official socialist parties.



cerned (rule 1). The goods managed are near by and of immediate usefulness. If public or collective property is managed transparently by the local authorities (municipalities), and if subsidiarity (decentralization) is respected, a careful management of the commons can be successful. Whatever you may say about those Swiss Alpine Corporations that have existed for 700 years: the Alps are still there, the cheeses are delicious.

The Fallback Scenario: Three Parachutes of The Commons

The collapse of the market-based economic system needn't scare us. Some people even set hope on it. On the other hand, we should neither wait for nor speculate about such a collapse. Instead we should try to establish more just and enjoyable

systems any way. The best time to try out alternatives is always: now. Institutional experience and know-how is already available or is being tested at the moment. As we have already pointed out it would be a fallacy to try to replace the present system by a *single* different and perfect system. Systemic stability requires several independent metabolisms.

As far as the institutions of the commons are concerned (functional, territorial) the commons are — according to the guidelines of resilience — intricately interlocked, decentralized, immune to systemic collapses and dysfunctions. The basis of livelihood is subsistence:

“Subsistence is the sum of all that humans need for living: Food, drink, shelter against cold or

heat, medical and other care and sociality. When subsistence is secured, life can go on.”⁴⁸

Consequently this means, that we don't have to be particularly inventive in finding a fallback scenario when markets fail. The most reformist, gradualist, pragmatic approach is the best, boring as it may be.

It could look as follows (the figures relate to the world; the sequence doesn't imply hierarchy, but only the material size of the respective spheres):

1 Public Services

For the whole infrastructure and the production of existentially necessary goods the present existing state must and can be transformed into an institution of extended public

⁴⁸ Bennholdt-Thomsen/Mies, 1997; “1) Subsistence politics is a politics of everyday life, bottom up, made by active, responsible individuals, not imposed from above, by a higher authority. 2) Subsistence politics is a politics of the necessary, not the transcendental. 3) Subsistence politics derives from the concrete, the material, the bodily, the sensual and is directed against the abstraction of money and the anonymity of commodities. 4) The subsistence perspective is a politics for the reestablishment of community.” Veronika Bennholt-Thomsen, St. Gallen, 15 May 2011.



sphere of the commons	1 public services	2 agricultural subsistence	3 creative / cooperative projects
function	basic supply, industry, banks, social services	food	crafts, light industries, arts, services
organization	direct and indirect democracy	direct democracy	free association
size/number	600 territories; 350,000 "branches"; towns, boroughs	14,000,000 neighborhoods	unlimited

services on a larger scale.⁴⁹ It is obvious that more transparency and democratic participation will be needed than today's administrations offer, more resilient structures. States must also observe Ostrom's rules of governing the commons, which, in fact, are nothing but principles of good governance. To renounce on large scale social coopera-

tion because there is a risk of degeneration into hierarchical power structures (Cf. Holmway) is a form of defeatism and is not compatible with the needs of the large urban societies we live in.⁵⁰

From the initial function as an apparatus of repression the modern state has gradu-

ally been transformed into a cooperative entity, in which each member contributes what s/he can afford (taxes) and receives what s/he needs (public services, from education to loans and health care). Once inequalities have been diminished and oligarchic interests have disappeared, states can in turn reduce their repressive and governing functions ("power over") and become sober cooperative administrations of things. The neo-liberal ideologues' hatred directed at "the state" in any form is conceivable when considering its cooperative aspect and potential.

In the eyes of the neo-liberal predators the very existence of the state is scandalous, even more so of a state that has partly assumed the role of an institution of the com-

⁴⁹ Joseph Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality*, 2012, says that "the average social profit of state investment in research and development is far above 50 per cent, and therefore much higher than in any other field of investment." (p. 236) "Private health insurance companies are less effective than state Medicare, private life insurers are less effective than state pension systems." (p. 238) "As we know neither the state nor the markets are perfect. (...) There are numerous cases of state failure, but they pale compared to the losses that the manifold failures of the private sector — particularly in the context of the Great Recession (after 2008) — have caused." (p. 455) In spite of all of this Stiglitz is no champion of a predominant role of the state (in its present form). He still persists in seeing markets, competition and growth as the preferable model.

⁵⁰ More than 50% of the world's population lives in cities; in the global north, it's around 75%.

mons. The global financial crisis is being used to destroy all the commons-aspects of the state: in Greece, in Portugal, but also in the still “healthy” regions of Europe.

Should we ever be confronted with local, regional or global collapses, we won’t have the time to establish fancy alternative models of large-scale social cooperation. (We’re not talking here about small survivalist projects in alternative niches.) We must use what we have, and since the state is available it can function again as a fall-back option. Let us reclaim the state then!⁵¹ It is not the first time that this has happened and can therefore happen again.

In the latest crisis we saw anti-liberal lapses everywhere. Even in the super-liberal USA several banks and GM were virtually taken over by the government. The same happened to a great number of banks in Europe (and Switzerland), (UBS, Ireland, Iceland). In the 1930’s the city of Zurich bought the share majority of the biggest local industrial company, Escher-

⁵¹ Wainwright 2009, 190 ff.

Wyss. Why? Officially it was done to save jobs and tax revenue. But Escher-Wyss was a major producer of turbines for the production of electricity. Had the company stopped its operations, the public service “supply of electricity” would eventually have been jeopardized. If we consider a specific public service as essential, we should provide it. It’s as simple as this. We seem to have forgotten this elementary piece of knowledge, blinded by market fetishism and neo-liberal dogmas. (It seems that the real-life neo-liberals are in fact always the first to ask for state bailouts. They have never refused them based on ideological qualms.)

The implosion of financial bubbles can lead to a sudden devaluation of real (material) capital, and to a chain-reaction of collapses of all sorts of companies. If there are institutions of the commons that can step in to save essential enterprises, all of this doesn’t have to scare us: everything is still here, the factories, the workers, and the know-how. It will just be adminis-

trated differently. From the realm of finances, we step down to the so-called real economy (of useful goods), from where we enter the spheres of the commons. All that has happened is that we have got rid of the capitalist fetish of valuation and growth. We just don’t go through these strange motions any more. To realize the simplicity of this operation, we need not develop any new theories or a raised consciousness, all we need is to gain the insight, that there is nobody else in the cockpit beside ourselves, and that we aren’t just passive objects at the mercy of a savior or somebody else’s good will. This mental change will only happen when we do things together and in a different way.

The only goal of an economic structure based on the commons is the collective benefit; there is no inherent constraint to grow. We produce the goods we need within ecological and social principles. Nothing can go wrong. And we don’t need to make an extra “ecological” effort. The whole economy will be “green.”

It is evident that the mere fact that an enterprise is state-owned (or a cooperative) doesn't make it automatically a better, more effective enterprise. There are some very bad state-owned companies or state administrations ("failed or failing states") and some very good ones (Scandinavia, Switzerland). Not systemic, but historical reasons are responsible for it. On the whole it doesn't make a difference in terms of efficiency whether an enterprise is state-owned or not.⁵² The Swiss supermarket chain Migros (run in an almost Chinese manner by a self-appointed management, but still the biggest non-state employer in Switzerland) belongs to practically everybody (the nominal share is 5 francs, which almost all the Swiss have paid and forgotten about), in other words to nobody, and which runs like clockwork nevertheless. What matters (according to Winklhofer)

is not formal ownership, but the existence of effective control mechanisms (see rule 5). In future these mechanisms will be strengthened due to shared democratic responsibility and transparency.

In the case of agriculture most states took on the responsibility a long time ago. At present 80 cents of each franc earned by Swiss farmers is subsidized by the state. Thus the Swiss farmers are in fact state employees like hospital doctors or university professors — they just haven't become aware of it yet. But this fact per se hasn't had any negative influence on their capacity to produce milk or potatoes. (In this function the state will be replaced by direct subsistence-partnerships; → microagro.)

Contrary to the dictatorial socialist economy, whose failure still serves as a scare-

crow to discourage any non-private activities, we're talking here about a democratically organized structure, that is transparent and based on the needs of all stakeholders. In countries like Switzerland or the US this system works fairly well, whereas in authoritarian states, it seems bound to fail.

As an indicator the so-called state quota (percentage of state budget of GDP), which amounts to about 40 per cent in most modern states (US 43 per cent, France 57 per cent, Switzerland 34 per cent, Denmark 58 per cent), will probably rise up to 65 per cent, but shrink in absolute figures (→ *ecological design*), for the current extent of public services isn't sustainable (→ sufficiency, below). Nothing substantially new would happen. The

⁵² Richard Winklhofer, Effizienz staatlicher versus privater Betriebe — empirische Belege zu einer öffentlichen Diskussion, in *Kurswechsel*, 2/2001: "As a summary one can state that the performance of a company depends essentially on a concentration of property than can create the necessary incentives for the monitoring of the management. No clear empirical proof can be found for the claim that state property per se leads to a lower performance of a company. Furthermore we can see that efficient monitoring of a company supports a positive development of performance. Finally it must be stated, that the privatizations, that have been recommended lately have no evident theoretical, empirical or managerial foundation of being more productive."



state/cooperative (defined as an institution of the commons) would only take over the tasks that local institutions of the commons cannot fulfill (subsidiarity). These, however, will have to be transformed and up-graded in such a way that they're capable of assuming more functions than they do today (relocalization; → town, borough, territories).

The newly structured organisms of industrial subsistence (complementing agricultural subsistence) would in turn also entail different forms of participation in the production processes themselves (working conditions), of division of work and of remunerative systems.

As far as self-management in enterprises is concerned, it would only concern working conditions, but not the type, form or quantity of products, for these will be defined by the social modules in an iterative planning process (→ demiurgic principle and

Cockshott⁵³) between producers/consumers (same persons in different roles). The absence of pressure from market forces will lead to more freedom and allow more effective forms of cooperation within the firms and thus help to end the *general management crisis* felt in many companies, private and public. (Blaming “incapable bosses” is only a symptom of archaic hierarchical structures of command!)

As Frigga Haug suggests,⁵⁴ a general part-time scheme called 4 in 1 could be established: 4 hours of professional work, 4 hours of household work (including agriculture), 4 hours of political and social work, 4 hours of individual activities per day (+ 8 hours of sleep). Social work consists of politics, administration, meetings on all levels, communication. It isn't surprising that Haug reserves four hours a day for this type of activities: institutions that are based on cooperation and the commons are socially very complex and require more di-

rect participation than regulation by the principle of “he who pays commands,” that we know today. (And which ultimately is unstable and doesn't work out, as we know.) Like in Sweden we'll need many more and longer coffee breaks to make cooperation possible and enjoyable.

Institutions of the commons only flourish if extreme inequality is avoided (cf. Stiglitz), which in turn affects the principles of remuneration. Extra incentives must be restricted to unpleasant or dangerous jobs, to extraordinary efforts, high reliability or the assumption of long-term responsibilities. Talent, mental or physical strengths (genetically determined) and education (provided by public services) will not be considered. In any case, a part of the work will have to be paid in a universal means of exchange (points, money, globos) to guarantee a minimal mobility of people and the flexible interregional allocation of resources (loans). (The current global average wage is esti-

⁵³ Paul Cockshott, *Towards a new socialism*, advocating for more efficient and democratic planning of a complex economy (1993). With the use of appropriate computer algorithms planning is possible and can be democratically controllable and non-bureaucratic.

⁵⁴ Haug, Frigga, *Die Vier-in-einem-Perspektive*; Politik von Frauen für eine neue Linke, 2012.



mated to be around \$7000 a year.)

Certain domains of life (household, food, public services) can be demonetarized as they are generally available, part of the citizen-package like in holiday-resorts. For other domains suitable types of currencies (regional, global) can be used as a method of steering consumption, avoiding waste or enforcing rationing of rare goods. Such a use of money wouldn't pose a threat of re-accumulation and of a new cycle of capitalist development, as historically capitalism didn't "naturally" evolve from small-scale artisan production.⁵⁵

2 Food Subsistence Based on Agro-urban Neighborhoods

The household (from Greek *oikos*=house, family+*nomos* = order) is the basis of any economy and is therefore the first social

module of subsistence. Besides general, public and industrial subsistence, housing, food, clothing, everyday culture etc. belong to the every-day life organizational sphere of subsistence.

The second pillar of a post-growth society are therefore subsistence communities on the level of neighborhoods, that can, most importantly, assume most of the food supply and production. This sphere comprises about one sixth of the overall economic activities if we take current household expenses as a reference. Neighborhoods are the basic social module of a society based on the commons.

The neighborhoods are the source of the empowerment, the trust and the communicative capacity that we need to determine our own destiny. Neighborhoods provide the social conditions to establish attitudes and values that enable people to

make society sustainable. For further features and functions of neighborhoods: → part two.

3 The Creative-Cooperative Sphere

To be honest this sphere is a residual category. It comprises all kinds of activities that are made possible by public and communal subsistence (the two other spheres).⁵⁶ It's a creative-cooperative sector that must respect the social and ecological guidelines, but is characterized by the principle of free association (or individuality). Activities in this sphere can be individual or assume the form of "club-commons," cooperative firms, foundations etc. Membership (→ Ostrom's rule 1) is required, but access is open in principle. Any form of exchange or production can be tried out: markets, bazaars, gifts, open workshops, fairs, money, bartering etc. In this area trading

⁵⁵ Kurz, 1999.

⁵⁶ Or, as Keynes said: "The day is not far off when the economic problem will take the back seat where it belongs, and the arena of the heart and the head will be occupied or reoccupied, by our real problems — the problems of life and of human relations, of creation and behavior and religion." — First Annual Report of the Arts Council (1945–1946).

The Three Spheres of the Global Commons

LEVEL/PERSONS	GENERAL SERVICES	CREATIVE	AGRICULTURE
PLANET 6.9 billion	fossil fuels, energy, communication, steel, medicaments, global bank, emergency aid, space travel, scientific research, means of transport, electronic components, weapons, synthetic materials	software, music, literature, film, fashion, cosmetic products, computers, games, musical instruments	emergency aid, seed banks, spices, coffee, tea, cocoa, spirits, tobacco, coca
SUBCONTINENT 0.5 to 1 billion	vehicles, boats, canals, water supply, energy grids, machinery, engines, paints, chemical products, electric parts, continental bank	clothing, cosmetic products, software, circus, household items, music, theatre groups	wines, olives, canned goods, cereals, cheese, fish, condensed milk, dried mushrooms and beans, nuts, truffles
TERRITORY 10 million	energy, trains, buses, tribunals, metal wares, university, ceramics, glass, paper, territorial COOPERATORY and bank	local textiles, bags, cups, bicycles, carpets, literature, brushes, music	cereals, potatoes, sugar, beer, salt, wine, cheese, sausages, oils
REGION 0.1 to 1 million	water, energy, hospital, public transports, concrete, police, sewage recycling, theatre, regional COOPERATORY and bank	furniture, wood, straw, leather products, hats, special vehicles, jewellery, stationery, pots, casinos	milk products, fruit, meat, eggs, poultry, vegetables, herbs, sausages, hams, chocolate, fish
CITY* 0.1 to 1 million <small>*can coincide with a region or even a territory</small>	water, energy, opera, museums, ice rinks, swimming pools, public transportation, sport stadiums, parks, COOPERATORY (and bank)	cabarets, gastronomic restaurants, clothing, shoes, meat specialties, sweets, spirits, cigars, beer	urban gardens, bees, berries, nuts, rabbits, chickens
BOROUGH/TOWN 20,000	primary school, high school, health centre, dentist, energy, plumbing, police, COOPERATORY	accessories, belts, ties, computers, cookies, beer, furniture	herbs, take-away meals, pasta, lemonades, flowers
NEIGHBORHOOD 500	water, energy, building maintenance, sewage, kindergarten	clothing, washing, cleaning, repairing, child care, housework	bread, yoghurt, herbs, berries, urban gardening, pizza
INDIVIDUAL 1		personal hygiene, gifts, mutual help, clothing, one-man-enterprises, massages	meals, urban gardening, herbs in balcony pots, digestion

instead of sharing isn't a systemic issue.⁵⁷

Six Modules for the Institutions of the Global Commons

The trinity of the commons corresponds to the political wisdom of the division of powers, of checks and balances. It represents material democracy and structural prudence, which teaches us not put all your eggs in one basket. Do not trust yourself too much.

