

Instituting Commoning

STEALTH.Unlimited (Ana Džokić and Marc Neelen)

A commons arises whenever a given community decides it wishes to manage a resource in a collective manner, with special regard for equitable access, use and sustainability.

(David Bollier)¹

Central to most contemporary definitions of the commons are three elements: a community, a resource and a form of collective management. Although at first glance the management element may look like the most obvious and almost technical aspect of commoning, it actually may be its most defining and political aspect rather than the neutral category it easily presupposes.² In the course of this article, we will therefore explore the background to the notion of management itself, and consider how certain forms of management are inscribed in the more conventional understanding of commons, especially as stated in Elinor Ostrom's research on Common-Pool Resources.³ We will call these the 'institutions of the commons', or as Ostrom calls them 'institutions for collective action'.⁴ The paper then looks at the forms of management required to achieve what Stavros Stavrides calls 'liberated commoning', discussed later in this text. This not only puts us on a path to new forms of institutions, but also to new forms of 'institutioning': in other words, both the act of self-instituting (self-organising) and self-institutionalising a community around certain commons, including the actual forms of governance this takes in relation to the community and its resources.

To understand the liberating aspect of self-instituting, we will take a look (back) at some remarkable examples from the early urban commons movement of more than a century ago, and at how such institutions were formed. This will bring us to a more contemporary understanding of what such institutions are today, or could possibly become tomorrow, based on interactions, conflicts and agreements, particularly with public institutions, as in the example arising from democratisation efforts in Italy in recent years, or ongoing attempts in cities in Croatia and Spain.

Coping with management

To begin, let us return to the notion of management. Although the term is often used when describing the constituting elements of the commons, it has developed an equally disputed connotation in that very same context. From 2011 to 2013, a 'technical government' took control in Italy, implementing budgetary reforms and austerity measures that brought Italy a step closer to becoming a technocracy: 'Technical and leadership skills would be selected on the basis of specialised knowledge and performance, rather than democratic election by those without such knowledge or skill deemed necessary.'⁵ It is not difficult to see why such practices are deepening the rift with the commoners, who strive instead for 'real democracy'. Such technocratic (rather than democratic) interventions are understood as implementations of so-called new managerialism, a commonplace practice in the

private sector, known for the imposition of a powerful management body that keeps professional skills and knowledge under tight control and is driven by efficiency, external accountability, monitoring, and an emphasis on standards.⁶ If managerialism is something to be cautious about, what does the term 'management' actually stand for?

The field of resource and environmental management, which is quite close to the commons, has recently held intense discussions about what management entails. It is of interest to have a look at this since, notably, resource and environmental management is also the field from which the 'historic' commons originate. Following the semantic roots of the word, geographer Dean Bavington critically explores the understanding of management in the environmental field as it shifts over time from management as control to management as careful use and, finally, to management as coping.

The meaning of management as handling and rational control entered the English language in the 16th century from the Italian *maneggiare* which referred to the training of horses [...]. Through management, wild and unpredictable horses were broken and administered through their paces, trained to trot, gallop, and high step by controlling their separate movements and gait in time and through space. [...]. To be successful, managers must eliminate or drastically reduce the complexity, wildness and freedom of all those targeted for management. Indeed from the perspective of management, wildness, freedom, diversity and complexity often represent 'problems' demanding solutions through control, handling and training.⁷

Bavington goes on to explain that in the early seventeenth century, this meaning of management was influenced by the introduction into English of the French word *ménager*, which has its roots in house-keeping and means a 'mode of careful usage', which is possible once something is stripped of its wildness, complexity and uncertainty and prepared

for optimal use. However close this may come to forms of stewardship, Bavington warns that this management as 'careful use' is highly connected to management as control because it requires the pre-existence of a relatively controlled material or symbolic environment before it can take place.

The confusion around the word manager – which entered the English language in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries and encompasses both the meaning of trainer (*menaggiare*) and custodian (*ménager*) – still exists today.

These two etymologic roots may leave many contemporary commoners rather in despair. Understandably, some larger or less formalised structure or mechanism to mediate a common resource is necessary – the institution – but the form of cooperation inscribed in these two forms of management leaves little space for the more tangential, emergent form of institutioning that many people seek today.

However, in resource management, a third meaning of management is increasingly finding expression, one that brings some relief. Bavington explains that this understanding of management, mainly invoked in situations where uncertainty, complexity and surprise have rendered command and control techniques useless, implies exactly the opposite of the two historic meanings of management:

Rather than meaning to control and to use carefully, 'to manage' can also mean to simply cope with a situation, person, problem or complex process [...]. We use this colloquial meaning of management [...] when we say 'I just managed to get this paper done on time,' or 'I just managed to pay rent this month.' When we utilise management in these ways we are referring to situations far removed from that of a controlling authority or from being in a position to map, plan, simplify, direct, husband or steward reality to serve our wishes.

