Social Relations in Commoning: Towards a Socially Innovative Perspective to Action Research in Building Landed Commons

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1. Introduction

From Land Ownership to Landed Commons

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Cooperation within, or as a mode of building, social relations is a type of agency that stretches far beyond economic fields and is a key unit of analysis in both theoretical (moral philosophical, mathematical, especially game-theoretical) and experimental literature (biology, including ethology, the study of the evolutionary origins and contemporary factors of cooperation, empirical sciences, psychology, etc.). The question of understanding the specific conditions under which people actually act cooperatively rather than defect, acting competitively, selfishly, or even aggressively, is an interdisciplinary one (Tuomela, 2013:1) that reaches deep into human ontologies. Answering this question is primordial in understanding the dynamics of commoning as building and rebuilding relations between people and groups (i.e. building community) and are quintessential to the building and development of Landed Commons (LCs).

So far, our overview of the history of thought surrounding LCs from nascent systems under the Roman empire, through the feudal system to the era of enclosures, within Marxist and anarchist thought and practice and all the way to more recent scholarship (see Chapters 2–4), has only modestly touched upon social relations. As we learned in Chapter 4, contemporary 'established' scholarship on the Commons has placed emphasis on the dynamic, relational, social, and negotiated processes that are at the heart of commoning. We observed that most of these approaches incorporate a focus on power dimensions. This focus on the relational politics of commoning argues for a radical transformation of global socio-ecological relations of inequalities (Velicu and García-López, 2018). It is in our view only a timid start in bringing the vast complex of human social relations and their (re)production into the LCs discourse and practice. What is especially missing is the connection between so-called micro-social relations in their diverse forms and the (re)building of socio-political relations.

An analysis of power relations in the Commons focuses on questions of power distribution and dominance between multifarious actors, which can be traced through the history of commoning and enclosures covering topics such as: the active role of feudal and aristocratic

lords in enclosing common land; village communities mobilizing and occupying land or making use of shared land for grazing herds; banks and land owners enclosing agricultural lands and turning them into manufacturing sites; real estate developers and other investors privatizing public land and turning it into semi-private shopping malls; high technology research, manufacturing, and advanced producer service estates appropriating urban land; public authorities expropriating small estate owners to promote large scale developments, and so on. As such, it is evident that power relations determine opportunities and failures for commoning – and yet many contemporary Commons studies overlook how these power dynamics connect to micro-social relations, how they are rooted in such micro-dynamics or overrule or paralyze them; and how alternative political relations and democratic governance systems can grow from micro-relations of solidarity, cooperation, and self-governance. Social relations between people and groups are very complex, as the case studies that we cover in subsequent chapters will show. We use the term social relations in its broadest sense, defined as relations between people and between groups as determined by their role or position in such relations, the social practices they adopt, the habitus they are shaped by, the ethics they share, or the common goals they pursue. People have roles as workers in production relations, take on spending modes as consumers in the consumption system, support friends in friendship circles, act according to diverse ethics as citizens in the political system, as students, participants in cultural circles, activists in social and political movements, volunteers in different types of associations, etc. In the neoliberal social system, these roles, modes of behaviour, ethics, and relations are rather economically and formally/institutionally determined as they take shape in the capitalist market economy and its institutions (Moulaert, 2021). Yet these roles, modes of behaviour, ethics, and relations can change through socio-political mobilization and socio-political transformation. Many such transformations start from the bottom-up. And not all relations between people, among groups, and within groups are system- or institutionally-determined (Van den Broeck, 2011). These allow for exiting dominant relational patterns and entering into so-called autonomous or post-foundational relations (Marchart, 2007). The latter relations are learning grounds for rediscovering mutuality, reciprocity, associational interaction, multi-vocal ways of communication, and shared decision-making in governance. In most of these relations, personal and collective subjectivities and identities and the processes by which they are formed have an important place. Moreover these subjectivity and relation building processes are coloured and formed by personal and collective emotions (Nightingale, 2015; Singh, 2017).