Most of the different types of commons and of activities can be distributed in six modules:

NEIGHBORHOOD	BOROUGH/TOWN
CITY/REGION	TERRITORY
SUBCONTINENT	PLANET

These modules are emergent entities, generated by possible reintegration of func-

tions, minimization of transport, economies of scale, communicative and political considerations, general features of stable, resilient systems. It is obvious, that they must be interpreted according to local conditions. The suggested modules are not identical in every circumstance, but they share more what Wittgenstein called "family resemblance."⁵⁸ We must not think of them as containers or gated communities, but rather as clouds with a fuzzy silhouette, as defined spaces and meeting points at the same time.

There is an intrinsic connection between functions and the size of the territories they serve. The cooperative state of public services works best in medium-sized territories that can be integrated without excessive use of energy for transportation. What we need is a global secession of medium-sized territories.

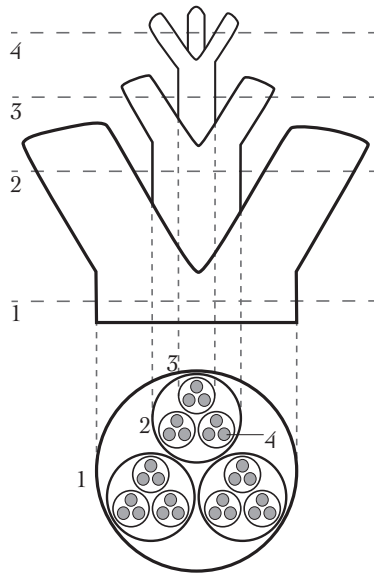
Big nations can be replaced by criss-cross federations and coalitions of territories that are defined by function, not by historical fictions. Territories can be members of sub-continental or global cooperatives for specific purposes. Such communal enterprises are already in existence, e.g. the CERN, a cooperative effort of nations, big and small. Unfortunately CERN isn't subjected to real democratic monitoring and in this respect not a perfect model.

Sub-continental or global cooperation is needed to develop the new ecological products, modular components or materials that can be used or assembled in territories or even neighborhoods.

The following diagram illustrates the embedding of smaller into larger commons-modules (as requested by Ostrom's rule 8):

⁵⁷ Kurz, 1999 and 2012. Attempts to plan this kind of activities can only lead to ridiculous or disastrous results. In fact, the purpose of planning is to free as many activities as possible from the necessity of planning.

⁵⁸ *Philosophical Investigations*, 1953.



Arthur Koestler's "Nested Holons"⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Koestler, Arthur, *The Ghost in the Machine*, 1967. "Every holon has a dual tendency to preserve and assert its individuality as a quasi-autonomous whole; and to function as an integrated part in it (existing or evolving) larger whole. This polarity between the Self-assertive and Integrative tendencies is inherent in the concept of hierarchic order." (p. 385) For such nested holons Koestler proposed the term *holarchy*. There is also an organisational system called *holacracy*. Again: how can you reduce the risk that "power to do" doesn't become "power over"?

Part Two

NEIGHBORHOODS AND MORE

Why Start in the Neighborhood?

The first and very promising institutions of the commons, the basic modules of a society based on the commons, are the neighborhoods. The size of the neighborhood can be derived from the requirements of resilience (modularity, relocalization, size, belonging), of subsistence and the managing principles for successful commons. Ostrom's rules correspond largely with the statutes of a housing cooperative (including defined boundaries, monitoring, internal mediation) and can practically be

applied in this context. Furthermore neighborhoods (linked to agricultural land in the region) are the logistically best suited community of subsistence.

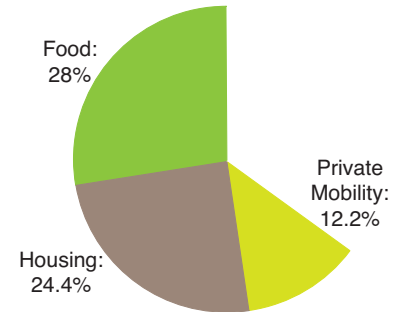
By transforming neighborhoods into communities of subsistence we clearly privilege reproduction over production. Making life possible and enjoyable is the main goal, industrial or social production being only an additional means to achieve this.⁶⁰

Also from a purely ecological point of view (sufficiency) neighborhoods mark an ideal starting point.

Our old operational system is based on the growth of capital, which can only grow if it has made a valuating detour via our households. The circle begins with the production, whose out-put must subsequently be consumed. Since the consumption happens in our households, the capital is kept alive, rejuvenated and in-

creased by our purchase of its products. In theory the economy could be stopped simply by boycotting shopping.⁶¹ Yet it is only too obvious that such a pseudo-strategy leads to sterile appeals to individual ascetism, whereas through cooperation and sharing in neighborhoods (commons and subsistence) the use of resources and energy is reduced and the quality of life improved at the same time. The answer to the problem is collectively produced lux-

The Ecological Impact of Households



⁶⁰ "Reproduction precedes social production. Touch the women, touch the rock." Peter Linebaugh, 2008.

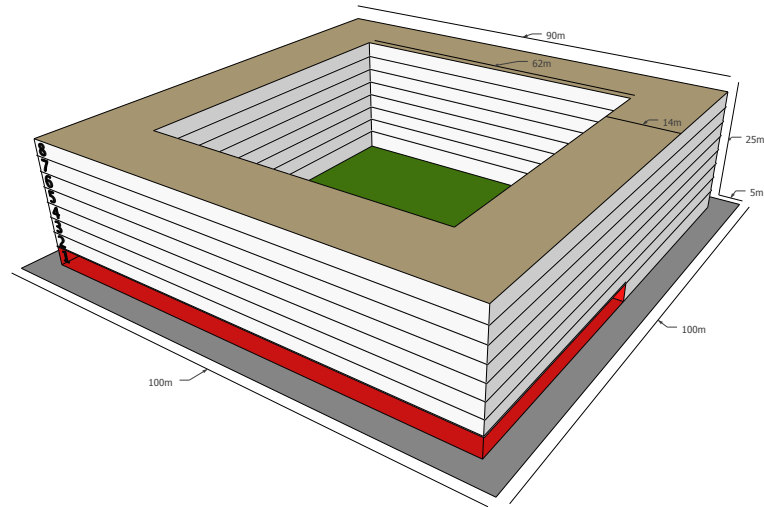
⁶¹ As well as by refusing to clean up its waste. George Caffentzis, "The Work/Energy Crisis and the Apocalypse," in: *In Letters of Blood and Fire*, 2013 (1992). A machine can be destroyed by starvation *and/or* constipation.

ury, rather than individual renunciation. Joint venture, instead of individual saving, is the motto.

Housing amounts to 24.4 per cent of our⁶² ecological impact, food to 28 per cent, private mobility to 12.2 per cent. This makes up almost two thirds of our total impact. The most decisive factor for an ecologically sound lifestyle is obviously a new way to produce, process and consume food.

In cities, neighborhoods are densely populated areas. Consider the following plan (right) as a reference model:

Volumetric Plan Neighborhood



What you see here is a relatively high (6 to 8 story) city block, arranged around a large courtyard. The buildings are 14 meters wide — allowing for a good proportion be-

tween volume and skin, which saves on insulation and façades. The *density*⁶³ is high, 500 persons per ha. However the ground floor, a generous 3.5 meters high communal

⁶² Figures for Switzerland; BAFU www.bafu.admin.ch.

⁶³ Including streets, parks, public spaces, which will result in 170 persons/ha. The densest neighborhood in Zurich has 93 persons/ha. In Brooklyn the average is 135 persons/ha. Historically dense urban centers are not the fruit of idealistic urbanistic considerations, but of real estate speculation (on all of this, cf. Glaeser, 2011).



space, compensates for the dense building-style. In most cities there are a lot of space reserves that can be used to achieve higher density without turning them into ant-heaps. Density is not a goal in itself. Social, communicative and other considerations come into play. You don't want to be "condensated" together with total strangers.

It is evident that the same volume can be distributed in different ways under different conditions: several blocks, buildings of various height, courts or backyards varying in size.

Most variations from the model lead to a higher ecological impact or to other disadvantages. High-rise buildings are not necessary to achieve a good density: they are expensive, communicatively inadequate

and do not create attractive urban environments. Where they already exist, they can be transformed.

Living in dense neighborhoods saves agriculturally useable land elsewhere and shortens distances in general. The model suggested above corresponds to 160 single-family homes taking up 6.4 ha, streets not included.

The term "neighborhood" will always be used consistently in the definition given above. What we do not mean is: immediate neighborhood on the same landing, in the same house or loosely situated in the vicinity of the building, or extended neighborhoods like "Williamsburg," "Lower East Side," "Mission," "Little Tokyo" etc. The

latter correspond rather to what we will define as basic communes, municipalities, boroughs, or towns in the country.

Dense city blocks are ideal for neighborhoods. They already exist in manifold in old parts of our cities, e.g. in Paris, Barcelona, Berlin, Vienna, San Francisco, Boston and New York.⁶⁴ These city blocks, more or less square, are worth being ecologically upgraded and re-transformed into the small urban microcosms they were at the beginning of the last century. As they were built in the era before the automobile, they are best suited as pedestrian areas.⁶⁵ The sprawling suburbs of the automobile age are much more difficult to put to new use as they rarely represent real neighborhoods. Existing neighborhood-affine struc-

⁶⁴ "... frequent streets and short blocks are valuable because of the fabric of intricate cross-use that they permit among the users of a city neighborhood." Jane Jacobs

⁶⁵ Modern cities also need parks; every borough needs a square like in Paris or New York. Plants to create a better microclimate are very useful, but should be used sparingly. Narrow alleys or small squares between neighborhoods are important to create an atmosphere of intensive communication — the specific purpose of cities. Or as Goodman puts it: "Urban beauty does not require trees and parks. Classically, as Christopher Tunnard has pointed out, if the cities were small there were no trees. (...) And when finally, as in the Ville Radieuse, the aim is to make a city in the park, one has despaired of city life altogether." (p. 48ff) "Green" cities are dense cities, Manhattan is greener than Houston Texas. (David Owen, "Green Manhattan: Everywhere Should Be More Like New York," *The New Yorker*, October 18, 2004).





tures are of great importance to us, for we won't be able to afford to re-build our cities completely, even less so to construct new ecological cities on a large scale (like Masdar in Abu Dhabi). Such an effort would use up a huge amount of resources and emit too much CO₂. It might even be the last straw in the ruination of the biosphere. We will have to improvise and improve the places we already live in.

In the model neighborhood presented above, most points aren't more than 80 m apart from each other, including vertical movements. To walk these 80 m takes about a minute. Everything is within "slipper distance," a proximity conducive to a great number of synergies. You don't have to dress up; you can even

move around in your bathrobe. Errands in this perimeter can be done in between, on the spur of the moment — you can fetch an onion or an egg while you have already started your cooking. You can interrupt a working-process without losing the context. You can fill the empty moments. It's a range that allows you to be very effective.⁶⁶

The buildings lining the streets are a great help with the creation of a lively street scene. The interchange between the quiet court or courtyard and the busy, mainly pedestrian streets, which, not being too wide, make urban life more thrilling and varied like Arab cities such as Marrakech. The streets are the realms of the "public man" (Sennett), courtyards are more pri-

vate or semi-public. Different roles can be played in different settings (→ borough).

"Old-Fashioned Plan" of Neighborhood

The neighborhoods proposed here are not just social or cultural units. They are logistic terminals, modules of household economy, relocalized clusters of formerly scattered living functions, which may resemble apartment-hotels. The *FORM OF LODGING* — solitary living in a single room, small flats for couples, family-flats, communal households of some 10 to 30 persons — floor-plans, arrangement of hallways, lifts etc. are not part of the neighborhood concept. They are strictly private or else a challenge for creative architects.⁶⁷ The private, the semi-public and

⁶⁶ As David Gelernter puts it: "The end effect of world-spanning information beams will be to make neighborhoods as important as they were in the nineteenth century. People will need houses and convenient, generic, local gathering spaces." ("Tapping into the Beam," p. 241; in: *The Next Fifty Years*, 2002). Gelernter also thinks that we won't need cities — on which point I disagree with him wholeheartedly. Maybe he doesn't know what different cities could look like.

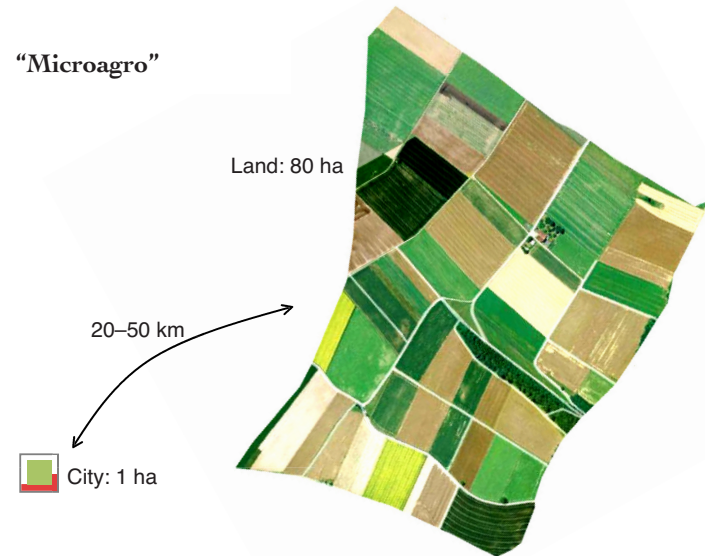
⁶⁷ Since 2001 several housing cooperatives in Zurich have been experimenting — so far successfully — with a variety of types of flats in the same buildings: B&B rooms, 2-room-studios, regular flats, clusters of flats, communities of 6 to 14 members. A substantial number of all flat types should be adapted to persons with disabilities (barrier-free, single-level, elevator). This makes the allocation of space more flexible and effective, as it allows you to move from one type of flat to another according to your biographical needs and still remain part of the same community (belonging!). This is especially important when you grow older or are physically disabled.



the public are completely separate spheres.

To achieve all of these goals, neighborhoods must be relatively large, consist of around 500 inhabitants, or 200 medium-sized flats of some 100m² each (just to give an idea of surfaces, no such flats do actually have to be built). Their linkage with an agricultural surface of about 80 ha (ca. 200 acres) in a perimeter of 20 to 50 kilometers (depending on local conditions) is fundamental to achieve food subsistence.⁶⁸ Details: See below.