When we manage as coping we are the ones being controlled or carefully used by someone or something. Managing, in the sense of dealing with and coping with uncertainty and complexity, is now a dominant theme in resource and environmental management and in contemporary life in general.⁸

Shortly, we will see how this relates to concepts such as liminal practices, as explored by the architect and theoretician Stavros Stavrides. But first, we will take a look at the very influential definitions drafted by political economist Elinor Ostrom regarding the management of common resources.

Beyond the boundaries of a blueprint

In the summary of her book, *Governing The Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*, Ostrom states that any group attempting to manage a common resource in a sustainable manner must resolve a number of issues in order to create institutions for collective action. Her research (on natural resource commons) revealed that groups that are able to organise and govern their behaviour successfully use the same basic design principles, helping them to overcome problems in creating these institutions. Eight principles characterise successful commons:

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' behaviour.
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.⁹

While it is essential to acknowledge the importance of Ostrom's research, and particularly the design principles for their clarity of concept, the resulting commoning institution has a quite stratified character. One should, however, keep in mind that it is based on findings resulting from often long-term functioning, natural common-pool-resource types of practices, and hence in mainly rural settings compared to the 'urban commons' under investigation here. Since 1990, when Ostrom published her book, commons have been increasingly emerging in cities where public spaces and institutions have shaped the urban context and governance up until the recent withering of the welfare state and its accompanying privatisation processes. Impacted by this shift, the current search for new institutions of the commons considers accessibility (known to us from public institutions), but seeks different, more direct modes of governance. The resulting contemporary understanding therefore particularly disputes the rigidity and enclosure expressed in Ostrom's design principles. Stavros Stavrides, when expressing his understanding of commoning institutions, has this to say:

If institutions are forms through which people organise their ways of being together, and if these institutions always represent some forms of coagulation, some forms of concretisation of power relations, then it is not enough for us to just be for commoning as a liberating process. It is not enough for us to find new institutions that look like the institutions that are in the service of the dominant classes. We have to find not simply other institutions, but perhaps new forms of institution.¹⁰

Stavrides points to forms of institution that are significantly more open and fluid than those which Ostrom tried to define. He subsequently speaks about finding common ground. In other words, a commons that understands itself as a continuous space of emergence, a space that persistently keeps itself in a state of flux:

This definition of the commons is always a dynamic definition, because if you - as societies and communities - tend to close this world and believe that what defines us has its borders and those outside the borders are others, then we come back to these either enclosed societies reminiscent of traditional ones, or the new forms of enclosure that are connected to the capitalist idea of a definition and classification and profit accumulation. [...] We have to rethink the commons as a flexible condition through which communities define themselves in a process of being open to other also emerging communities. This might produce a new form of coordination between people and organised communities that does not exist as differentiated entities but as entities in the process of finding and negotiating with one and another. Commoning, as I stress it as a process and not an end product, is important to be viewed as a process in where [*sic*] people discover the potentialities of sharing something. I also stress the fact that commoning includes the process in which you define the uses and rules and forms of regulation in where [*sic*] you keep this process alive. You need constantly to be alert in avoiding that this process solidifies and closes itself and therefore reverses its meaning. If commoning tends to close itself in a closed society and community, and it defines its own world, with certain classifications and rules of conduct, then commoning reverses itself and simply becomes the area of a public which reflects a certain authority that is created in order to keep this order going as a strict and circumscribed order. Commoning that is not in a flux reverses its meaning.¹¹

Here, the notion of liberated communing as a 'practice through which commoning invents, creates and, by itself, creates its own institutions, its own forms' is essential.¹² It is evident that such a definition of the institutions of commoning drifts away from the strict demarcation of a community and its set of rules, and goes beyond the governing of a resource per se as the earlier Ostrom definition envisioned.

When it comes to 'institutioning' commons, Saki

Bailey, a scholar of political economy and law, first points to the actual difficulty of defining the commons community:

If you have a community, how do you define it? Do you define it by its inhabitants, by the people who live in a city, do you define it by the nation, do you define it as a global community? Is the community criteria based on citizenship, or simply on being human, or based on the actual participation in the cultivation and management of a resource? Or is it based on geography?¹³

Whereas Ostrom states that group boundaries must be clearly described, Bailey points to the notion of contractual communities as defined by legal scholar Carol M. Rose, who affirms that such communities often appear like commons on the inside, but operate like private entities (and private property) on the outside. This makes the right of access, or the right to benefit from a specific common, highly problematic:

What we are promoting is a kind of tribalism. It is a kind of anarchy. If that's the policy – I am ok with that. But, if we are not proposing anarchy, then we have to understand that the management of a common has to be connected to the right of citizenship, and to the rights of the constitution. I do not have an answer to this, but to me it is the biggest problem to the commons: how do you define a community without creating exclusions. And even citizenship creates exclusions: you exclude people like migrants. Tricky questions that should be addressed and answered.¹⁴

Apart from the difficulty of defining a non-excluding community, when it comes to governing a resource, the actual property regimes around that resource come into play. First of all, Saki Bailey explains that the conventional classification of goods into public, communal and private does not correlate with the legal regimes: public, private and customary law (this last to a minor degree in the European context) that govern them. This is something already pointed

out by Ostrom, when she states,

Common-pool resources may be owned by national, regional, or local governments; by communal groups; by private individuals or corporations; or used as open access resources by whomever can gain access. Each of the broad types of property regimes has different sets of advantages and disadvantages, but at times may rely upon similar operational rules regarding access and use of a resource [...] Thus, as discussed below, there is no automatic association of common-pool resources with common property regimes – or with any other particular type of property regime.¹⁵

Whether related to material commons (with legal regimes like land titles, etc.) or immaterial commons (with intellectual property rights, copyrights, etc.), the respective commons challenge to different degrees the idea of ownership as an absolute one. Property is actually a bundle of rights, which is different from the concept of absolute ownership or *dominium plenum* that stems from Roman and English law and has influenced most European legal systems.¹⁶ The Nordic countries, having been less affected by Roman law, have a different approach to ownership. In their context, private property can be subdivided into many different rights, such as the right of use (for instance, the right to live in a condominium apartment without being the absolute owner of it).

Building upon this, Bailey confirms that the choice of legal regime regarding property, rights of use, etc. is not automatic (natural), and therefore it is in our hands to change it. (As a side note, it is also this aspect of self-determination that offers a community and its commons such an emancipatory potential).

According to Bailey, this reality of choice leads to the conclusion that we need to investigate new types of property distribution through the decree of law. Property distribution may, in turn, deeply influence the way we institute the commons and the

modes of governing we enable around a resource. At first sight, the prospect of profoundly changing property distribution, access rights, or the openness of a community may look like formidable challenges. However, in the world of commoners, such challenges have been met before, as we will discuss shortly.

A glance backwards from the future

Observing the discussion around urban commons that has sprung up in recent times, it is almost ironic to note how much it has been explored as if it were an emergent phenomenon or a novel invention. Already over a century ago, urban commons, in the form of cooperatives set up by citizens, began to have a major impact on urban life and on what eventually became the welfare state. By commoning basic needs, such as housing and food, city dwellers, mainly workers and craftsmen, took these out of the commodity loop. Today, their struggle and the capacities they developed have apparently largely disappeared from our collective memory, therefore it is a good moment to go back to some of the origins of this movement.

The Industrial Revolution in Europe, sparked the appearance of the cooperative movement, as cooperative movement protagonist Karen Zimbelman explains:

As people moved from farms into the growing cities, they had to rely on stores to feed their families because they could no longer grow their own food. Working people had very little control over the quality of their food or living conditions. Those with money gained more and more power over those without. Early coops were set up as a way to protect the interests of the less powerful members of society – workers, consumers, farmers, and producers.

In England, consumers were frustrated by the abuses of storeowners, many of whom adulterated products to increase their profits. In many cases,

workers' wages were paid in company 'chits' – credit that could only be used at the company's stores. The average consumer had very few choices and little control. Groups of these people began experimenting with various methods of providing for their needs themselves. They decided to pool their money and purchase groceries together. When they purchased goods from a wholesale dealer and then divided them equally among themselves, they were surprised at the savings and higher quality of products they were able to obtain.¹⁷

In 1843, after a failed strike by the textile mill workers of Rochdale, England, the millworkers decided to abandon ideas for a further strike or to seek charitable donations, and instead opted to take one of their most pressing issues, the provision of affordable food, under their own control. Twenty-eight of them founded the Rochdale Equitable Pioneers Society and started preparations to establish a food store as an alternative to the company store. As Zimbelman stunningly describes, after a year of saving they opened their own store in December 1844, selling butter, sugar, flour and oatmeal. Due to the refusal of the gas company to supply the store with gas to light it, they found themselves selling candles as well. The Rochdale Pioneers developed a list of operating principles (Rochdale Principles) to govern their organisation, which in a slightly updated version are still guiding cooperatives today. Notably, the first principle states that cooperative societies must have a membership 'open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination'.¹⁸ This openness is reminiscent of the current call for a 'liminal' demarcation of the commons (*vis-à-vis* the Ostrom definition).