Interest in (micro) social relations has grown in importance as the Commons scholarship has advanced and covered historical and contemporary patterns of solidarity in relation to the governance of land and its resources. To that purpose this scholarship is also increasingly tapping into different disciplines concerned about the nature and ethical roots of social relations and practices.

In this chapter we explore the nature of social relations, human behaviour, and subjectivities in commoning and especially commoning in Landed Commons, or in other social constructions from which commoners may learn. We interrogate various literatures from a number of disciplines that address the diverse natures of social relations, their factors, and the wider processes in which they root, flourish, or wain. This interrogation will be essential to justify and calibrate the approach we are using in case study analysis in the subsequent chapters (i.e. the Théorie des Cités plus, TdC+; see Chapters 6 and 7).

In this chapter, we deepen the meaning of social relations and practice, specifically looking at the voluntary and involuntary interpersonal connections or disconnections between people (and, we might add, nature) as defining features of commoning, i.e. building LCs together. We suggest that these micro-dynamics, which are slowly becoming incorporated in recent scholarship on the Commons, are pivotal as a 'make or break' for concrete contemporary LCs and their analysis. We will argue, in tune with several of the literatures on social relations we consulted, that micro-relations grounded in shared freedom and solidarity are essential to build effective socio-political relations, and that the governance they (are expected to) embed is sufficiently potent to overrule or resist exploitative power relations.

In Section 2, we make use of insights from various disciplines to better understand the diverse nature of social relations. In Section 2.1, we explore literatures that are not specific to commoning (sociology, psychology, and Social Innovation and community development literature) whereas in Section 2.2 we draw upon recent inputs from different schools in the Commons literature (interdisciplinary Political Ecology, feminist Political Ecology, and anarchism) to help us clarify different aspects of social relations and human agency that are essential in commoning. These include the role of affection, mutual aid, emotions, empathy, conflict and its resolution, the relationship between the commoners and what they common, and the interaction between personal and collective subjectivities.

Based on this brief literature review, in Section 3 we summarize the meaning of social relations for commoning, pointing to how to better calibrate the types of social relations that matter in commoning, the typical behaviour that fosters Commons (or which they embed), and how social relations can be geared towards nonhierarchical political systems. In the

concluding section we explain how our renewed insights into commoning and social relations will give more flesh to Action Research (AR) methods that we will use in the case studies in subsequent chapters. Central in this concluding reflection will be the focus on co-learning, which requires building social relations together through interaction and joint analysis, but equally so by building a Commons together: doing what we learn as well as learning through what we do together.

2. Social relations in community-building

In this section we focus on theories and research on social relations that help to understand the nature of commoning, i.e. building relations of trust and solidarity for the common good among actors acting according to diverse views of the world or value systems. To this purpose, we explore contributions from literatures that are not specific to commoning (Section 2.1) as well as (mainly recent) literatures that focus on the Commons from the point of view of building social relations (Section 2.2).

2.1 Un-common Literature on Social Relations

As a basic unit of analysis within the social sciences, social relations can be analyzed through myriads of lenses. In this section we briefly provide an overview of those science branches that we find most relevant to understanding the nature of social relations in commoning even if they are not or only indirectly mobilized in Commons literature. We mainly discuss social relations within literatures of sociology, social psychology, and Social Innovation and Community Development literature.

Sociology

Although 'social relations' is a term launched by sociologists, today it is used in various disciplines or intellectual schools, each putting their particular focus on the nature and analytical specificity of social relations. Paving the way towards an understanding of society as more than a simple aggregate of individuals, we first refer to Durkheim's concept of 'nonmaterial social facts' or 'collective conscience' holding (traditional) societies together, as compared to modern societies that are said to be glued through the division of labour. Culture, social institutions, and religion are examples of nonmaterial social facts studied by Durkheim and that are brought back today by scholars studying social relations and conceptualizing the difference between community and society.