“Microagro”



⁶⁸ How far away will the agrocenters be in the case of global cities like New York? Not very far away. Thanks to Euclid, surfaces expand to the square power with the distance. So within a distance of 62 mi (100km) from Bryant Square, you get 31,415 km², enough land for 18 million persons. If you subtract the sea surface, forests and built-over areas, you'd still get enough land in a one to two hour drive at the most. Agrocenters for New York might be far up-state (Kingston), near Trenton or on Long Island. If you use two agrocenters, one for fresh produce near-by (a vegetable zone) and one for the rest of the food, farther away, you can optimize transport. For fresh produce you need 2.5 ha per neighborhood, so for the 8 million persons of NY, you need 40,000 ha, all in a 11.2 km distance, a bit more subtracting built areas and the sea. With urban gardening you can probably provide most of the herbs, some eggs and honey. This method can be especially interesting for less dense or depopulating cities like Detroit or Houston, Texas. Of course there's also a communicative and pedagogical aspect to urban gardening. For cereals you might want to collaborate with adjacent neighborhoods. However there are now small mills for cereals that are as effective as industrial ones and could be used in single neighborhoods.

Size matters for a number of reasons:

For *SOCIAL STABILITY* a certain minimal size of population is required to even out fluctuations (people moving, being born or dying). Stability is an essential prerogative for the cooperation to succeed, since we do not normally cooperate with people we will most likely never meet again (Cf. Wilson, p.172).

On the other hand it must be said that relaxed *COMMUNICATION* can be hindered by too much intimacy, too. There must be room for internal sub-communities. Communal households, families, must be an option. A size of around 500 (or: 450 to 800) persons is therefore conditional to make internal organization both transparent and non-intrusive. According to Dunbar⁶⁹ people can communicate informally up to a group-size of 150 (the so-called Dunbar figure). The ideal group size must therefore be much larger in order to create

a systemic pressure for consciously designed formal communication to avoid buddy systems, favoritism or mafia-like forms of dominion (→ Ostrom's rules). Neighborhoods are neither clans nor tribes; they are cool social modules of common access. Neighborhoods need rules and formal institutions.

Larger units of a thousand or more inhabitants risk becoming too anonymous. They tend not to support spontaneous cooperation, produce longer internal distances and cause the need of a costly administrative structure that will be more remote, more professionalized and less transparent.

The "medium size" allows to *BELONG*, which is important for resilient structures, without having to pay the price of too much social stickiness and supervision. Neighborhood is ambiguous in quality: too much of it makes us nervous, too little renders us lonesome. We need communal spaces, but equally a well protected sphere

of privacy. Neighborhoods are "nests" (Cf. Wilson). They should not be prisons. The equilibrium between the private and the semi-public sphere can be defined differently in every neighborhood, depending on the cultural background, the age of its members or its particular situation.

Size also matters concerning *HOUSEHOLD ECONOMICS* and the possibility of division of work. Collective cooperation can be organized flexibly, an appropriate occupation can be found for everyone, diversity and security are achieved more easily. In case of absences, other people will fill in to make sure the system — e.g. heating, bakery — does not collapse. If a neighborhood is too small, it will have to do without certain elements in the infrastructure, which makes it less attractive and requires access to external services. Every function that is out-sourced requires longer trips and worsens the ecological balance.

⁶⁹ R. I. M. Dunbar: "Coevolution of neocortical size, group size and language in humans," in: *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*. 16 (4), 1993, S. 681–735.



If a community is stable, diversified and large enough, the feasibility of *SHARING* is enhanced automatically. Cooperation needs “clusters” (Cf. Nowak, 2012). The cooperative surplus that can be shared increases. The smaller the community, the more difficult sharing becomes, simply because there is less to be shared. Size has a systemic, even a political importance. Social modules of the commons that are too small tend to fail.

Arrangements of this size allow *AGE GROUPS* to interact effectively. In Switzerland e.g. there would be on an average 85 persons over 65 who can meet according to their cultural preferences. Fans of the Beatles and Rolling Stones can gather separately. Neighborhoods are not fami-

lies, age- or socio-economic ghettos. They are heterogeneous.

CARE WORK AND HOUSEWORK (misnamed “care economy”) gets more labor-saving and thus less tiring, if groups are large enough to maintain a generous and sustainable infrastructure within reach. Reproductive work in general can be shared more easily within neighborhoods or boroughs (for special services and needs). The old system of dumping housework on women alone can be broken up by sharing it in its manifold forms between both sexes, according to their special talents and inclinations. “Material feminism”⁷⁰ can also be good news for men. Elderly or sick people can stay in their neighborhoods, an important factor of health and well-being.⁷¹ For kids a friendly neighborhood may be a wel-

come change to their families and help develop social skills.

The size of 500 inhabitants/200 flats permits *COST-EFFICIENT BUILDING*, reconstruction or renovation. It is no accident that most new projects (at least around Zurich) have these dimensions. Compact buildings not only have a smaller façade surface, which is a very important cost factor, they also make for ecologically sound construction.

For all these reasons, neighborhoods should be urban. Fifty per cent of the world’s population lives in cities; in Europe and the USA 75 per cent. Re-definition of the cities from the country is the greatest challenge of our time (Cf. Vandana Shiva). Without taming and regenerating our sprawling mega-cities there is no

⁷⁰ Hayden, Dolores, *The Grand Domestic Revolution*, Cambridge, MA, 2004.

⁷¹ Chadwell (2005) tells the story of Roseto, a community of Italian immigrants that had a strangely low incidence of heart diseases. The only factor that could explain it was the community lifestyle that they had imported from their Apulian hometown. The “Mediterranean diet” plays a very minor role: you do not live longer by just eating more vegetables and using more olive oil.



sustainable future. We must concentrate our efforts on the cities.⁷²

But what about the rural areas? All aspects of the current crisis are also felt in the countryside, the industrialization of agriculture and land grabbing, as well as the impacts of mining, transportation, contamination of the environment, deforestation etc. It is evident that the restructuring of the rural areas must go hand in hand with the transformation of the cities, re-naturalization of the countryside, re-urbanization of the cities. Protecting the rural areas against monstrous real estate developments and establishing instead CSA ties (microagro) will revive the countryside as well as the city. Moving from the suburbs into the newly revived central cities means gaining land for agriculture in its vicinity. The agrocenters will put new life into villages or hamlets in the country and secure the exchange between the two lifestyles.

A final caveat: not everybody wants to live in neighborhoods. Nor should everybody have to. A substantial majority of all people, let us say 65 per cent, who choose to live in this way, will be sufficient for a systemic reconfiguration of our lifestyle and will guarantee the “power of neighborhood.” What we want to show here is the feasibility of subsistent neighborhoods as a model and to make the variations on it measurable. In between and in remote locations there is enough space for hermits, introverts, small groups, families and all kinds of idiosyncratic communities. The neighborhood themselves will have diverse degrees of communality: some will be more like apartment hotels, where you are mostly left to yourself, others will have an intense collective life. Between the neighborhoods all kinds of networks and cooperative enterprises are thinkable (also concerning care infrastructure). Together

in a borough they represent a stable context of real social security that does not need any formal or administrative structures. Adjacent neighborhoods will guarantee each other a lifelong right to stay in a community — which is, as I have already pointed out several times, highly conducive to good health.

The 6-Ton Week

A new food logistics will be essential if we want to achieve an ecologically sustainable lifestyle. The “reinterpretation of the cities from the countryside” (Vandana Shiva) is the basis of all serious proposals for a post-growth / post-capitalist society.

According to estimates a neighborhood needs about 6 tons of food per week. Some produce (like potatoes, cereals) is only delivered once a year and can be transported in bulk by train. Cooperation in liveries be-

⁷² It is certainly no accident that we’re living in a period of generalized global urban uprisings. Be it Moscow, Cairo, New York, Lima, London, Istanbul or Madrid, such uprisings can emerge anywhere and anytime, for major, minor or no reasons (some trees in a park in Istanbul, a dysfunctional bus-system in Sao Paolo etc.). They are the expression of a general dissatisfaction not only with the living conditions in the cities, but with the whole “western” lifestyle and economic system: the west is as dissatisfied with the “west” as the east!

tween neighborhoods would seem a good option. The small truck (2 t) you need can be shared between two neighborhoods.⁷³

As can be gathered from the following table, land use can be reduced substantially by a mainly vegetarian diet, but even a moderate reduction in animal production (milk, eggs, meat) is compatible with a globally sustainable lifestyle. Living on a vegetarian diet reduces the use of the agricultural surface by half (not down to 32.5 per cent, as you would have to compensate with more plant calories and protein-production, if you do without animal production).

No single territory need achieve a 100 per cent autarchy on food. Most territories

(states, countries) were not conceived on ecological grounds, but are the result of historical accidents. Continental, or even global, food imports or exports can be ecologically sound, fair and even necessary in situations of need.

For a food logistics based on direct supply a food depot of about 400 m² (4300 sq feet) on the ground floor of the neighborhood is needed: space for processing, preparing, preserving and cooking. In this depot+kitchen food isn't just stored. It is transformed into meals instantly. As 32 per cent of the energy expenditure for food in the US is caused by storage and cooking in the individual households,⁷⁴ it is essential that food not be endlessly shifted from

fridges onto shelves and from there into other fridges, but that it be prepared for immediate consumption (convenience food) on the premises. These meals can then be fetched from the depot (80 m/one minute), be heated up or seasoned in the flats (or communities), or eaten in the adjacent restaurant/lounge space. It isn't ecologically necessary that as many persons as possible eat together in big halls, which will be empty, though heated, most of the time. Cooking and eating together is much fun and a great opportunity for informal and *continuous* communication. All kinds of dinner or gourmet clubs are possible.⁷⁵ The restaurant (about 300 m²) is rather a multi-functional space, serving as lounge, bar, li-

⁷³ Based on a study by the FIBL (Forschungsinstitut für biologische Landwirtschaft, Switzerland) for 100 persons. Depending on the share of animal production land use varies between 54 ha and 126 ha in a German study (Atsuko Wakamiya, "Familie, Haushalt, Ernährung," in: *Land-info* 7/2011), which takes us back to an estimation of around 80 ha.

⁷⁴ Hänggi, 2011; p. 76; 22 per cent are used for the production, the rest for packaging, processing and transports.

⁷⁵ One is a weekly *circolo* and goes like this: 44 members divide into 11 cooking teams of four. Every team cooks, washes up and does all the work four times a year and pays for all the food. This means that you can eat 40 times for free and have the time to communicate without having to help. (It is essential that help be strictly forbidden!) After a year (there are 8 weeks of *circolo* holidays) members can leave or join and a new *circolo* begins. I know of 2 *circoli* that have been operating for 20, and, respectively, 12 years.

Table: Organic Food for 500 Persons (Estimated, Central Europe)

<i>PRODUCE</i>	<i>PROCESSED</i>	<i>PERSON/WEEK</i>	<i>500 PERS./W.</i>	<i>PER YEAR</i>	<i>SURFACE</i>
VEGETABLES HERBS		2 kg	1000 kg	50,000 kg	2.5 ha
MILK	YOGHURT CHEESE BUTTER	2 l 0.4 kg 0.3 kg 0.2 kg	1000 l 200 l 150 kg 100 kg	260 000 l	60 cows, 30 ha
EGGS		4	2000	5,000 kg	500 hens, 5 ha
CEREALS	BREAD PASTA	1 kg 1 kg	500 kg 500 kg	50,000 kg	15 ha
POTATOES		1 kg	500 kg	25,000 kg	1 ha
FRUIT, BERRIES, CIDER		3 kg	1500 kg	75,000 kg	8 ha
MEAT		0.6 kg	300 kg	15,000 kg (30 kg/pers.) ⁷⁶	beef 12 t, 17.5 ha pork 3 t, 5 ha
TOTAL			5.76 t	300 t	85 ha 57.5 animal (68 per cent)

⁷⁶ Today, Switzerland: 54 kg. US: 123 kg.

brary, pool room, café, fumoir, working space (see below), where up to 150 persons can hang out at a time. It should suffice to function as a room for spontaneous communication, exchange of information, chats, confrontations and encounters.

In this depot you will find fresh vegetables and bread, 40 types of tomatoes, eggs from happy hens, new quiches, new soufflés, pâtés, sausages and pastries. As a young gourmet cook put it in a Swiss newspaper (*Blick*) lately, the perfect carrot will replace boring caviar. Sufficiency, done properly, can become the basis of a new form of luxury.

Why direct supply with food on the level of a neighborhood? Would a food-coop in the borough or larger neighborhood not do?

If we are serious about looking for an alternative to agribusiness and commercial supermarket logistics, agricultural production must be directly linked to the consumers; in fact the consumers must personally be acquainted with their producers and take an interest, i.e. participate, appropriately in the production. The character of agriculture as part of the care economy — the care of the soil, plants and animals — requires participation in the first person, as *ortoloco* underlines. We don't all have to become farmers, but we must become more closely associated with the food production.

Organized as neighborhoods of consumers this is a feasible and sustainable concept.

According to a German study the so-called “regional supermarket” logistics (food from the region in a big depot for people living near-by, as we suggest it) is ecologically better than regular supermarkets, organic food stores, farmers' markets or any other form of food distribution.^{77 78}

The International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), which published a report on global agriculture comparable in scope to that published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), recommends medium-sized agricultural units as a global answer to feeding the 9 billion or so people who will be living on our planet a few decades in the future. Given fossil fuel inputs, the net caloric out-

⁷⁷ Farmers' markets are in fact not very ecological, as most of the food is shipped around in small quantities and a big part is always brought back to the farm. As an alternative to supermarkets they're welcome as long as there is no other direct livery system. As live food museums and enjoyable, communicative institutions — especially on borough-level as covered markets — markets will survive and are no ecological problem. What would Paris, Barcelona or Athens be without their markets? Whereas microagro provides regular everyday food, the markets will offer special treats — and chats. Martin Demmeler, *Ökobilanz eines Verbrauchers regionaler Bio-Lebensmittel*, Bioring Allgäu, 2000.

⁷⁸ The size of the depot is essential to even out fluctuations in demand — any shop manager knows how losses are generated by too small business volumes.

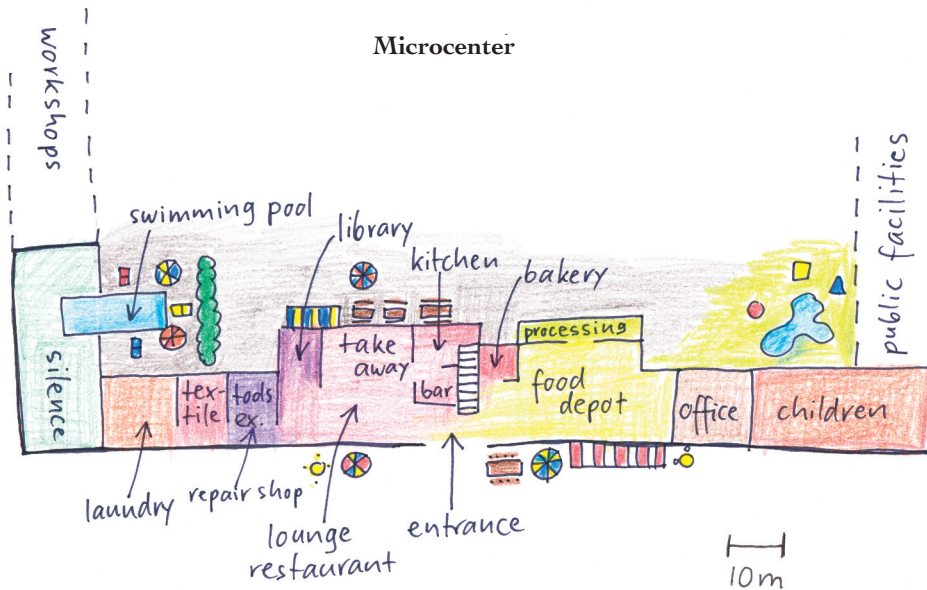
put of large agro-industrial production is negative and therefore has no future if we are to tackle carbon emissions and climate change. It also uses a lot of water. Biodiversity is destroyed. Food is wasted. But the bread that Nancy baked or the chards that you have harvested yourself won't be thrown away. So the only feasible way of doing agriculture on this planet is intensive, mixed-crop, largely organic production. This form of agriculture is hopelessly unprofitable under current conditions. Let us change the conditions then! What could such a new agriculture look like? Around a core professional staff of maybe 10 persons (→ resilience: graduated commitment), the general pool of household work of the members of the agro-urban cooperative will have to supply about the same number of workers, mainly in times of seasonal peaks (hay-making, harvesting, summer). This doesn't mean that everybody must work in the fields, the general pool being so large and flexible, that a wide choice of chores can be offered: cooking, tending to the depots, maintenance of buildings, child care etc.