Just as the Rochdale Pioneers faced resistance from the establishment right from the start (the refusal to supply the shop with gas is one

example), so other groups setting up cooperative efforts encountered similar obstructions. This might be relevant to keep in mind when considering the current struggles for the commons. Another important step in the attempts by citizens to control their own lives was the emergence of cooperative housing. Although the first known appearance was in Rennes (France) in 1720, it took a further century, until the mid-1800s, for the initiative to flourish in England, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the USA and Sweden.¹⁹ Looking back to that time, some striking similarities with today's tendencies can be found. Let us look, for example, at the case of early cooperative housing in Amsterdam.

In the late 1800s, the Dutch government treated housing as though it were an issue to be dealt with solely by each individual member of society. Yet for many living in the cities, acquiring affordable housing was a sheer impossibility. Housing quarters had become overcrowded as a result of the rush of workers to the city, with thousands of families packed in shanty-like conditions, paying exploitative rents amidst diseases such as cholera and typhus. With the cooperative movements on the rise, it became clear that the housing issue was the next to be taken into collective hands. In Amsterdam, a small group of people had been cautiously preparing for this. In May 1868, they launched a trial run of the Amsterdam People's Journal (*Amsterdamsch Volksblad*), in which they outlined the blueprint for their endeavour. Six weeks later, in the first official number, its simplicity became clear: the newspaper called upon the citizenry to establish a fund to build houses, and with a payment of just ten cents per week, 5000 members, 'supervised by a pragmatic friend of the people', would have enough capital to start a cooperative after one year.²⁰

It was a daring idea, and something that focused the attention of the citizenry, as well as the establishment and the police. Due to detailed reports by

the last, we have considerable insight into how this idea came into being on Monday, 2 November 1868, when the Construction Society for the Acquisition of Private Housing was established in The Swan Café on the Nieuwendijk in Amsterdam.²¹ The difficulty in gathering the capital was countered by a remarkable, although not perfect, solution: members of the Construction Society would pay ten cents per week over the course of 50 weeks, thus raising enough capital for a five-guilder share. Such a share would give access to a lottery that, in turn, would give the 'beneficiaries' access to a house that meanwhile would be built with the funds gathered. The rent for such a house would be no more than one guilder per week, an astonishingly low amount, and those who paid this sum for twenty years would become full owners of their house. Although not everyone would have the luck to gain their own house, those left without one would share in the pride of having kick-started this remarkable initiative.

For the men of the Amsterdam People's Journal, that Monday, 2 November 1868 must have been an unforgettable day. [...] On 24 October, the People's Journal published the construction company's regulations. The previous day, placards had been used to call the population of Amsterdam to meet the following night. The posters attracted the attention of the police and the public, and, thanks to all the fuss, the meeting in The Swan Café on the Nieuwendijk a resounding success. Over 700 citizens, almost all workers, flocked there. They filled the hall and adjacent rooms, flooded the large courtyard, and had even to find a place on the street. [...] That first night, between 400 and 500 people became jubilant members, but it did not stop there. In the days that followed, another hundred citizens joined, by 17 November, there were already 1145 people, and by April 1869, over 2000 of Amsterdam's workers were affiliated with the construction cooperative.²²

In the period up until 1901, the year in which the first

Law on Housing was introduced in the Netherlands, the Construction Society had already built the impressive number of 940 houses. The success of this cooperative would pave the way for many others in The Netherlands, a spirit that also took hold in many other European countries at that time. Eventually, over a period of many decades, this cooperative housing movement became completely absorbed into the housing policies of the welfare state. But before the state took over, some other remarkable experiments took place.

Whereas the Construction Society built its success on a lottery, decades later, in the 1950s, the Castor movement in France took a much more cautious approach to the access of commonly constructed houses. In a discussion about instituting the commons, it is a story that should not be overlooked.

The first major project of the Castors (Beavers) cooperative self-construction movement began in 1948 in Pessac, close to Bordeaux, as a response to the lack of housing after World War II. Building on its success, the initiative developed in several regions of France until it was operating nationally with nearly 50,000 members. The extraordinary endeavour in Pessac began with a group of 150 naval industry workers, helped by the factory priest, who formed a cooperative to build their own homes. They could not get a bank loan for materials, but managed to convince the French State to award them credit based on the labour they would invest. During the three years of construction, the Castors' members kept a logbook of the time they had invested in completing the building of 150 houses, roads, the common house with a library and a water tower, all of which was a remarkable act of solidarity and non-opportunism. No worker was allowed access to his house until all of the others had been finished. Their relationships, based on cooperation and the sharing of fundamental values, created a strong community

spirit that it is possible to trace even today. As the cultural critic Antoine Perraud aptly remarked:

Does such a project seem possible today? On the technical side, no problems: the block without mortar still exists and the many ecological habitats constructed from straw, soil, and timber show that we can still happily self-construct taking some precautions. The first obstacle may be societal in that it is more difficult to gather the expertise of manual work to build collectively. The 'workers' are now more likely tertiary workers whose daily working tool is the computer. This obviously does not prevent us from collectively reflecting on the organisation of the habitat or from collectively facing the challenges for a project like this [...] The second obstacle is legal: the Chalandon Act of 1971 abolished the opportunities brought about by the 1947 Act on cooperation: the status of cooperative living is no longer recognised. The inhabitants of Les Castors Pessac thus became owners much like any other after 1971.²³

Of note, however, is that since 2008, the French Association of Housing Cooperatives, Habicoop, has been engaging in action for a legal change that would enable cooperative housing again in France, and would give it certain tax benefits.²⁴

As already mentioned above, much of the cooperative movement had merged into the welfare state by the 1960s and 1970s, when mass housing became an agenda for many European countries. However, the arrival of the 1980s libertarian Thatcherite doctrine heralded the end of this and, regrettably, turned many of the earlier cooperatives, at that time public properties, into privatised entities. It is only now, a century after the surge in cooperative movements in Europe and the US, that similar commons – concerning housing, land ownership (community land trusts) and basic provisions such as energy – are shyly taking the stage again. The resources these commons provide have once again become difficult to access, not least

due to the mortgage crisis, austerity measures and existential issues that pushed many citizens out of their homes – and onto the squares. As a result, the accompanying commons institution(s) are ready for a contemporary remake. In this regard, many people also want to see the re-emergence of self-determination in the existential part of their lives, as was the case with the historic examples explored above.

Commons and its institutions: exploring new terrain

When speaking about the Squares movements (in particular Tahrir Square in Cairo, Puerta del Sol in Madrid, and Syntagma Square in Athens), the 'resource' of the square itself also becomes an institution of commoning, as Stavros Stavrides describes:

I believe that space is not just another kind of product – space cannot be simply public, common or private, which is one level that connects space to commons – I believe that space is also an institution of commoning, that space gives form to practices of commoning, that rethinking space is essential in rethinking the processes of commoning.²⁵

Along with the principal difficulties concerning the definition of communities, the necessity to revise the legal regime related to property (as pointed out by Saki Bailey), and the reassurance found in the breathtakingly daring examples of the early pioneers, opens the horizon to a rather different, if as yet largely unfamiliar type of commons institution.

While the Squares movement can be understood as the most dynamic or visible practice of commoning-in-the-making, some other practices of local decision-making can give a sense of direction to such forms of engagement. Over the course of the previous two years, we have encountered examples of contemporary commons being proposed, tested and operated in various European

contexts. From these, three commons ‘institutions’ stand out: the hybrid civil-public partnerships being experimented across Croatia, the social centres in Spain, and the participatory budgeting in the Italian city of Grottammare. While aware that this is a very narrow selection of European examples, they nonetheless open a perspective on what contemporary commons institutions can be or could become.

Let us first take a look at the civil-public partnerships that are currently being shaped throughout Croatia. The necessity to explore such partnerships lies in the particular post-transitional context found in former socialist countries, where the cultural, social and educational institutions of the (welfare) state have withered away. Similar conditions can also be found increasingly in the ‘former’ West, from Sweden all the way to Spain. On the one hand, a large, ramified network of public institutions and their facilities loses its content and potential (factories, former public buildings, etc.), and on the other hand, an important network of civil society and cultural organisations (formed often, but not exclusively, by NGOs), frequently finds itself without spatial resources and in unsustainable economic circumstances.

These emergent networks have taken on an important role in defining new (post-) public commons. Teodor Celakoski, one of the initiators of these hybrid cultural and social institutions in Croatia, explains:

The hybrid model should ensure the stability of the institutional framework in a way that public institutions guarantee long-term use of public infrastructure for social purposes. On the other hand, it should ensure the involvement of users in its management, their horizontal self-organisation and the variety of facilities and programs. There is also a formal legal ground on which such a model can be based. It is an institution of mixed-type, established through a common act on the part of local authorities and civil society organisations.

Use of this legal possibility opens up space to compensate for the deficiencies of a sluggish and outdated institutional framework that no longer can adequately meet the growing needs of both the organised civil society and the wider local community.²⁶

In regard to this, the role of space can also be important as an initiator of commons itself, as Stavros Stavrides explained earlier. Examples of hybrid institutions of this kind, such as Pogon in Zagreb and Rojc in Pula, are based to a large extent on the potential offered by a physical space.