In German sociology, the works by M. Weber and G. Simmel also contribute to a definition of sociology as the science of social life, social relations, social interactions, or social institutions. Weber's definition of social relations is probably the most popular one and still

most frequently used. For Weber, the term social relationship ‘denotes the behaviour of a plurality of actors insofar as, in its meaningful content, the action of each takes account of that of the others and is oriented in these terms’ (Weber, [1922] 1978: 26, cited in Gane, 2005). In other words, a social relation ‘is a collective encounter that comprises orientation and adjustment to the “meaningful behaviour” of others’ (Gane, 2005: 214). Weber distinguished two types of social relationships: communal and associative, *Vergemeinschaftung* and *Vergesellschaftung*, respectively in the German language, expressing a sense of process contained in the concept of social relation alongside its proximity to the idea of socialization (Gane, 2005). In communal social relationships, the orientation of social action is ‘based on a subjective feeling of the parties, whether affectual [actor’s affects and feelings states] or traditional [ingrained habituation], that they belong together’ (Weber, [1922] 1978: 40, 25, cited by Gane, 2005: 214). Associative social relationships, in contrast, refer to an orientation of social action:

> it rests on a rationally motivated adjustment of interests or a similarly motivated agreement, whether the basis of rational judgement be absolute values or reasons of expediency. It is especially common, though by no means inevitable, for the associative type of relationship to rest on a rational agreement by mutual consent. In that case, the corresponding action is, at the pole of rationality, oriented either to a value-rational belief in one’s own obligation, or to a rational (*zweckrationale*) expectation the other party will live up to it (Weber, [1922] 1978: 40–41, cited in Gane, 2005).</p:quotation>

Both communal and associative social relationships can be open or closed to outsiders or newcomers; they can either allow participation to those who wish to join, or exclude, limit, and condition participation through certain rules (Weber, [1922] 1978: 43, cited by Gane, 2005). Tradition, affect, or rationalization can determine if a relationship is open or closed. Certain personal emotional relationships (for example, personal loyalty) and organizations (such as firms, churches, and states) are rooted in closed relationships and specific rules of behaviour (Weber, 1922; Swedberg, 2020). While discussing the nature of social relationships, Weber also explained that these can be contradictory, conflictive, and permeated by power relationships (Walliman et al., 1977; Weber, 1922: 53). In his own words, ‘a social relationship will be referred to as “conflict” (Kampf) insofar as action is oriented

intentionally to carrying out the actor's own will against the resistance of the other party or parties' (Weber, [1922] 1978: 38, cited in Swedberg, 2020: 434).

A relationist interpretation of Simmel's work (see Ruggieri, 2017; Donati, 2009) is also relevant when convoking sociology to define social relations. For Simmel, the concept of 'relation' is fundamental to examine modern societies and the social facts as the formal result of the interaction among human beings (Ruggieri, 2017). For Donati (2009: 23, cited in Ruggieri, 2017), Simmel was the first sociologist to state that a 'dynamic effect (then becoming a form) of a continuous and constitutive relational integration among individuals' is the main subject of social science. This dynamism is depicted in his interest on the meaning and nature of life, as portrayed in the following quote:

> Then life appears to be something lived always at the intersection of multiple worlds, always garnering particles utterly particular in nature from the God's eye perspective of each absolutely self-subsistent categorial world – and composing itself from these particles. Life makes up a whole, yet so too does each categorial world. Where life and worlds intersect, they create fragments – fragments of life, fragments of worlds (Simmel, 2012: 247, cited in Ruggieri, 2017)[i].</p:quotation>

Relations can be considered the 'molecule' of social life itself and the carrier of socio-ontological questions from the individual being to the level of 'relations' (Donati, 2009, cited in Ruggieri, 2017). Interesting for our conceptualization of social relationships is Simmel's recognition of two levels of the social life: the individual level and the social one expressed in the relational sphere and emerging from interaction. At the same time, he distinguishes the empirical social life from something standing above it (Ruggieri, 2017).