It's the relatively large *size* of the neighborhoods that makes the combination of agriculture and urban living ecologically and economically feasible. The quantities are just right.

To deliver 6 tons of food a week, three times 2 tons, a small truck is needed, which can be fuelled by the biogas produced from a small part of consumer waste (or other bio-mass). On the other days, the same truck can be used by an adjacent neighborhood. The very simple logistics of moving from A to B full stop replaces the current chain of food logistics, which is responsible for immense waste moving the goods between distribution centers, supermarkets, shopping centers and as well as the costumers traveling backwards and forwards. Today packaging and transport make up 50 per cent of the costs of food. What you get in a neighborhood is a kind of embedded supermarket every 100 m, which is open 24 hours a day within walking distance and accessible by elevators. Unrestricted opening time prevents exces-

sive storage in the flats (fridges) again. It will not take you much longer than a minute to fetch a glass of cool beer.

A food depot+kitchen embedded in a neighborhood microcenter makes the whole thing even more synergistic. It might look as follows if we take a reference model again:



This ground-floor microcenter, about 1200 m² (1400 sq. yards) in size, could be divided up like this:

Food depot	300m ² (360 yards ²)
Bakery	30
Processing	30
Restaurant/bar/lounge	300 (+ terrace)
Library	30
Internal goods depot	50
Wardrobe/textile	30
Laundry	50
Repair shop, tools	30
Bath	300 (+space in back yard)
Quiet room	30
Kids play room*	60 (+external space)
Administration	30
Total	1270m²⁷⁹

The microcenter with its niches and its many entrances/exits serves a wide range of functions. It allows meeting the other people, or else, avoiding them.

*Needless to say that the 80-some kids in the neighborhood need additional space in kindergartens, day-care centers, teenage cellars etc. They can of course use all other space, too.

⁷⁹ Cf. Neustart Schweiz, *Nachbarschaften entwickeln!*, 2013; p. 42.

It would be wrong to think of the microcenter as a collection of small businesses. It is much rather an integral element of the cooperative (→demiurgic principle), run by waged professionals and by unwaged members of the cooperative (→graduated commitment).⁸⁰ The era of nostalgic small businesses is irrevocably a thing of the past because they have proven to be inefficient, wasteful and more often than not based on the exploitation of either family members or “illegal” immigrants. Which baker’s son wants to become a baker, which butcher’s daughter a butcher? A small business logistics usually generates conflicts of interest between owners and users and introduces a logic of (small) profits in an economic sector that is unprofitable under decent social conditions.

This new neighborhood infrastructure offers the comfort of a four-star-hotel. What you get is a large heated room with shower and balcony, first class furniture and services. You can also make several rooms to a family space, provided you’re into the concept of living in flats. A microcenter may include a small swimming pool like the Sargfabrik in Vienna or the cooperative Halen near Berne.⁸¹ There are several lounges, wardrobes, depots of household machines, a media-center, a hairdresser’s, a laundry, a tailor’s shop, a general repair workshop etc.

When you bear in mind that in a dense urban context you have such a microcenter every 100 or 200 meters you realize the full potential of this model (→ Latouche: relocation). Around the cooperatively

run microcenter other enterprises (cooperative or private, of the 3rd sector) may flourish: cigar shops, wine shops, jewelry shops, bike-repair shops, lawyers, computer shops, sane hatters, florists etc. In other words you get the vibrating street life of the old days, minus the squalor we have come to associate with it. It offers urban life per se, strolls around in the borough, visiting different microcenters, observing all the activities on the ground floor level, undisturbed by parked or running cars (or only very rarely, by a very beautiful one). Pure joy! Cities that offer this kind of life in narrow pedestrian alleys are considered to be very attractive. That is why you would like to have a pied-à-terre in Paris, Manhattan or Barcelona, but not so much in Brasilia, Dubai or Houston, Texas.⁸²

⁸⁰ Estimates show that such a microcenter can be run with 6 paid full-time jobs and 56,000 hours of unpaid work per year, or 3.2 hours per week (based on 350 persons, without children and older persons), corresponding to a total of 36 full-time jobs. (Neustart Schweiz, *Nachbarschaften entwickeln!* 2013, p. 42) A housing project in Winterthur, Switzerland, will start out with 36 hours/year/per person, however with a much reduced infrastructure: www.giesserei-gesewo.ch.

⁸¹ www.sargfabrik.at; www.halen.ch.

⁸² Cf. Jane Jacobs; Alexander; Sennett; Glaeser, Edward, *Triumph of the City*, 2011.

How Much Is Enough? How Much Is Sustainable?

The neighborhood as described above could function on an energy level of exactly 1008 watt,⁸⁵ which corresponds to the long-term global ecological requirement of using only one planet instead of two or more. The current energy consumption in the US is around 10,000 watt per person. The average person in the US today should therefore be expected to be 10

times happier than the inhabitant of the above neighborhood.⁸⁴

Energy consumption is one of the many aspects of the overall ecological impact. It's intrinsically linked with it, too. Compared with the so-called ecological footprint (US: 8; sustainable: 1) things don't look much better.

If you consider the planet as a common, energy-consumption relative to local climate and situation should be roughly the

same for everybody. In Ethiopia, where the average consumption is 100 watt at the present moment, 500 watt would probably be fair, whereas in colder areas, like the north of the US, Canada, northern Europe etc., 1500 watt would still be ok. A reduction by a factor of 6 is feasible with respect to technological efficiency, renewable sources and a more luxurious, but more communal, lifestyle (→ sufficiency).

As a general point of reference 1000 watt is the goal.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Watt is the measure for the rate of energy conversion; it goes per person. 1000 Watt means, that a 1000-watt-bulb is burning all the time for you alone, or that you have ten "energy slaves" (a human has a performance of about 100 watt) at your disposal. This wattage can take on many different forms: calories in food, gas, wood, electricity, grey energy in goods, human services.

⁸⁴ "The real sin is to do evil and not to enjoy it." Charles Baudelaire ("Le vice, c'est le mal que l'on fait sans plaisir.")

⁸⁵ The so-called 2000-Watt-society is an invention by the ETH (Swiss Federal Polytechnical Institute, 1998) based on an earlier estimation for a globally sustainable level of energy consumption by the Brazilian physicist José Goldemberg, who suggested a global ration of 1049 watt. This would include: a 315 l fridge, a color TV, 2850 car kilometers, 345 flight kilometers and a large quantity of steel, aluminum and other materials. (Hänggi 2011, p.58 ff.) These 1000 watt were doubled by the ETH-physicists to make the proposal sound more palatable to the general public. However the current average energy-level of the planet, 2300 watt, is not sustainable and corresponds to an ecological footprint of 1.8 (i.e. we're using 1.8 planets at the moment). So, 1000 Watt is not only more honest, but also feasible. If two persons sit under a 1000-watt-light, energy use is 500 watt. If 20 persons sit in a dark room where somebody reads from a book using a 50 watt-light, you use 2.4 Watt. Light, music, heating, transport etc. can easily be shared in this way as (partly) non-rival commons, wine can't. Sharing the grey energy that's in buildings, transport systems or machines is particularly effective. The restaurant in my building doesn't even need heating, as the body-heat of the costumers is circulated by a heat-exchange-system. The same system reduces energy-use also for the flats. Such systems are relatively costly and only effective in large and bulky buildings (=> reference model above). To organize as many forms of sharing as it's enjoyable is the trick of neighborhood-life.



Sufficiency requires a lifestyle bearing by the following features:⁸⁶

(the figures are per person)

- 200 sq foot of heated or cooled private living space in an insulated building
- no car
- no plane flights
- 6 miles per day of train travel
- a train trip of 1400 miles per year
- a boat voyage of 8000 miles per year
- 36 pounds of meat per year
- 18.5 gallons of water per day
- 1 newspaper per ten inhabitants

What is described in this table is not *the* compulsory way of life. It is only a quantifying illustration of one possible mix of en-

ergy uses. If you don't eat any meat at all, you might want to drive a car instead: vegans drive cars.⁸⁷ People, who need more living space, can cut down on their train trips. Since they are happily living in their precious home, they may not feel such a strong urge to travel.

As far as the long voyages are concerned there are not enough boats available at the moment, in particular boats that are ecologically effective. The figure of a quota of voyages is only included in the list to show that transportation on water is the most energy-efficient and that we don't have to give up planetary mobility. In terms of ecology investments in canal systems and in the technology of high-tech sailing vessels make more sense than

investments in cars and planes. These are two examples for the new ecological design that must be developed in a continental and global context.

Our current use of computers and the internet (160–286 watts per Internet user;⁸⁸) is not really sustainable either. Computers will therefore have to be used communally again in computer corners in the communal lounges or the ABC (see below). They should also be restricted to household applications such as the management of chores or the sharing of goods. Likewise watching DVDs may become a sociable occasion. Fostering spontaneous off-line communication will help to reduce the need to be permanently on-line.

⁸⁶ Neustart Schweiz, *Nachbarschaften entwickeln!*, 2013, p. 38.

⁸⁷ If you are a vegetarian, don't drive a car, ride your bicycle, live in a room of only 10 m² etc. you're overdoing it: you're saving two planets instead of one. (You wouldn't want to compensate with your extra-ascetism for persons who drive Ferraris and eat big hairy steaks every day, would you?) A sustainable lifestyle is not a question of individual behavior. The individualization of responsibility is actually a trap favored by green capitalism (like banning smoking, or being penalized for being fat or avoiding sports). What we suggest is a lifestyle that is the implicit result of a communal infrastructure that makes live not just sustainable, but enjoyable. We're in this together or we let it be.

⁸⁸ <http://www.cs.berkeley.edu/~jtma/papers/energyhotnets2011.pdf> We aren't even talking here of the horrible conditions computers or mobile phones are produced under presently (Foxconn etc.).



Many of the other entries are virtually irrelevant in terms of our energy budget. They do not call for any urgent saving efforts. They may simply point to reductions that make sense anyway: clothing (8.5 watts), furniture (16 watts), household waste (11 watts). However materials such as plastic (224 watts), paper (75 watts) and cardboard (60 watts) are worth being used sparingly. Packaging-free food, as we suggest, will definitely help. What matters is that we become aware of the proportions when we compare with the huge impact of heating (1568 watts), car traffic (1598 watts) or plane trips (686 watts). The numbers listed here were valid for Switzerland in the 90s. They're probably higher in the US and currently.

The focus is less on recycling than on not using goods or services that we do not need in the first place.

The educational sector makes up only 3.6 per cent of the current energy expenditure, by the way. More education would not exactly kill the planet. However more ecologically efficient construction and use of school-buildings, situating them centrally, ideally within walking distance, and a more effective use of space in a borough-center would certainly help (→ ABC).

As the 1000-watt limit aims at reducing carbon-emissions, one might assume that by using non-fossil renewable energy sources you could increase the minimal energy use without causing any problems.⁸⁹

The biggest problem we are faced by today is how to produce enough electricity with renewable energy technologies. Yet electricity makes up only about 25 per cent of our overall energy consumption. Gas may be better than oil (the main argument for fracking), but it still emits carbondiox-

ide. In addition we must not forget, that renewable energy sources have an ecological impact, too: rivers, lakes, destruction of landscapes by dams, production, maintenance and replacement of equipment. Geothermic drills may cause earthquakes. You do not get something from nothing — that's physics. We must therefore make an effort to reduce our energy consumption before we invest heavily in technologies because their production uses up a lot of fossil energy beforehand. Of course new technologies are always welcome. But the problem is that it is simply impossible to produce enough energy to replace our old energy sources by renewable ones within a useful time limit. Actually we should stop emitting any CO₂ right away, because too much of it is already in the atmosphere.

There is yet another reason why a low-energy civilization is preferable. As Marcel Hänggi⁹⁰ puts it in his book, power also

⁸⁹ According to Monbiot (2007) we'll need a 90 per cent CO₂ cut. If we just did this without any other changes, our countries would look "like very poor third-world countries" (p. xix).

⁹⁰ *Ausgepowert*, 2012.

means “power” by which he means to say that big energy flows require a greater social effort to keep their production and usage in check: there is, as it were, more power in the game. Those who have the power usually profit from the new power sources. Hänggi describes how the introduction of the horse into societies tipped the power relationships in favor of the men, as it happened in the case of the North American Indians, but also when Eurasian horsemen overran the old matriarchal civilizations (Cf. Eisler). Energy can be destructive by itself, even if you disregard the notorious oil spills or nuclear accidents. The countries with the largest

energy consumption (USA, Russia, Saudi Arabia) are neither the most egalitarian nor do they have the happiest citizens.⁹¹ What speaks in favor of a low-energy lifestyle is that it makes for a life that is slower, lighter, more personal, and less worrisome.⁹² Geometric proximity corresponds to social closeness with friends and family. In a historical perspective a low-energy lifestyle of 1000 watts is still an extremely high-energy society. We’re far from talking about a return to the Middle Ages and to unnecessary drudgery, but about a state which is realistic, socially stable, ecologically well-balanced and still offers a life in comfort. In the ’50s I was

living in a 1500-watt society. In the meantime the efficiency of energy use has quadrupled, which means that today 1000 watts offer the comfort that would then have required 4000 watts. In my youth I never suffered because there was not enough energy available. The problems were of a cultural and political nature: ideological, pedagogical and patriarchal repression (bigotry, anti-communism, Cold War), lack of freedom, military service, police repression, conservative restrictions in private life. The rebellions caused by this repression were then suffocated by consumerism and swept away by a huge flow of energy.

⁹¹ Richard G. Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*, Penguin, 2010.

⁹² Nobel-prize winning economist Daniel Kahneman (*Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Penguin, 2011) has tried to quantify our quality of life not just by asking stupid questions such as “Are you happy?”, but by measuring time actually spent in discomfort with the so-called U-index: “For 1000 American women in a Midwestern city, the U-index was 29% for the morning commute, 27% for work, 24% for child care, 18% for housework, 12% for socializing, 12% for TV watching, and 5% for sex. The U-index was higher by about 6% on weekdays than it was on weekends...” (p. 394) “We found that American women spent about 19% of the time in an unpleasant state, somewhat higher than French women (16%) or Danish women (14%)” (p. 393). One factor that makes French women happier seems to be undisturbed dining (p. 395). American women make themselves unhappier because they combine eating with other activities! Using the car is the biggest factor of perceived unhappiness — topping activities like torture, wars, death, sickness (these events are rare and short), etc. If we drive less, provide good child care (e.g., in neighborhoods), work less, and reduce housework by organizing it more cleverly, then we will also be happier. But of course: being caught in a traffic jam in your electric or hybrid car will be *much, much more* enjoyable!