Pogon-Zagreb Centre for Independent Culture and Youth comprises two venues measuring 80 and 450 square metres respectively, which are used by some fifty different organisations for between 250-300 various cultural/artistic events and projects per year. It labels itself cunningly as being ‘not an independent institution, but [...] the institution of the independents: through its purpose (supporting independent cultural and youth scene), the way it is managed (civil-public co-management) and its context (direct result of initiatives taken by the independents)’.²⁷ It is operated jointly by the Alliance Operation City (a local network of youth and cultural associations) and the City of Zagreb. This hybrid model provides long-term sustainability as the result of a balance between public financing and supervision on the one hand, and independent programming and participatory decision-making on the other. How has Pogon managed to institute this? Its organisational statement explains:

Equality in access – Pogon’s resources are accessible to all the users and their programs on equal conditions. Our users are: NGOs, informal groups, artists, art organisations, individuals organising cultural and youth programs (contemporary arts and culture; related social, theoretical, and policy activities; various youth activities).

Transparency, simplicity, and flexibility in

programming – programming rules and procedures are clear and accessible online. Anyone who needs to use Pogon's resources may find all the details on our website, including the calendar, a standard contract, pricing, etc. There are no privileged users, and every user must go through the same simple procedure of applying through an online form. [...]

Partnership and collaboration – the very core of our model is the cooperation of different groups and organisations. Alongside the founding civil-public partnership, Pogon is based on a partnership of two complementary civil society sub-sectors – culture and youth. This partnership is a result of joint values, shared interests, and complementary needs.²⁸

Social Centre Rojc in the coastal city of Pula is based in a massive former army building measuring 16.739 square metres, making it the largest venue in town. Since the Yugoslav Army left Rojc in 1991, it has gradually been taken over by civil society organisations. First they occupied the building, then, after formalisation measures by the Pula Municipality in 1999, they were given utilisation contracts. To date, the hundred or so organisations have regular utilisation contracts with no financial obligations toward the Town of Pula other than electricity bills.²⁹

In recent years, with help from the initiators of Pogon, Rojc has seen a transition towards civil public co-management, which the users first devised in the Rojc Alliance Association. Due to its different background – first squatted then 'instituted', rather than instituted before taking over the venue – the level of openness, transparency and equal access, which make Pogon such an exemplary case, at Rojc still remain a major hurdle to be taken. Nonetheless, it once again shows that civil public co-management is not limited to small experiments at the fringe of society. In recent years in Spain, an informal network of social centres has sprung up. From our own account in Madrid it is obvious that they span an entire range: from the more to less formalised,

from large to relatively modest venues, and from formal partnerships with cultural or municipal institutions to anarcho-squats. What they do have in common, however, is the strong desire to explore participatory models of governance and the need to address a society that finds itself in an urgent crisis. When looking at the different social centres and their struggle to forge 'proper' or adequate forms of institutioning, one should bear in mind the sheer grandiosity of the task of dealing with the issues of a collapsing healthcare system, the consequences of eviction or foreclosure on housing, the deteriorating situation of migrants – and of Spanish democracy itself.³⁰ However improvised, ad hoc or in flux, the social centres are a seedbed of new urban commons and their institutions ('innovative' would be the proper term in the land of neo-conservatives, but pioneering they are without doubt).

Whereas many of the Madrid social centres find themselves in limbo with the municipality or the government, the situation in the Italian city of Grottammare is a very different one. It features an example of how a municipal government can decide to common, or, in more conventional municipal terms, to democratise important aspects of its governing capacity – in the form of part of the city's collective budget. As in most other cases, this initiative did not emerge without a crisis. In 1994, after a collapse of the local municipal government, the new city government took a drastic turn and implemented participatory budgeting:

[A] process of democratic deliberation and decision-making, and a type of participatory democracy, in which ordinary people decide how to allocate part of a municipal or public budget. Participatory budgeting allows citizens to identify, discuss, and prioritise public spending projects, and gives them the power to make real decisions about how money is spent.³¹

Participatory budgeting is most renowned for its implementation in Porto Alegre (Brazil, 1.5 million

inhabitants) since 1989. In Europe, one of the first implementations has been in Grottammare, on the Adriatic coast in Italy, where it has been experimented alongside a number of other democratising reforms. Grottammare is one of the rare Italian coastal cities where beaches are not fenced and are completely public. Pier Paolo Fanesi, coordinator of participatory budgeting in Grottammare, explains the mood during the gatherings:

I can tell you how I experience the atmosphere during the participatory budgeting meetings. It is never easy to understand beforehand what will happen. Most of the time the people that come bring open issues to the meetings. Problems they themselves have tried to solve but without success. It's very impressive to see how these meetings become a container of information. Also for politicians and experts. The assemblies are never quiet meetings where you are bored.³²

When the new local government took over in 1994, it was so inexperienced in governance that, out of necessity, it turned to the local population for assistance in running the city through a programme of participation and solidarity – not at all fashionable ideas at that time in Italy. Lacking any experience in participatory budgeting, the city had to explore it the hard way:

In the early stages, the Participatory Budget was presented as a path still poorly structured, highly spontaneous and unconscious. [...] The Social Forum in Porto Alegre, and the ensuing debate that has developed around the theme of participation, served to cement and consolidate the structuring of the process, a phenomenon actually already in place. [...] Without going into technicalities, today the structuring of the Participatory Budget is divided into two cycles of seven shareholder meetings. The first, called 'administrators listen to the citizens' (October), aims to determine the requests for intervention and planning, leaving the second cycle, 'I Decide Too' (January/February), to perform the important work of ordering the priorities,

both those concerning requests and neighbourhood projects, and those concerning citizens.