For Simmel, society can only emerge in the locus where individuals come to interact, and human interaction stems from certain motives and pursues certain purposes. Social entities are, according to Simmel, composed of two inseparable elements: (i) the 'contents of interaction,' which refer to the drives, motives, or motivations underlying a particular human interaction; and (ii) the 'forms of interaction' that comprise the question about how individuals interrelate and how they, through all sorts of interaction, shape content and social reality (Ruggieri, 2017). The identification and analysis of the forms of interaction are central for Simmel and constitute the core task of sociology, whereas the study of the properties of contents is a task for other disciplines. According to him, sociologists must address 'forms' of association (*Vergesellschaftung*), which are the result of the relational and primary mechanism of 'reciprocity' (*Wechselwirkung*) (Ruggieri, 2017: 52).

Further historical debates in sociology on the diverse nature of social relations we find covered in the survey article by Floyd House (1926) on 'Social relations and social interaction.' Although this article is meant as a gentle criticism of E. C. Hayes' (1925) article concerning the 'grammar of social science,' it also serves as a memo of terms and procedures used in sociology. We are especially interested in Hayes' second suggestion, i.e. 'to reserve the term "social process" for reference to the evolution or becoming of human society, and that other aspects of the social reality which have been called "social processes" be referred to as "social relations"' (House, 1926: 617). Both authors refer to Park and Burgess' *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, which is considered a major theoretical pillar of what is today known as the 'Chicago Sociology' (Braude, 1970). In this extensive volume, Park and Burgess (1924: 42) argue that 'social control is the central fact and central problem of sociology'; for them, 'how dissimilar individuals are able to act in concert' constitutes the core of sociological inquiry (Braude, 1970). As explained by Braude (1970), social control and the potentialities for concert are achieved through what they considered the major aspects of the social processes of interaction. These are competition, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation, denoting that the essence of our humanity is our sociability; humans can only exist as a collective, socialized entity. As expressed by Braude (1970), isolation is considered social death. In terms of competition, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation they are, to use Cooley's phrase, aspects of an organic whole. House explains how the distinction between competition, on the one hand, and conflict, accommodation, and assimilation on the other 'is in one respect more fundamental than the distinctions between the latter three,' arguing that 'competition is the concept under which the biological struggle for existence and economic struggle for position in an economic order are subsumed' (House, 1926: 622). Aware that House's article was written in the 1920s, we sense a Spencerian bias in the reading of typical agencies of evolution, overestimating the role of competitive agency at the expense of mutual aid, the latter recognized by Kropotkin as an essential pillar in Darwinian theory (Kropotkin 1914 [1902]).[ii] What we learn from these sociological articles is that these aspects of the social process – competition, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation – are indeed key in the dynamics of building community and society. Most relevant for our work here, i.e. working towards an operationalization of social relations in commoning, is the following passage from the House article:

> There is to be observed in all communities, however, a process in which, through participation in common activities and through living together in relatively intimate relations—which is both cause and effect—persons develop an organic, sympathetic

responsiveness to one another's claims and attitudes, so that their relations to one another no longer admit of description in terms of 'organization' in any but the most nebulous and inclusive sense of the term (House, 1926: 626–627). </p:quotation>

We do not fully understand what House means when he argues that 'the term assimilation affords a point of view and a category under which the process in which relationships of this order are created and sustained may be studied in abstraction from the processes of conflict and accommodation, with which, in particular cases, it is more or less complicated' (House, 1926: 627). For our study this analytical separation between conflict and assimilation cannot be withheld. Neither do we approve that the quadruple 'competition, conflict, accommodation and assimilation' covers all typical actions and causes of the dynamics in development and construction of social relations. We are missing hierarchy and power, which are more pervasive than what House covers by 'conflict.' And 'dominance-subordination' is further-reaching than just being an element 'perhaps the principal one' of the process of accommodation (House, 1926: 629). Moreover, further addressing Hayes' grammar of social science, House parks 'co-operation' as an aspect of social reality 'from the economic point of view,' a reduction which from our reading of social dynamics is not acceptable.