In the end we will not be able to do without some form of rationing of our use of natural resources. But instead of “cap and trade,” we should try “cap and share,” because it is more just. If we try to regulate our use of resources through pricing, the rich in their Porsches will joyously overtake us pedaling along on our bicycles. Nobody wants to have any of this. We’re not all that stupid.

**The “Power of Neighborhood,” or:
“No Democracy Without *Demos*”**

The point we’re trying to make here is that neighborhoods as defined above are not only ecologically and economically effective modules, they form the indispensable social basis of a new civilization based on commons. On the one hand they are resilient, stable, just, anti-fragile, cooperative, ruled by Elinor’s eight rules, energy-efficient etc., on the other they also have a fundamental social, political func-

tion. Without a basic *demos*, a Greek word for the autarchic communities of the citizens, there can be no real democracy, or inclusive, egalitarian participation. If the members of such a community are not aware that their personal involvement is vital, neighborhoods will degenerate and become purely administrative units and eventually decay. (Cf. de Angelis below) If the (micro-) centers cannot hold, the other spheres will also fall apart.

As Saskia Sassen put it at the Neighborhood Congress at the University of Lucerne in November 2012, even at present “the power of neighborhood” should not be underestimated. The movements of the last decades have created close links between many “global neighborhoods” in many cities from New York to Cairo, if I may use the term “neighborhood” in a looser sense here than I suggested above. A lot of NGOs and other organizations have their offices or meeting places in the liveliest urban neighborhoods and are part

of an informal global network of activists. “Occupy your neighborhood” is in fact the logical consequence of “Occupy Wall Street,” or any other banking districts all over the world. Since the eighties the “space wars” in the inner cities⁹⁵ have been fought over the reanimation and defense of these neighborhoods and against the sanitation attacks of “gentrification,” or attempts at turning of them into quaint open-air shopping centers. If these horrid pedestrian malls are the alternative, I’d rather have a substantial amount of car and heavy truck traffic. The horizontal international of global neighborhoods will be an essential complement to the regionally and globally interlocked institutions of the commons as they will have to rely on indirect, vertical and delegated responsibility as well. The global neighborhoods represent a common everyday life basis of all the other spheres that depend on it. These neighborhoods in their diversity — from the fisherman’s village in Africa to the urban high-rise in Hong Kong — will em-

⁹⁵ Midnight Notes, 1982.



body the way we live together on this planet. It is in these neighborhoods that we develop, learn and transmit the attitudes and rules we need to govern larger commons. For if we do not feel in charge of our immediate social context, things will get out of hand. The “social capital” (a horrible, technocratic term, but still very popular in sociological discussions), or to put it more concretely: trust, mutual support, responsibility, conflict resolving capacity, democratic participation are acquired and preserved in this communal sphere. The “power to do” is based there.

This implies that multifunctional cooperative neighborhoods cannot possibly be established for other people, i.e. they cannot be created in a purely administrative manner, although a little support from the authorities may be welcome at times. With new constructions the participation of the future inhabitants in a project phase is just as essential as is that of the people already living in neighborhoods that are to be transformed. In the case of cooperative housing projects, which are emerging here

and there, the inclusion of the future tenants at an early stage is necessary to give them the means to determine the project, to create personal relationships and to identify with the nascent social module. An authentic neighborhood is the result of a story of a commons; it's a realistic novel. To create such “novels” we need new nodes of citizens' initiatives, that can also mobilize support from local administrations, know-how from universities, political parties. Defending the waning qualities of existing neighborhoods against real estate developers and shortsighted local authorities is not enough. We must move forward and posit our neighborhoods as the global modules of a new civilization, of a universal project. We have to set that goal to keep up the spirit, for all we know that permanent resistance alone causes pain in the neck.

Boroughs, Small Towns

Important as neighborhoods no doubt are, they do not have the potential to organize the whole of the commons. It would actu-

ally be a big mistake to overload the neighborhoods with tasks they either cannot or are not meant to perform. We have already seen that size matters. Schools, health care centers, energy and water supply systems should not be placed in urban neighborhoods. Far remote rural areas or other isolated regions on islands or in deserts are of course a different matter. “The devil is big in the small village,” an Ecuadorian proverb goes. Far from being hermetically defined spaces neighborhoods are rather like open crossroads, places where you meet, arrive and depart. They need air to breathe, they need other neighborhoods, and they need cooperation on the level of boroughs or small towns. They also relate to their larger urban context, to big cities like New York, Sao Paulo or Lagos, which follow their own logic and qualities (see: city centers). A city cannot exist as a monotonous patchwork of neighborhoods.

The next module in terms of theoretical models is an urban area of some 10,000 to 50,000 inhabitants that can be part of a larger city, or a small town on its own in





the country. Such a borough comprises 10 to 40 neighborhoods and serves as a branch office of the general services (see above). Most everyday errands can be performed within a perimeter of 500m, or within 5 minutes.

On this idealized plan you can discern a clearly defined pedestrian center, a link to the territorial, if not global railroad or subway system, two bus lines, industrial plants near the train tracks. In the center you would find a “world” supermarket run as a public cooperative of about 2000m² supplying additional foods and goods that cannot reasonably be produced locally: such as coffee, tea, spices, olive-oil, cocoa, sugar, salt, baking soda, detergents, wines etc. An exchange of goods can also happen directly between neighborhoods, e.g. Tuscan wine from a sister neighborhood, Tyrolian bacon, cheese from Quebec, which as it is not ecologically very sound for bulky goods and would probably be exceptional and regarded as a form of cultural exchange and bonding. Global exchange of foods or other goods can in





fact be fair and sustainable. We are selling coffee from Chiapas in our co-op via a fair-trade agreement. As it travels far, it should be shipped and in suitable quantities, too, to make the handling and packaging more effective. Autarchy is not a goal in itself, but it can be a side effect of energy-efficiency and avoidance of anonymity.

There is a small health center/emergency clinic with a pharmacy, an administrative center, a police station, a big hall, various cinemas and coffeehouses etc. A moderately large square with a band stand in its center of the zocalo, plaza, platia etc. type. Such medium-sized urban units play an important part in the reorganization and recentralization of the sprawling megacities in the north or the south, or to stop the flight from purely rural areas.⁹⁴

The sense of belonging (→ resilience) not only matters on the neighborhood-level, but also globally.

It's not only economic pressure that drives people from the country into the cities: a lot of young people also hope to escape from sheer boredom or patriarchal, religious or other oppression.⁹⁵ Why not link all the theoretically possible 450,000 borough/town centers via internet (web-cams, video-walls, sound) and set up ABC (Anti-Boredom-Centers) around a bar/saloon area as combined popular cultural and information spaces? It would allow live communication worldwide at any time, watching other people play games, following discussions, readings, lectures, concerts and stay connected and up-to-date. It would provide maximum transparency, communication and all the other resilience features. It would minimize physical traveling, too. Schools, a hotel, a library and a museum of local history could complement the ABC and also lodge occasional guests. Besides the power of neighborhood we'd also get the power of boroughs estab-

lished. The need of belonging to the world community will get a material basis.

The size of this module of the commons is important for its proper functioning. Public services need a minimal infrastructure and a wide range of offers. A lot of smaller municipalities in Switzerland (and other countries) are struggling to fulfill the demands: instead of the current 2480 communes we'd only need about 600. In the US, we'd be talking about 15,000 municipalities of 20,000 persons. A neighborhood is not a borough, and a borough is not a neighborhood. Whereas neighborhoods are semi-public units, the borough is a public, a political area, the stage of the "public man" (Sennett). Here the private man, in Greek: *idiotes*, can appear as a citizen and play her role as an equal player. Democracy without aware and committed citizens cannot work. Bringing these systemic differences back to life also means making life richer, keeping up dynamism

⁹⁴ www.nestown, in Ethiopia.

⁹⁵ That's at least what the author Samson Kambalu, *The Jive Talker*, 2008, told me when I asked him why he had moved from Malawi to London.





between in the different forms of communication and self-representation. In your neighborhood you can go down to the lounge in jeans and pullover. If you go to the borough center, you dress up, make up and/or put on a silk tie, wear perfume. The microcenter is a mostly desexualized territory for family and friends; the town centers have an erotic undertone. In the microcenter you relax on old sofas, listen to your favorite music and smoke cigarettes. In the ABC you dance tango, smoke expensive Cuban cigars and sip an aged Armagnac. Of course all these differences depend on the local cultural background. It *need not have to* be cigars and Armagnac for that matter. But still: it would be depressing to see you in your pajamas in the central coffee house.⁹⁶ The neighborhood

is the stage of tragedy (death, jealousy, love, divorce, hate, families), the borough is the stage of comedy. You play a character of your own choice, you can laugh about your destiny and the folly of your ambitions. It is *Commedia dell'arte*!⁹⁷

Boroughs/towns are the sphere of the commons where the embedded neighborhoods receive support in case of problems, shortages or failure. They have an extra pool of resources to balance out unequal distribution of resources, similarly to the systems of financial equalization that exists between communes and cantons in Switzerland. The goal of such a system is not total equality, but the keeping of inequalities within limits. Siphoning away surplus should not be a punishment for

special efforts. It would be disastrous if some sort of competition between poor and rich neighborhoods replaced the old one between rich and poor individuals. This function of embedding is relevant also in all subsequent spheres: regions, territories, globally, where it is most urgent.

A special opportunity arises for boroughs at the fringe of cities or for towns in the country. Here agriculture and housing can be directly combined, microcenter and agrocenter become one where your spade is leaning against a wall downstairs in the entry hall. Our friends in Geneva call this an *agroquartier*.⁹⁸ A whole borough of 20 neighborhoods would produce its food on an adjacent patch of land. Agricultural work may be prescribed by physiothera-

⁹⁶ No wonder people walking around in shorts and flip-flops in public spaces are not considered as welcome guests by the locals, but as intruders or occupiers, or, even worse, as tourists. The message they convey is: this is my private space. For my part, I always dress up, when I go to public spaces or events at home or in other countries. The first symptom of a successful “revolution” will probably be that you suddenly see lots of people in nice suits and elegant dresses gathering in public spaces....

⁹⁷ Some Italian towns still have a range of *circoli* and *sedì* around the central square, where members of associations, unions and political parties can be seen hanging out, reading newspapers and having discussions.

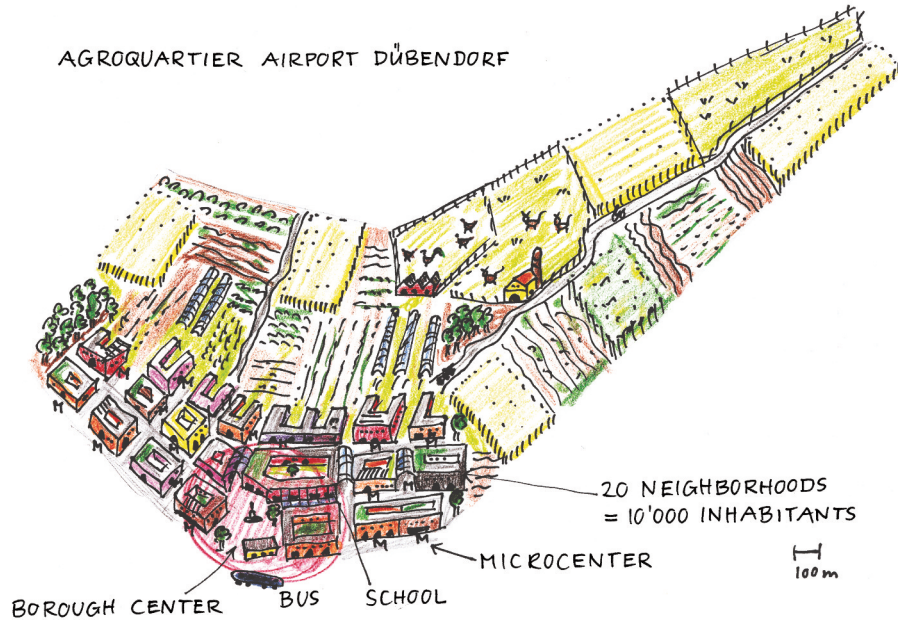
⁹⁸ www.agroquartier.ch



pists and fitness coaches and replace sports and workouts.

Depending on your personal fitness requirements you'd get a program of weeding, hoeing or harvesting.

Here an *agroquartier* would be created on a disused airport near Zurich.



Regions

Spheres of embedding have a certain inner logic and must at the same time be relatively flexible in their situational interpretation. Aspects of subsistence, together with certain ecological and operational considerations, have defined the respective modules so far. Neighborhoods are about everyday life and food, boroughs/towns about public services. The further away the modules are from immediate needs the more loosely defined are the sizes. Thus the next sphere, the region, is open to many different interpretations:

- it comprises dozens of boroughs or hundreds of neighborhoods and has an additional center;
- it includes most of the land used by the neighborhoods, i.e. a perimeter of up to 100 miles in the case of global

cities like New York or Shanghai, which means it corresponds to metropolitan areas and a surrounding agricultural zone;

- its population is substantial. It can vary between 200,000 and 20 million people;
- in Europe a “typical” region is the “hinterland” of a larger city of 500,000 inhabitants;
- in terms of functions it provides services like universities, hospitals, power plants, industries, museums, public transport, the opera, stadiums, banks, courts etc. On the whole metropolitan/regional services will be “lighter” than today, as a lot of them are provided more locally in boroughs or neighborhoods;
- in terms of ecology regions integrate town and country. They are connected by public transportation, and most places can be reached within half an hour (bus, train, tram) or within an hour on bicycle. Regions manage their natural environment: rivers, lakes, coasts, forests, moors, etc.;
- in very thinly populated areas with no

large cities, there will be public service centers at an appropriate geographic location without the urban sociotope of big city life;

- in some situations regions and territories can also be fused, e.g. in city-states like Singapore, or islands like Malta, Cyprus, Fiji.

Another important function of regions/cities for the governing of the commons is the organization of industrial subsistence, research, cooperation on a larger scale, pooling and allocation of general resources. This corresponds to what we call banking (incl. stock exchange) today. The demiurgical principle and the necessity of democratic planning require transparent public institutions that can replace big business and opaque banking. Large-scale cooperation has two main aspects:

- the definition of projects (research, innovation, “ideas,” inventions, technologies);
- the pooling of the necessary resources (material, know-how, labor power).

Big cities centers are the ideal location for these two functions, which are technical as well as political. Therefore all the “stakeholders” should be able to participate. Citizens are entrepreneurs, investors and consumers at the same time.