Between these two phases, there are two boards of technical feasibility that have the goal of rationalising all the requests made in the first cycle. The first, consisting of engineers and politicians (mayor and aldermen) is designed to remove all the requests and projects impossible to achieve due to lack of expertise and resources. Then it is time for a second technical workshop called the Participatory Board of the Districts, made up of politicians, technicians and a spokesperson chosen from within each assembly of the first cycle. This step has a definite value and substantiality warranty. Here, in fact, we proceed to a rationalisation of the requests and projects that emerged in the first cycle [...]. The district intervenors are those who provide a commitment of human and financial resources and thus pose a precise administrative/political choice. We talk about the management of an area, a cultural event or road works. Finally, the citizens intervene, engaging in some cases rather importantly with the budget and making its effects felt on the whole community [...]. Once we have exhausted these steps, we proceed with the last step, the municipal council members.³³

This process constitutes a radical move away from representative democracy, firstly because it does not acknowledge political representation. No citizen is represented by anyone else; the only form of delegation that is allowed is the family proxy, where one family member can represent a whole family.

The participatory process, however, does not stop at budgeting. Over time, more and more areas of decision-making have been explored, even as far as decisions regarding the General Urban Plan of the city. Although many cities today claim a participatory process, few achieve the scope that Grottammare has been able to reach.

And finally, the political dimension

We have travelled quite a distance from the initial exploration into the semantic origins of the term 'management', moving from the (disputed) blueprints for commons' government to the rise of the courageous pioneers of past commons, and finally arriving at the pioneers of present and potentially future commons. Yet however promising these new commons initiatives are, and however novel their forms of instituting may be, these initiatives are not sufficient to build a society.

From the earlier cooperative urban commoners we learnt that it was necessary to form a larger political framework that would ease the daily struggle and existential necessities in their lives. To a certain degree, this was done successfully by the welfare state model, which acknowledged the struggles and developed some of the commoning institutions on a much larger scale; for instance, the public housing programmes. On the other hand, this latter system has led to an increasing distance between societal institutions and citizens. Today, with the disappearance of the welfare state, new structures for collective action and governance – commoning – need to be reinvented, a task that is up to all of us. As Saki Bailey argues above, essential choices in achieving this, such as the legal regime, are not mandated by any kind of natural classification. Therefore they are political decisions that need to be taken by a community – that is, by us.

Notes

This paper is based on the 2012-2013 post-master research *In Search of Common Ground*, which explores issues and potential directions for urban commons today, and the resulting conference entitled *Commoning the City, The Stockholm Conference 2013* (April 2013), which involved a number of the contributors quoted in this text. *In Search of Common Ground* was set up by STEALTH, unlimited at the Royal Institute of Art (K&K), Stockholm, in collaboration with Professor Henrietta Palmer of Mejan

Arc. It included three expeditions across Europe to study emerging practices of urban commons, and eleven seminars. This paper is based on one of the chapters of the forthcoming publication that encompasses the results of the conference, interviews with the speakers, and extrapolations of future opportunities and implications regarding urban commons.

1. David Bollier, *The Commons, Short and Sweet*, 2011, <<http://bollier.org/commons-short-and-sweet>> [accessed 22 June 2014].
2. Peter Linebaugh, in his book *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2008), provides a magnificent insight by turning the notion of commons from a noun into a verb, therefore emphasising that in the very act of commoning, or of (re)producing in common, lies the essence of the commons.
3. Common-pool resources or common property resources (CPRs), as described by Elinor Ostrom, are natural or human-made resource systems where one person's use subtracts from another's use, and where it is often necessary, but difficult and costly, to exclude other users outside the group from using the resource. While the core resource (e.g. water or fish) is to be protected or nurtured in order to allow for its continuous exploitation, a limited number of units can be harvested or consumed.
4. Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
5. <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technocracy>> [accessed 22 June 2014].
6. This is according to Fred Inglis' review of the book by Robert R. Locke and J. C. Spender, *Confronting Managerialism: How the Business Elite and Their Schools Threw Our Lives Out of Balance*, (London: Zed Books, 2011), <<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/books/confronting-managerialism-how-the-business-elite-and-their-schools-threw-our-lives-out-of-balance/418797.article>> [accessed 22 June 2014].
7. Dean Bavington, 'Managerial Ecology and Its Discontents: Exploring the Complexities of