Social relations in psychology

Psychology, being the scientific study of mind and behaviour, is a natural home for investigating the nature of social relations. A discipline of immense scope that crosses the frontiers between natural and social sciences, psychology encompasses both conscious and unconscious phenomena in its quest to understand why people behave as they do. While the numerous theoretical fields of psychology touch upon unpacking the conditions and phenomena of mental states and behaviours of people, here we highlight the contributions of personal and interpersonal psychology (pertaining to actions, events, and feelings between two or more individuals) also looking to social psychology (study of the social conditions under which thoughts, feelings, and behaviours occur, and how these influence social relations, Allport, 1985: 5). Uncovering why people collaborate or refuse to do so in commoning touches upon our basic assumptions of tendencies within human nature. While Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) argued most pointedly for the innate benevolent nature of humankind (blaming the corrupting nature of society for any lack of solidarity), on the other end of the ontological spectrum we find Hobbes' analysis of humankind consisting of 'war of all against all,' with civilization being its only hope for benevolence. Rousseau's optimistic approach to human nature is shared by humanistic psychology, which emphasizes the social connectedness and sensitivity to others' needs as essential for psychological well-

being (Rogers 1961, Maslow, 1954); this emphasis has been more recently taken up by positive psychology, focusing on social solidarity and interpersonal connectedness. Graeber and Wengrow (2018; 2021) deconstruct however the Rousseauian idyllic imaginary of the human trajectory, disagreeing with the developmentalist nature of this imaginary from natural solidarity to human bonds corrupted by civilization. They write (2018, p. 3) that 'Civilization meant many bad things (wars, taxes, bureaucracy, patriarchy, slavery…) but also made possible written literature, science, philosophy, and most other great human achievements.' They also provide evidence that 'in the beginning,' in many so-called primitive communities, despite the absence of (modern) civilization, different institutionalized forms of mutual aid, cooperation, governance, solidarity-based freedom, equality, feminist values, and temporary and collective leadership, etc. existed.

Analyses regarding basic assumptions of tendencies within human nature can broadly be linked to two fundamental human needs: that of belonging and that of independence. Self-determination theory for example argues that humans are motivated by needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 2020, referred to in Nadler 2020). Belonging and independence are often described as contrasting, where belongingness has to do with the desire to form and sustain significant social relations (Baumeister and Leary, 1995 quoted in Nadler, 2020) and independence has to do with the need for individuality and self-reliance (Nadler, 2020). Within this, solidarity can be considered the 'glue' that binds people together in relationships and groups – concretized in the behavioural expression of giving and receiving help; it is a fundamental aspect of the act of commoning.

Particularly relevant are the links between anarchism and psychology in regards to the tension between individuality and mutuality. Traditionally, anarchists have made little reference to psychology as a discipline mainly dismissing its individualist focus; yet they recognize the impact of alienation on both individual and collective subjectivities (see Chapter 4). Contemporary psychology, for its part, has yet to take anarchism seriously (Heckert, 2013). Over the last decade, however, there is a nascent move to systematically understand the potential links between the two – which for our purposes is of core interest. Fox (2011: 12), one of the key scholars who explores these links, points out that just as numerous branches of psychology grapple with the tension between individuality and mutuality, anarchism 'recognizes the inseparability of, and reciprocity between, personal and societal change as well as the difficulty of attempting both simultaneously.' Considering the two fundamental human needs of belonging and independence from an anarchist psychological perspective can bring new insights into the mechanisms driving human

behaviour in commoning. A central facet of anarchist thought is that 'the institution of the centralized state and blind obedience to authority and procedure inhibits both individual autonomy and a psychological sense of community' (Sarason 1982 as described in Heckert, 2013: 514). Anarchists advocate for simultaneous freedom and equality, individuality and community (Heckert, 2013: 514). This opens the way for practically experimenting with types of social relations and social institutions that nurture both of these fundamental needs. As described by Heckert (2013: 515), an 'ideal anarchist world might be characterised by a global tapestry of non-hierarchical cultures with neither states nor profits nor privilege based on race, class, gender, sexuality or other social markers. Instead, cultures find their own ways of simultaneously practising freedom and equality, valuing both individuality and community.' From this vision, the two fundamental needs for belonging and independence, community and individuality, solidarity and self-reliance, are not inherently and incessantly in a state of tension. Herbert Read highlights the concurrent development of individual freedom and 'social consciousness' because 'society can only function harmoniously if the individuals composing it are integrated persons, that is to say they are whole and healthy, and by that very reason competent to render mutual aid' (Read, 1943:18 quoted in Heckert, 2013: 517; see also Maslow, 1971). As such, linking anarchism to psychology allows for 'zooming into the nano- and micro-levels of intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships or out to the macro-levels of organisations and polities' (Heckert, 2013: 516) whereby fundamentally these human needs find their balance.