The institution where these two elements are combined is called a **cooperatory/inventory**, a permanent fair/exchange/laboratory for the definition of projects of a public impact. A cooperatory is a relatively large complex of exhibition halls, meeting rooms, lobbies, rooms with technical resources, laboratories for trials, tests, workshops for model-making and prototypes, cafés, restaurants 50,000 m² in size. It’s the place where “things happen,” a form of modern agora, where groups of citizens, researchers or individual inventors meet to develop their projects and present them to the public. All know-how, academic and practical, can be mobilized in a “hands-on” atmosphere. In collaboration with universities and professional associations these projects are evaluated by elected juries,

which either approve of them or reject them. It is also where public discussions are held. Their public utility is discussed in the media and decided upon in the pertaining democratic institutions. Public resources are then allocated in the form of loans and the project organizers use the cooperatory (on-line, and off-line) again to find the cooperators with the appropriate training, the providers of materials etc. We're talking here about the sector of professional work (the 20 hour/week; see above). So resources can be allocated in the form of money (regional, global) that ultimately goes into wages.

A part of the funds are reserved to projects in the creative/cooperative sector. The decisions are by professional juries organized in different chambers or guilds not by political institutions. Smaller loans, some \$100,000 or smaller, can be given on private bona fide responsibility without a public assessment process. As most of the private banks will have collapsed after the implosion of the next bubble, banking will be a public service like any other, e.g.

water supply or education. "Private business" can be done just as well with loans from a state bank.

The cooperatories of various spheres, upwards from the town, are linked (via internet, conventions or fairs) across levels and territories up to the global sphere to enhance the overall efficiency and progress. They are the institutions of the global common of know-how, technology and science.

One of the prerequisites for the functioning of such a system is the citizens' good general education, which can be acquired at formal schools, i.e. college/grammar schools, or more informally at the ABC.

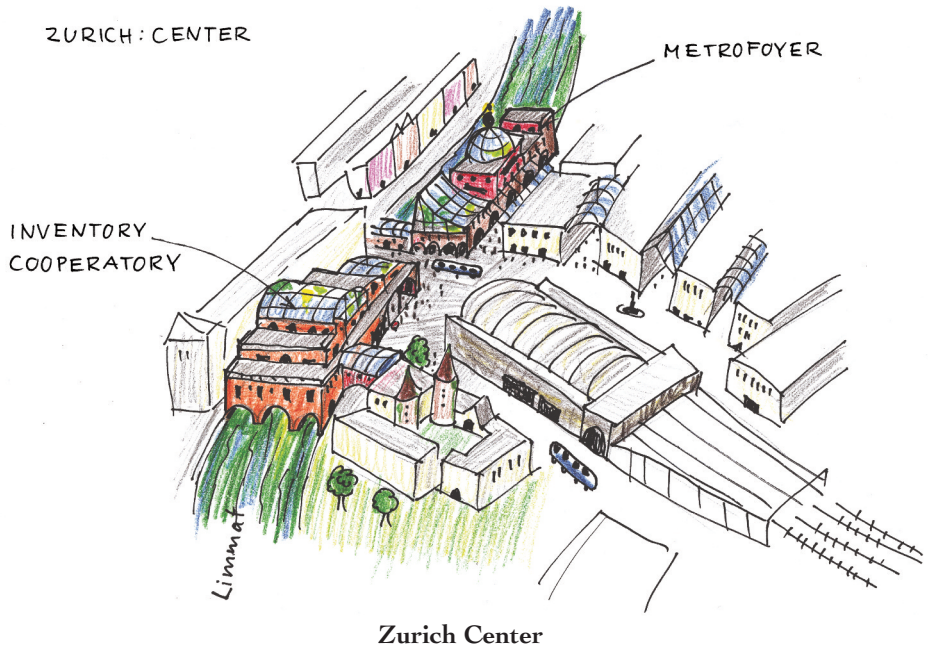
City Centers

Very often downtown areas are no real city centers, but just business or shopping districts that are deserted after closing time. What you find there, apart from museums, are the invariable clothing, shoe or accessory chains and food franchises like Starbucks you see all over the world. Although

they are located in the geographical center, they don't fulfill any communicative or political function. The above-mentioned inventories/cooperatories will prove helpful. They must be located either in or close to the historical city centers — if such exist. Relocating universities from far-away campuses and even hospitals right to the centers will also help to strengthen them (see: Paris, Barcelona, New York).

Analogous to the ABC every city of 200,000 inhabitants and more could establish what we call a *metro foyer* to make the center more "civic," accessible and lively. A metro foyer is a relatively large structure (50,000 m²) of up to five floors, may-be constructed in the galleries- or covered market tradition of the 19th century.

On the ground floor you find a big hall connected with the main train station that is the gate to global intermetropolitan exchange (metrofoyer). Other large cities, call them sister-cities, if you like, have their "embassies" in the form of replicas of original bars, pubs, cafés, salons, restaurants,



Zurich Center

depots here. It is the place expats meet with the locals, exchange information, help plan trips and find accommodation. Cul-

tural, scientific or other meetings or discussions may take place here, too. Bringing the world into the city-centers helps sub-

stituting physical travel, receiving guests instead of tourists and creating an off-line complement to the “global city” of the internet. This location is only partly commercial and financed by the city as a kind of reception lobby and welcome lounge, the living-room of the city, as it were.

On the upper floors you find assembly halls for all kinds of occasions (parties, union-centers, NGOs, citizens’ initiatives) where they can get office space and facilities to organize social activities and interventions. Additional space can be used for cinemas, theaters, media depots, reading-rooms, dance floors. On the roof you’d ideally have several panoramic restaurants, one with a smoking section, for socializing and for the savoring of the local cuisine.

This metrofoyer would be a relaxed meeting-place for people from all generations, particularly the younger generation for making friends and finding partners. A city center without erotic atmosphere is a deadly place.



In some cities large squares can take over this function as do, e.g., Plaza del Sol in Madrid, Campo dei Fiori in Rome, the Ramblas in Barcelona, Place St. Michel in Paris, and which works out well in Mediterranean or subtropical climates. In northern cities you need sheltered space that can also be used on rainy or cold days. Urbanization means mediterraneanization.

The re-establishing of multifunctional city centers is also an ecological imperative: when you “go to town” you should be able to do a number of errands within walking distance in one trip and still have time for some fun. Local centralization means relocation.

Besides the regional services and functions there is still a lot of housing space available in the city centers, much more than you find nowadays if you use the high-rise buildings cleverly. In some cases one high-rise building can correspond to one neighborhood. Urban neighborhoods, other forms of communal or individual living,

boroughs and city centers can be fused into an exceptionally lively zone.

600 Territories

Looking at any map, you can discern that territories of a certain size seem to be quite common: the states (in US, Mexico), the Länder (in Germany), the régions (in France), provinces, or small countries like Costa Rica, Estonia, Scotland, Belgium. Most of them are around 50,000 km², have a population of 10 million and are geographically compact.⁹⁹ The reason behind it is transport, for in such a territory you can reach any point in a 2 hour drive/train trip, which means you can do a job within this territory in one day without having to look for a hotel room. If we apply one or the other criterion, a lot of existing entities fall into this category. The term “territory” can be used relatively loosely here. Compared with large nations or mere regions, territories are a promising medium-size category that has a lot of ecological, political and other advantages.

Most importantly territories have the potential to be places where ecological integration and national/political neutralization are practicable. Of course you do occasionally get some nationalistic hiccups as in “Great Albania” or “Great Hungary,” but compared with the real global superpowers such territorial aspirations seem harmless. They are rather expressions of an inferiority complex caused by the arrogance of the great powers. Giving more real autonomy (in the physical and political sense) to territories seems a good way to reduce the impact of greater nations that have become dysfunctional in many respects anyway. To achieve a balanced global organization of the commons, we need more evenly matched members, small enough to be dependent on each other, yet large enough to function independently (→ modularity; decoupling) for a certain time. So a global cooperative of territories seems a good role-model for such a democratically structured institution. As long as a small group of big nations (the US, BRIC, Germany, France etc.) rule the

⁹⁹ Pennsylvania is a bit larger; Massachusetts smaller, Denmark or Switzerland are about the right size.





global institutions (UN), there can be no mention of democracy, and the whole construction will remain unstable.

Big nations tend to create centralized structures that are very costly and not really sustainable. When they fail, they make a lot of noise and cause a lot of damage. Most former national functions that are taken over by territories will work better: higher education, train systems, specialized hospitals, electricity grids, banking, industries, police etc. There aren't many things that big nations can do better than small countries. Swiss universities are no worse than German ones, as are Swiss hospitals. Swiss trains do not have a reputation of being less punctual than German ones, in spite of greater density. It would be wrong, though, to put this fact down to "national character" or technical features. It is the rippling effect of local disruptions that goes through systems that are too large to buffer them. Most decisions concerning regional problems that could be made in Stuttgart must be made in Berlin. With a better relocalization of services and

other functions, long-distance traveling can be reduced. Other long-distance induced breakdowns, like those of the electric grid, occur less frequently, too.

In Europe you can see how competition at the intermediate sub-level of big nations is an obstacle to continental cooperation. In fact, cooperation on a continental level would be much more efficient than going through the "middle-man" of the old-fashioned nations. We must think both smaller (territory) and bigger (continental and global) than nations. The Europeans, even the citizens of the big nations, are sick and tired of the constant bickering among Berlin, Paris and London, which is mostly due to old historical sensibilities and prejudice. The US is a bit of a special case, as it's a nation and, taken together with Canada and Mexico, an almost sub-continental entity. The step to a truly sub-continental institution could easily be achieved by giving the states, estados or provinces a bit more relocalized autonomy and by loosening up the national competences.

Territories are well adapted to a combination of direct and indirect forms of democracy. People still know each other, communication is possible, delegates and administrators are not too much cut off from ordinary citizens, political ambitions don't fly too high. Direct contacts cut administration costs and make monitoring easy. Scandals can be detected and dealt with at shorter notice. Shit still happens, but smaller shit. You see what *they're* doing. A lot of commons can be managed in this sphere, particularly natural ones. Territories are a form of decentralization which also goes for large-scale services and industries. For an efficient health or social service, you do not need nations to be big: small nations like Denmark (40,000 km², 5.5 million inhabitants) or Norway offer quite decent public services. Risks can be balanced off in units of 5 million inhabitants. You don't have to rely on bureaucratic behemoths responsible for 80 or 300 million persons. All you need is a territorial parliament of 200 to 400 delegates and an administrative board of 7 to eleven members. These delegates could



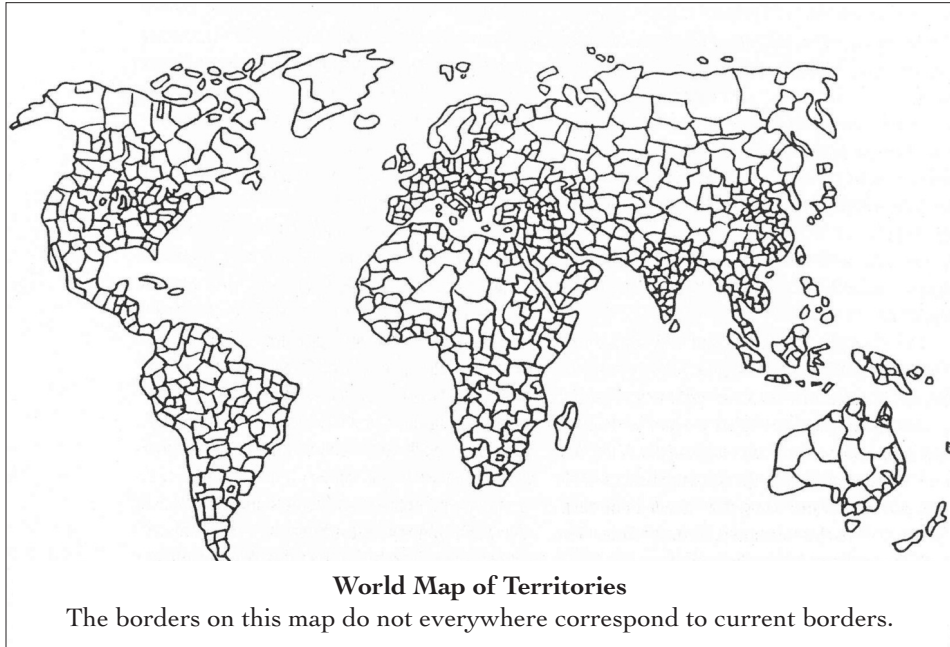
also double as delegates of the 5 to 10 regional councils in a territory, so that you don't get too much political "overhead."

As Leopold Kohr¹⁰⁰ suggested, territories could serve as an antidote against nationalistic fantasies. They are not ethnically, religiously or culturally defined, but only by their function as providers of sufficient public services for everybody.¹⁰¹ The fewer symbolical trappings (such as flags, anthems, national poets, capitals and capitols), the better. Territories could also be a way of overcoming difficult situations like that in the Near East. Why not establish Levant A, B and G by drawing two straight lines from the sea to the desert between the Turkish and Egyptian borders? The administrative center of each of these three territories should probably be a lesser city, not the historically over-determined "holy" cities like Damascus or Jerusalem. If people want to live certain religious or

¹⁰⁰ Kohr, Leopold, *The Breakdown of Nations*, London 1957.

¹⁰¹ That you don't need a "national" language to "integrate" people can be seen in Switzerland, where people have been using four languages plus English (in recent times) for centuries — and the country is still on the map. Instead of a melting pot, a nice buffet will do.

¹⁰² To consider religion as a private affair seems to be a wise decision in the light of history.



other lifestyles more intensively, as seems to be the case, they can still do that in single neighborhoods, but not beyond.¹⁰²

The world would comprise as many cooperative territories as Switzerland has basic municipalities.

Subcontinents, Planet

With the establishment of railroad systems and canals, subcontinents and continents have become the real physical areas of our social metabolism. For more than a hundred years dysfunctional nations have tried to accommodate this reality with traditional borders, identities and institutional particularities, with path-dependent aberrations of all sorts. The defense of national markets and the corresponding weakness of purely supra- or poly-national institutions (EU) have so far prevented the emergence of authentic and democratic continental cooperation. It is obvious that existing blatant inequalities have paralyzed relaxed forms of cooperation. As long as there are dramatically under-equipped territories, phenomena like forced migration, fences, deaths on leaking boats, will not vanish. Only a double-thronged strategy of strengthening the territories as providers of public services and

of complementing them with functional, ecologically sound forms of cooperation on the continental level can succeed. Once the continental institutions take on the form of cooperatives of members of comparable size (modules), mutual trust will spread, a prerequisite for the commons to be governed together.

A global organization of the commons must fulfill two requisites:

- legitimacy;
- democracy.

The existent organizations like UN, World Bank, WTO, G8, IMF are neither very democratic nor democratically legitimated, because not all its constituent members are democratic states and they're dominated by a few big nations. Their reputation has become so bad in the last decades that it'll be the best to do without them. A big sigh of relief will be heard all over the world, once they're gone. A new start can be quite straight-forward. As we're used to since the French revolution we can set up a

Planetary Assembly elected on the basis of the 600 territories, counting 600 representatives. This body can then take over some of the more useful and functioning existing organizations like the WHO, Unesco or FAO. The territorial delegates could be chosen by the lot, like in Ancient Athens, so that men and women are equally represented and that political manipulation and corruption is mitigated (→ Ostrom's rules). An administrative board of may-be 25 members could run executive business and function as an emergency committee. Everybody will understand such a system as normal and legitimate and this will guarantee its effectiveness. As of now, a global initiative of small countries, regions, states, provinces, Länder etc. can already propose such a "reform," so that at the appropriate moment it can be established quickly enough not to paralyze existential global functions (like health or food).