- Control, Careful Use and Coping in Resource and Environmental Management', in *Environments: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 30, 3, (2002), pp. 3-21 (p. 11).
8. Ibid., p. 13
 9. <<http://onthecommons.org/magazine/elinor-ostroms-8-principles-managing-commons>> [accessed 22 June 2014].
 10. Stavros Stavrides, from the talk 'Commoned Future: Inventing Open Institutions and Spaces of Sharing' at *Commoning the City*, The Stockholm Conference 2013 (Stockholm, 11 April 2013).
 11. Stavros Stavrides, from the interview by Marc Neelen and Henrietta Palmer following *Commoning the City*, The Stockholm Conference 2013 (Stockholm, 12 April 2013).
 12. Taken from the talk by Stavros Stavrides, 'Commoned Future' (Stockholm, 11 April 2013).
 13. Saki Bailey, transcript from the interview by Alexander de Cuveland and Dubravka Seklić, following *Commoning the City*, Stockholm Conference 2013 (Stockholm, 12 April 2013).
 14. Ibid.
 15. Elinor Ostrom, 'Private and Common Property Rights', in *Encyclopaedia of Law and Economics: The History and Methodology of Law and Economics*, ed. by Boudewijn Bouckaert and Gerrit De Gees (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2000), p. 338.
 16. *Dominium plenum* is the unlimited right of an owner to use his property as he deems fit, without accountability to anyone. It unites *dominium directum* (ownership) with *dominium utile* (user right).
 17. Karen Zimbelman, in *Orientation to Co-ops and to Wheatsville Co-op for Co-op Employees* (Austin: National Cooperative Grocers Association, 2007), p. 22.
 18. International Co-operative Alliance (ICA), <<http://ica.coop/en/whats-co-op/co-operative-identity-values-principles>> [accessed 22 June 2014].
 19. Richard Siegler and Herbert J. Levy, 'Brief History of Cooperative Housing', in *Cooperative Housing Journal* (Washington: National Association of Housing Cooperatives, 1986), p. 12.
 20. Dennis Bos, doctoral dissertation *Waarachtige voks-vrienden. De vroege socialistische beweging in Amsterdam, 1848-1894* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam, 2001), p. 103.
 21. Original title: Bouwmaatschappij tot Verkrijging van Eigen Woningen.
 22. Dennis Bos, doctoral dissertation *Waarachtige voks-vrienden*, pp. 107-8 (translation by the authors).
 23. Antoine Perraud, 'Utopie et logements: les castors de Pessac' (translation by the authors), <<http://blogs.mediapart.fr/blog/aurelienpere/170412/utopie-et-logements-les-castors-de-pessac>> [accessed 23 June 2014].
 24. *Campagne nationale pour la reconnaissance du statut*, <<http://www.habicoop.fr/spip.php?rubrique115>> [accessed 23 June 2014].
 25. Stavros Stavrides, from the talk 'Commoned Future' (Stockholm, 11 April 2013).
 26. Teodor Celakoski in *Razvoj sudioničkog modela upravljanja Društvem centrom Rojc kroz javno-civilno partnerstvo* (Pula: Udruga Zelena Istra, 2011) (translated by the authors).
 27. <<http://www.upogoni.org/en/>> [accessed 05 July 2013].
 28. <<http://www.upogoni.org/en/about/organization-and-management/>> [accessed 23 June 2014].
 29. <<http://zagreb.openinstitutions.net/rojc/>> [accessed 23 June 2014].
 30. In March 2013, the total number of eviction orders executed since 2008 by the Spanish courts was 252,826, <<http://www.thelocal.es/20130413/spanish-region-blocks-home-evictions>> [accessed 23 June 2014].
 31. Eva-Maria Verfürth, interview with Giovanni Allegretti, *More Generous Than You Would Think*, 2013, <<http://www.dandc.eu/en/article/participatory-budgeting-about-every-voice-being-heard>> [accessed 23 June 2014].
 32. Pier Paolo Fanesi, transcript from the interview by Marc Neelen and Henrietta Palmer, following *Commoning the City* (Stockholm, 12 April 2013).
 33. Pier Paolo Fanesi, *Grottammare Partecipativa* (2008), pp. 1-2 (translation by the authors), <<http://www>.

comune.bergamo.it/upload/bergamo_ecm8/gestione-documentale/08_Fanesi_testo_6493.pdf [accessed 23 June 2014].

Biography

STEALTH.unlimited (architects Ana Džokić and Marc Neelen, Rotterdam/Belgrade) is a practice that spans urban research, spatial intervention, curating and cultural activism with the aim of mobilising a way of thinking about and constructing the city based on the principles of shared authoring. Ana is a practice-based PhD candidate at KKH in Stockholm and Marc is currently a visiting professor at the SSoA, University of Sheffield.