Subcontinental and global cooperation is particularly important for the just attribution of non-local, basic resources and for industrial subsistence. We neither own the



resources, which we happen to sit on; nor do we own the air that happens to flow across our territories. It would make no sense at all to ship and distribute all the resources (e.g. metals, oil) evenly across the whole planet. For ecological reasons it's best to use them on the spot and to share products where they are created. For the new ecological, modular and robust technology that we need (mentioned above), we need large-scale cooperation. We can produce all the electric engines and equipment, processors, machines, chemical components etc. on a few sites for the whole planet. Like Lego-blocks they could be manifold modules that can then be assembled, modified or combined in all spheres, even down to single neighborhoods. The problems we are faced with like competition, systemic incompatibility, excessive redundancy, parallel development costs, could be solved. At the moment powerful monopolistic forces push in

that direction already. Alas, they don't do that to solve our technical problems, but to defend the profits of their owners. We cannot break the power of these monopolies by going back to lower levels of production. In this case small is not beautiful, but a recipe for the road to defeat.

Continental and global cooperation is most urgently needed to balance the unequal levels of equipment and resources in the territories. Transfer of resources must go to emerging or existing institutions of the commons, to neighborhoods, towns and territories. Not to governments or companies. A basic package of services and technical equipment for all inhabitants of the planet must be made accessible. Food subsistence (microagro) can be realized almost everywhere. This decent infrastructure must be defined in concrete technical, not financial terms. It does not stand to reason, why this transfer should

take the risky and tortuous detour of macro- or micro loans to create new markets, i.e. to try to jump-start a machine of which we know that it will neither work properly nor in the long run. It can be instituted in the form of twinning between the towns in the over-equipped north and the towns or territories of the under-equipped south. This transfer cannot be conceived as a repetition of the disastrous development of capitalism, it must be seen as a reparation for colonial exploitation, slavery or more recent robberies like land grabbing and mining. People living on this planet have a title to a good life based on subsistence and institutions of the commons.¹⁰⁵ We have the means to implement such a plan right away (see below).

¹⁰⁵ Just read the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 10th December 1948 and compare it to the current state of affairs. No wonder people get furious when they do this, like Stéphane Hessel, (*Indignez-vous*, 2011) a co-author of the document, who, at the age of 96, not only found no progress, but setbacks everywhere. He died in 2013.



Part Three

TWO LOGICS

In this last part, a few questions about our immediate forms of actions shall be asked and answered.

The institutions of the commons presented above aspire to correspond to a new common sense. If we agree on this: why don't we see more real action to establish them?

The logic of the modules of the commons described above doesn't correspond to that of political action. It would be absurd to assume that you could start building from scratch, in your backyard, as it were, and then work yourself up to the planetary level, through all the prescribed modules. Politics articulates itself in a wide range of movements that cut across modules, terri-

tories, and functions. Most movements emerge around specific topics like lay-offs, pension cuts, bank bailouts, police repression, student loans etc., which eventually reveal the inner workings of the system. To put it drastically it might happen, that the cozy multifunctional neighborhoods are not the starting point, but rather the product of a global phase change. We must make sure not to confuse the model with the reality, the map and with the landscape. Most political change still happens on the level of nation states, with problematic results. On the other hand refusing the arena, because you think it's the wrong one, will lead to paralysis.

The ability to come up with surprises and open up new fields of action instead of simply following the news is essential. Needless to say there are more promising and less promising fields of action. There are fundamental vectors and mere sideshows. Modesty is not a political virtue. Either we want it all or we leave

things as they are. Having big schemes — as I advocate them here — is not a vice, but a necessity. It would be wrong to mistake them for prescriptive models or even scenarios to follow to the dot. When you make big plans we must be prepared for manifold surprises. Nothing will turn out as planned — that is, if you had a plan in the first place.

Political Action as “As If”

Still the logic of present action and future modules can be used to organize and to stir people's imagination. We can reflect the future in the present and by doing so develop a dynamic of organization. It is possible to found either more or less complete neighborhoods, or just proto-microcenters. They will in due course become local focuses of empowerment for many issues.¹⁰⁴ Present borough-like areas offer possibilities of local centralization, where the old space wars make new and better sense. Even small countries, states or regions can be seen as

¹⁰⁴ In my borough it helped to stop a huge shopping-center + soccer stadium project from being built, and to reduce traffic.



future territories with a large measure of autonomy or even (embedded) autarchy. Means and goals don't have to clash, but it would be an absurd undertaking to try to bring about overlapping and contradiction-free political activity instantly.

The suggestions I'm making here are neither comprehensive nor necessarily realistic. They are my contribution to a discussion that is already happening in many forms and places.¹⁰⁵

The Green Plan

The first political reactions to the crisis — or shall we call it panic? — of 2008 were as immediate as they were unimaginative. In analogy to the crisis of the 1930s a New Deal was supposed to deliver the world economy from the mess. In many countries impulse programs were implemented. These were not designed to change the

system, but to rescue the existing one, primarily the auto industry. In Germany e.g. you could get a huge rebate if you traded in your old car for a new one; in the US GM was bailed out.

After these first reactions, which came like a reflex, we saw proposals called Green New Deal. The money pumped into the ailing economies should be invested in technologies that were thought to help us cope with the double challenge of peak oil (the peak was reached in 2010) and the pollution of the environment. In 2009 UNEP (a UN-organization) recommended investments in a Global Green New Deal. In some countries "green" impulse programs of totally \$2.8 trillion were started. The green part, however, was only 15.6 per cent on average.¹⁰⁶ In the USA it was only 10 per cent, in Germany 13 per cent, in South Korea, however, it was taken seriously and amounted to 80.5 per

cent. All these green impulse programs are based on the assumption that new ecological technologies will allow the economies to grow again. This assumption is illusory, because there is no possible path that could achieve growth without an excessive output of CO₂. Decarbonization cannot succeed.¹⁰⁷ Green economy is a myth.

A strict refusal of these mythical schemes will not help our cause, though. We cannot invent a different political situation, just because we don't like the existing one. Realistically macro-economic political action will be determined by strategies like some sort of reformist Green New Deals. The challenge therefore is: how to turn the Green New Deal into a really green, global, fair and genuine deal? They want "green" — let's give them green! They want to invest money — let's show them how and where!

¹⁰⁵ Consider among others: Voss, Elisabeth, *Wegweiser solidarische Ökonomie*, 2010; Hopkins, Rob, *Transition Companion*, 2011.

¹⁰⁶ Jackson, 2011, p. 123.

¹⁰⁷ Jackson, 2011, p. 85–95.



Logically a transition to a society based on the commons should begin at the center of globalization, the United States. Yet, since politics takes many twists and turns, the chain might break at another so far unforeseen peripheral place, which causes repercussions in the center. What could a plan for the US then look like? The population of the US is roughly 300 million, so we'd theoretically be dealing with 600,000 neighborhoods, 15,000 boroughs or towns, 300 regions and 30 territories. As the spatial distribution of the population is not homogeneous and various geographical and historical factors come into play, the actual figures will be somewhat different. (Not all "new" territories correspond to existing states — but it wouldn't make sense to create new state borders, no matter whether they are a bit too big or a bit too small.) The creation of 600,000 sustainable neighborhoods based on micro-agro subsistence with all the trappings might cost \$5 million each (not including the costs of resettling suburbanites), totaling \$3.6 trillion. The costs of establishing or transforming of lively

town centers (incl. ABC, a world food-store etc.) are more difficult to estimate. In some situations it wouldn't cost anything and could just be part of the regular municipal budget, in others it could run up to \$100 million. If we allow \$20 million for each, it would mean another \$300 billion. All in all we're talking about a \$4 trillion investment program that would have to be spread over a number of years. Additional investment should go into the reanimation of the (sub)-continental train-system. (Class-war winner Warren Buffett seems to have begun to invest in it.) The creation and relocation of regional and territorial industries alongside train-tracks (remember that the cars have gone!) would also cost hundreds of billions of dollars. The insulation of buildings, local energy plants, eco-design of industrial goods would not cost anything, they would just mean a re-direction of investment away from consumer goods to collectively useful goods (Tim Jackson). An incentive program to get this process started would be a good idea, though.

Financing this Green Plan is not a big problem. For historical reasons it could take on the form of a "New" Deal between government, unions and bosses, each contributing one third to the Green Plan fund. A tripartite committee would run the Plan in a transparent, communicative manner. The annual wages of the 100 million US workers currently amount to \$3.7 trillion. If a 3 per cent Green Plan tax is instituted, you get \$111 billion from the workers and the same amounts from the bosses and the government, all in all \$333 billion per year. In ten years the Plan could be realized. The workers would profit from the additional services and cheaper food, the bosses from lower wages, the government from less expenses for crime prevention, health or infrastructure (streets).

The implementation of the Green Plan would be based on bottom-up participation. Federal commissioners would not order the transformation of your neighborhood or town, but it would rather be a voluntary program, one that supports local initiatives, as they emerge. If enough in-



habitants of a given neighborhood or borough express their will to make some steps forward (→ neighborhood contract), they would automatically get organizational, financial and know-how support from the fund and its staff.

The Green Plan as a political approach can be seen as an economic impulse program, as the product of inconclusive class wars, as a reformist way-out of a general collapse, etc. (see above). It's a suggestion that can be made also on city or state levels, in the form of propositions or round table talks.

The advantage of this comprehensive, almost megalomaniac plan, is that it positions living in decent, healthy and supportive neighborhood as a human *right*, which in fact it *is* already — we are waiting to see it implemented. The rich have no problem creating their ideal (even ecologically perfect) neighborhoods with all the features mentioned above. In the form of gated communities or exclusive towns (like Disney's *Celebration*) they

probably already exist. Microcenters could also be the form of glorified gentrification. In a lot of “middle-class” situations a Big Plan is only needed to give persons with enough resources a little organizational and financial shove to get their act together and to pool the existing assets. But there are a lot of neighborhoods which are not even recognized by their inhabitants as such and which will need large investments in infrastructure, in education as well as organizational support. It's either everybody or nobody.

This is particularly true on a global level.

The Neighborhood Contract

If you look at your neighborhood, the prospect of having to cooperate more closely with your neighbors doesn't probably look very appealing to you. Must politics come so close? Couldn't we begin elsewhere? Research shows that closeness can breed disgust and cozy feelings *at the same time*. Everybody wants to protect his or her privacy *and* not to be alone. Neighbor-

hood is ambiguous. So creating a multifunctional neighborhood doesn't mean that you find new friends. (“Neighborhood cooperation? Yes, but not with that asshole on the third floor!”) Organizing neighbors is sometimes better done by outsiders with an “official” cool mission than by the actual neighbors themselves (this could be an NGO or some mysterious global neighborhood agency called GNA — you know who they are). The tragedy of neighborhood associations and neighborhood activists is all too well known. (As I said: neighborhood is the genuine place for tragedy, so we shouldn't be surprised.) If neighborhood organization depends on being nice and helpful to each other, it'll be on shaky grounds, instable and fragile, as Taleb would put it.

As I pointed out before, neighborhood commons don't necessarily have to begin in neighborhoods. They can, though. The most promising approach is in a rather business-like manner through a neighborhood contract, which can also take on the form of the statutes of an association or co-



operative. Templates exist. Such a contract would follow all the good pieces of advice from Elinor Ostrom, Andrew Zolli or Rob Hopkins (Transition Town). It will help to fix the borders of the neighborhood according to the recommended size (500 persons, one or two blocks, location of the microcenter and the farmland etc.). It would stipulate the duties (money, work¹⁰⁸) and entitlements (food, services) of its members. The central subject of this contract is the establishment of a direct food logistics with the proper infrastructure along the model of CSA (community supported agriculture). As soon as enough inhabitants of a given neighborhood have signed the contract and subscribed to pay the dues the microcenter is established, managers and farmers are hired, the food can be delivered and distributed. If the circumstances are propitious, the whole package of the four-star 24-hour resort-

hotel standard described above can evolve. You can become a happy car-free neighborhood, living on 1000 watts and savoring 40 different sorts of tomatoes.

Tentative fore-runner projects — e.g. only a smaller food depot for 20 households — in cooperation with other embryonic neighborhoods in the same borough — are easier to realize but tend to stagnate and to disappear if the “real thing” does not start happening.¹⁰⁹ Smaller projects just require too much work and commitment for too few people. They tend to become a drag.

Without “collateral” support from town or city organisms bottom-up initiatives only go so far. Better not give it a go if you don’t want to end up in the avant-garde trap (isolation, sectarianism, disappointment, paralysis).

Model Neighborhoods in Larger Cities as 2000-Watt-Schools

The real challenge of a world based on the commons and subsistence is the transformation of its existing structures, neighborhoods and industries.

Beginning with the big challenge is not always the best way to start out, though. Social relationships are ingrained in existing neighborhoods, divisions of class, income, education, race, and ethnic background or even the memories of notorious arguments about noise, cat poo and snarling dogs, which may represent daunting obstacles.

It might therefore be more promising to begin with a neighborhood afresh, with members who choose to live there and

¹⁰⁸ It is essential that contributions in the form of chores are performed personally and cannot be compensated with money, for if you permit this, the “rich” will turn the “poor” into their domestics and instead of commoning you end up with a new form of feudalism.

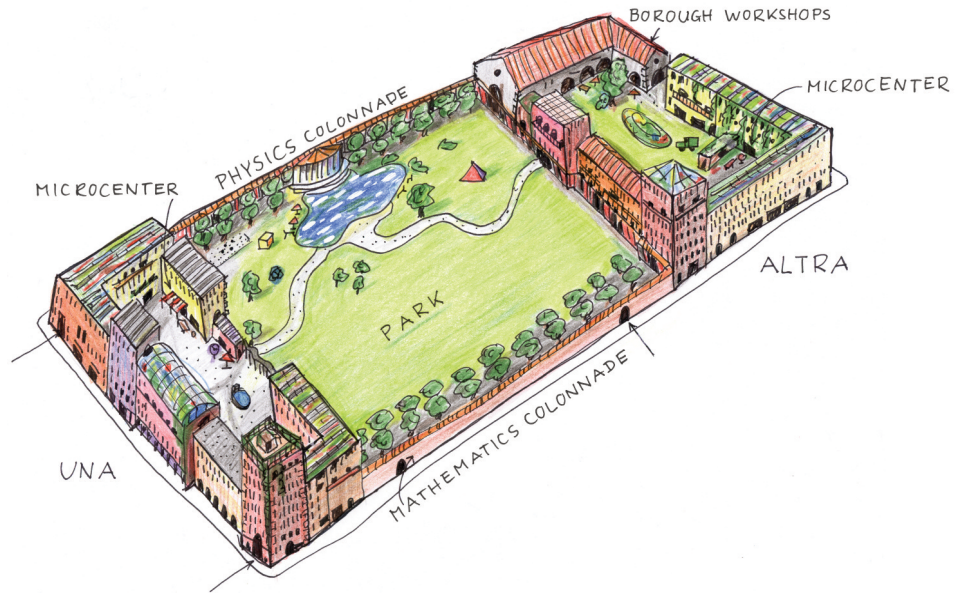
¹⁰⁹ In some situations the establishment of an embryonic organizational “microcenter” in the form of a bar, lounge or café could be a good idea, though. Maybe such a place already exists and you can make a deal with the owner for part-time use, billboard, etc.

don't know each other too well. The disadvantage of such a pioneer- or model- approach is that the project can be put aside as an exceptional case, an odd creation of idealists or a utopian zoo.

Maybe this advantage can be combined with the neighborhood-contract approach, if the model-neighborhoods serve as organizational centers and moral support for the diffused activists.

Model neighborhoods (nena1.ch has the full program and statutes ready for use — in German) can be applied to most urban situations: empty industrial sites, decaying housing estates, empty warehouse areas, or disused army barracks (as in Zurich).

Every major city (200,000 inhabitants or more) should grant itself a model neighborhood in the the form of a cooperative or a municipal institution like a school (or a zoo). Five hundred persons of the average demographic mix live there to illustrate, try out and propagate their lifestyle. Eco-designed washing machines,



Zurich Former Barracks

kitchens, software for internal organization and communication, energy systems, cradle-to-cradle furniture, clothing etc. can be tested. Rooms for about 30 guests are reserved for persons who want to try neighborhood life for some weeks or

months, which means these neighborhoods also serve as schools. If the land and the building is subsidized by the city (as if the Green Plan did exist), housing costs can be kept affordable.



Model neighborhoods should be built near the city center, near a train or bus station, so that they are easily accessible for visitors (or even tourists). Having one or (more and more) model neighborhoods should be the pride of a city, like the theatre, the college or the art museum.

Model neighborhoods can be the starting point of the transformation of all (or most) neighborhoods into modules of the new shift towards the commons.

Borough and Town Centers for Everybody: The New ABC

To use fewer resources, we must relocalize every-day life functions. This can partly happen in neighborhoods. Relocalization on the level of boroughs or small towns means local centralization and strengthening of the old downtown areas. The so-called revitalization of these areas is under way, but with rather ambiguous results. After the old working-class had been resettled in suburbia, the centers became either

areas of neglect and squalor or business districts. In the meantime (since the '90s), the downtown areas have been turned, mainly by recent immigrants, into lively places with restaurants, shops and entertainment enterprises. A lot of global capital (from Korea, Bangladesh, Yemen, Columbia etc.) has found its way into them. At the same time suburbia became the epitome of boredom and depressions, and the ex-suburbanites are flocking back to downtown, but not as new friendly neighbors and partners of the current residents, but as competitors for the space. Warehouses are turned into expensive loft condominiums, food stores into chic boutiques, organic food stores or art galleries. Pedestrian areas are created, not for ecological reasons, but as a form of turning streets into sanitized and "safe" shopping malls. Real estate values go up driving less profitable uses out. Nothing new there, we've seen it all happen in Soho, the Lower East Side and in Brooklyn. Tourists, part-time bohemians and those who cater for them take over. Downtown areas are becoming a combination of museum and going-out

zone. They may look quaint and colorful, but in terms of social life there are dead, there's no new sense of community, but just business. We have to react in this space war of gentrification and expulsion. Downtown centers must become centers of everyday-logistics for the persons living in the borough. We don't need more H&Ms, Starbucks or other franchises (not even alternative ones). We want places like the ABC, (i.e. places where local cultural and scientific resources can be shared), schools, cooperative food depots, affordable housing and we want them in the middle of our neighborhood-clusters. What we can do without are downtown areas, which are a mixture of museums and expensive restaurants. (Art can be a weapon or pretext against convivial spaces.)

A new alliance must be struck between the "intermediate" developers of the downtown areas, those people who could not afford suburbia, and are now being evicted and new cooperative residents (us). Not everybody who had to leave suburbia in recent years is exactly a "rich" gentrifier,





not any more... (We're talking about the new "precarious middle classes" of jobless recovery.) Instead of gentrification, we want to *common the city*.

Recapturing the downtown centers is on our agenda, particularly in the less fashionable parts of bigger cities. Even ex-suburbs can be transformed into denser, urban clusters.

Initiatives in Existing States or Small Countries

Roughly speaking, most US-states correspond to what I call territories. As in the case of borough/town centers strengthening states as they are today can be an ambiguous undertaking. On a purely ecological and subsistence level it makes sense and is also necessary. The defense of public services has stirred quite a number of serious struggles in different states and changed the political landscape. A new mobilization of the young for collective and communal structures is happening — mostly at city or state level. Against

the pseudo-anarchisms of libertarians and Ayn Randians a revival of forms of social, even institutional solidarity is on the rise.

After the old commons have been dismantled partially the crucial function of public services is being rediscovered.

Some of the states in the US (or countries in Europe) are more progressive, others less. To reject or even dismantle the federal programs and to bet on the states as a principle can be a losing proposition (like Cameron's Big Society; see below). The existing federal social security systems must be considered as a minimal guarantee that must be complemented by even better state services. It is typical of the function of continental networks to balance out the resources of territories. This cannot be sacrificed to the mythical idea of the autarchy of states.

A Global Plan

In Europe and the US we'd see 1,600,000 "tragic" neighborhoods and

40,000 "comic" boroughs. And what about the rest of the world? In 2007 the world GNP was about \$54 trillion, of which \$38 trillion went to the "developed" countries and \$14 trillion to the "developing" countries. Africa only got 2.3 per cent or \$1.25 trillion. Africa has about one billion inhabitants, one seventh, or 14.3 per cent, of the world population. As we're all entitled to \$7,700 a year, Africa should be getting \$7 trillion. If we allotted every African neighborhood \$100,000, we'd need \$200 billion, every borough or town \$20 million, another \$100 billion and every territory \$1 billion, another \$50 billion, altogether \$350 billion. Compared with the \$266 billion (0.7 per cent of \$38 trillion, as promised by the UN) that we owe the developed countries anyway, this is peanuts. With 1 per cent of the GNP of the rich countries, we could invest \$380 billion every year. Spread across five to ten years, which would be enough to free all the neighborhoods, boroughs, towns or territories of the world from squalor and boredom.





But of course, money isn't everything. A sudden flood of money would even put all the surviving forms of non-monetary subsistence at risk and actually worsen the situation.¹¹⁰ It is obvious that a transfer of resources must be worked out together with the local populations, in a transparent, democratic and ecological sound form. Still, it is important to insist on the global fund — \$380 billion per year. It underlines the basic entitlement in the only currently valid form of measurement, money.

Global plans have been “declared” in many versions over and over again (Millennium goals etc.). They should now be reformulated on the basis of resilient social modules of the commons. The transformation in the north must be the same in content as that in the south, depending on

local conditions, of course. We may even have to learn, that we in the north are further off the mark than the communities in the south and that we'll be grateful to learn a lot from the remaining forms of subsistence and commons in the global south.

Are We Ready for Change?

In spite of the big hype about the commons, commoning, the common good, community, cooperation, we shouldn't forget that things are moving in the opposite direction almost everywhere. We've been repeating to ourselves that neo-liberalism is dead, capitalism a zombie, the collapse nigh: it hasn't happened. Some even say that capitalism on a world-scale is just going through its teething problems. The emerging movement around the commons is only a mar-

ginal phenomenon, and it may be too late to achieve anything.

A lot of people ask themselves if our attitudes of private isolation and of delegating responsibilities to authorities or big leaders can be changed in due time.¹¹¹ It is no good saying that we must first overcome our patriarchal, racist, tribalist, sexist, educational, religious or other limitations or economic interests in order to be able to realize the new institutions of the commons. Must we first realize the correct class compositions in our organizations or groups before we can act? I think these divisions can only be overcome by cooperating in smaller or larger projects and mobilizations. To overcome our divisions it isn't enough to cultivate mutual respect, multi-cultural skills or other forms of “good behavior,” only a common universal project

¹¹⁰ On micro credit systems and the ambiguity of their results: Abhijit V. Banerjee and Esther Duflo, *Poor Economics*, 2011. Instead of strengthening the existing communities micro credits turn neighbors into competing small entrepreneurs that don't even make enough money to improve their welfare (p. 214).

¹¹¹ The tactics of “direct action“ tries to change exactly this. David Graeber, *Direct Action*, 2009.





can achieve this.¹¹² As already Aristotle knew: values are created by exercising them, not just by declaring them. It stands to reason that our divisions can't be overcome before the transformation has happened, they will probably only disappear as a result of this process. Unlike the microagro logistics, politics doesn't move from A to B.

Others doubt whether we are able to break the chains our consciousness that has been colonized by the patterns of consumerism and hyper-individualism at all.¹¹³ Can we imagine belonging to a community? Haven't we become too touchy, too self-centered? Can an apple person talk to an android person? Aren't humans competitive, egoistic, obsessed with power and aggression by nature? Must any social system that doesn't take these inclinations into ac-

count assume totalitarian traits? Are we marching towards eco-dictatorship, reeducation camps, indoctrination, 1000-Wattserfdom? These questions are not pointless. It is an old ideological trick to reduce system-induced behavior to anthropological constants. It is indeed difficult to rediscover our cooperative potential after 250 years of capitalist conditioning. Yet it exists.

What we need is not so much consciousness-raising, as concrete proposals for action. Humans are capable of everything, including cooperation. We don't have to change, but we can act differently.

Massimo de Angelis raises another troubling question in his article "Crisis, Capital and Co-optation" — does capital need the commons to survive?¹¹⁴ Don't we risk helping capitalism to solve its current cri-

sis by strengthening cooperation? As David Graeber puts it in his book¹¹⁵ no company can function without the spontaneous cooperation ("baseline communism") of its employees. We can't help cooperating, even if it's only for the benefit of our exploiters. Capitalist firms are based on a communal dynamics. Clever entrepreneurs openly bet on them and create an ambiance of respect and cooperation (Google; Sandberg of Facebook: "we're all equal"). This is even more visible in the sphere of reproduction or the care sector: without being asked to we do a lot of work in our homes and create a lot of communal resources ("social capital") to keep our labor power in good repair. The greatest part of care or housework is unpaid work and is performed by women, often recruited from low-wage countries. If this kind of work

¹¹² Slavoj Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, London, 2012; "Do not just respect others, offer them a common struggle, because our most urgent problems are problems we have together" p. 74.

¹¹³ "The iron cage of consumerism" — as Jackson puts it, paraphrasing Weber's dictum.

¹¹⁴ Helfrich, 2012; p. 227.

¹¹⁵ "In fact, communism is *the foundation of all human sociability*. It is what makes society possible." *Debt: The First 5000 years*, 2011; p. 96 (his emphasis).



weren't done or had to be paid in full, the whole system would collapse instantly. So to survive market economy must reactivate and exploit the social commons in our households and neighborhoods.¹¹⁶ The current prime minister of Great Britain, David Cameron, calls this *Big Society*, which is probably a lame pun on the *No Society* of his precursor Margaret Thatcher. What Big Society means is the encouragement of social self-help institutions that should replace the publicly financed services by voluntary, unpaid work. If you add to this unpaid urban gardening or soup kitchens run by NGOs, the cost of living can be reduced, compensating for lower wages or precarious jobs. As a result you get an overall reduction of wages, more profits for the capitalists and better competitiveness of British companies on the world market. The race downwards to the even lower wages in East European or Asian countries can start. The fact, that this strategy

of co-optation exists, illustrates the contradiction of the system perfectly. It can be seen as good news and become the basis of the bargaining of new deals. In a way Big Society is an act of despair. In the end it depends on the power of the emerging neighborhoods, if the co-optation works or if it gets out of hand. A risky business for both sides, and *therefore* an interesting one.

Officially the current political and military action's goal is the rescue of the middle classes. It seems that almost everybody seems to belong or aspires to belong to this privileged few that live in the shrinking "comfort zones." The term "middle class" has no precise sociological meaning. What it really means is: those who are still granted a decent way of life. If you ask the members of this elusive group directly, it turns out the "middle classes" have lost faith in the system that claims to defend their interests. On the

other hand they still think they have a lot to lose and are afraid of any fundamental change. The "indecision" of the middle classes is effectively blocking the necessary transformation and thus reduces the chances of a peaceful transition. The longer they hesitate, they more violent the situation risks to become.

One can say that the initiation of a peaceful global transformation depends on the behavior of those 20 per cent of the world population that benefit from the current inequality and, mediated through their political systems, that have the military power (the US defense budget is as large as that of all other countries put together), the "armed consumers." Out of these 20 per cent the 10 per cent of the middle purchasing power class (e.g. households between \$50 and \$100 thousand per year, or those 50 per cent of the population in Switzerland, that make between \$5,000 and \$12,000 a month), the

¹¹⁶ The importance of unrecognized, unpaid and feminized house- and carework has been emphasized by the feminist movement since the seventies ("Wages against Housework," Federici, 2014 (1975).

voters of the left or green parties, the economically and ecologically concerned (or scared?) middle class, must be convinced to switch to a (collectively shared) 4-star-hotel comfort. Will the neighborhood-concept convince them? Will it convince them in time? Are they ready to switch from a market-dominated system to a commons-based one?¹¹⁷ If this rich and powerful minority isn't able to present a concretely formulated peace program to the rest of the world, the wars will go on and get worse — till 2020, when we will see the so-called “revolution of the young

generation” (Karl Wagner, Club of Rome, 2012).¹¹⁸ We'll need another strange victory,¹¹⁹ this time not just over nuclear reactors, but over the whole economic reactor, which is even more dangerous.

As political parties, unions and special interest groups of all sorts seem to be entrenched in the defensive management of losses and are paralyzed by the contradictions of the system they want to rescue (jobs versus de-growth, purchasing power versus ecology), we'll need some sort of independent citizens' initiatives.

These can be existing ones or new ones. The less “flavor” they have, the better.¹²⁰ Such flavorless associations can work together with universities, NGOs, public authorities, or even parties and unions, if they have a well-defined program. We'll take it from there.

19 July 2013

¹¹⁷ The rejection of the present economic system and the insight into the necessity of a more sustainable lifestyle are almost mainstream opinions in a lot of countries. According to a study of the BBC, only 11 percent of the world population think that capitalism works well. In France, Mexico and the Ukraine more than 40 per cent demand that it should be replaced by something completely different. There are only two countries where more than one fifth of the people think that capitalism works in its present form: the USA (25 percent) and Pakistan (21 per cent). In Zurich and other Swiss cities very ambitious propositions for a 2000-Watt-society (down from the present 8000) usually get three quarters of the votes (Zurich 76%), most city governments are left/green. In Germany a recent poll (2012) by the *Bertelsmann Stiftung* found that 80 per cent of the Germans want a new economic system. So what we need is not exactly “consciousness raising”. But there seems to be many a slip between insight and action... However we must not forget that the situation is extremely fragile and the system posing as solid (mainly by erecting higher and higher office buildings) is wholly dependent on a minimal compliance of its employees (us). A single morning that doesn't see us showing up for work on a mass scale can wreck it. It doesn't live on steel and concrete but on live labor.

¹¹⁸ I think we are already seeing this revolution in the global urban uprising, from Cairo to Sao Paulo.

¹¹⁹ Midnight Notes, 1979.

¹²⁰ In Switzerland: www.neustartschweiz.ch (neighborhoods); www.danach.info (post-growth-society).

THE CULTURE OF COOPERATION*

**Eight misunderstandings
to be avoided:**

- 1) The “what” is more important than the “how.”
- 2) We are the good ones.
- 3) We all want the same.
- 4) We pursue idealistic goals and must watch out that nobody benefits personally.
- 5) We are against power, therefore it does not exist among us.
- 6) We create a free space where everybody can do what s/he wants.
- 7) We trust each other and do not need any rules.
- 8) We love each other and do not fight.

*Elisabeth Voss, Chemnitz, 2012.

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