We suggest that as a frame of reference the anarchism-psychology link offers an insightful sounding board for exploring the basic premises of the micro-level dynamics of mutual aid, solidarity, and co-learning involved in commoning. In the methodology presented in the following chapters (see Chapter 6, section 'Social and personal psychology'), developed to analyze the building of LCs, a choice has been made among (social) psychological theories including the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen 1991), Value–Belief–Norm Model (Stern 2000), and Critical Action Learning (CAL). CAL also opens door to make better connections between socio-political and institutional logics and contexts on the one hand, and social - psychological dynamics on the other.

Social innovation and community development literature

Social Innovation literature has had several lives. We are mainly interested in the life it started in reaction to over-rationalized, economistic, and technological innovation-based approaches to local and regional development. In contrast to these approaches, the concept of Social Innovation was relaunched at the neighbourhood or community level as a collective

strategy and process combining the satisfaction of unmet human needs, the fostering of cooperative social relations, and socio-political empowerment of community members in pursuit of democratic political governance. Social Innovation, in MacCallum's and Moulaert's view, is first and foremost innovation in social relations based on values of solidarity, reciprocity, and association (Moulaert and MacCallum, 2019). Such values involve respect, empathy with diverse viewpoints and convictions, openness to diverse languages and modes of communication, tolerance, and care. Socially innovative research, grounded in the same values and behaviours, has a real contribution to make to Social Innovation through building and disseminating shared knowledge, understanding, vision, and cross-sector relationships. Social Innovation researchers are mainly action researchers and have significantly contributed to the development of AR in community development. In particular, they stress the importance of not only socially innovating the community, but also of doing research in a socially-innovative way through democratic cooperation, reflection, and evaluation moments, etc. (see for example Elsen and Lorenz, 2014). Recently, MacCallum and Moulaert (forthcoming) developed a method to assess Social Innovation based on a socially innovative ontology. Comparing evaluation criteria used in mainstream innovation systems-based methods of assessment with Social Innovation criteria, they stress the impact of the dynamics in various types of social relations on the social outcome of the innovation process. We will use part of the points of attention in that evaluation method to highlight features of social relations that are relevant in commoning.

2.2 Social Relations as Discussed in Recent Commons Scholarship

Ostromian scholars sought, within a diversity of modes of cooperation (or 'collective action'), the solution to Commons problems by focusing on the link of cooperation with organizational structures, self-governance, and local democracy. As discussed in Chapter 4 (Section 3), however, they exhibited a limited understanding of the social and human agency and relations in the nature–human metabolism. In this section, we are interested in drawing from literature connecting social relations and the Commons, which is scattered amongst various disciplines, to delve deeper into this neglected connection. We draw again on Political Ecology (PE) and Anarchism: instead of emphasizing their (conscious or nonconscious) attempt to overcome simplistic understandings feeding into dualistic analyses of LCs as done in Chapter 4, here we focus on what they have to say about social relations; we also expand the focus to include Feminist Political Ecology (FPE). And we draw on anarchism's take on sociality and human relationships as it argues that humans – being alienated by capitalist work conditions, state dominance, and patriarchal life structures –

engage in cooperation by reproducing modes of conviviality and commensality, thereby reactivating values of trust, solidarity, and friendship.

(Interdisciplinary) political ecology

Velicu and García-López's (2018) article *Thinking the commons through Ostrom and Butler: Boundedness and vulnerability* can be situated at the intersection of sociology, PE, and philosophy. They revisit commoning from a relational political perspective and put Elinor Ostrom and Judith Butler into dialogue: 'A politics of commoning is not a mere technical management of resources (in space) but a struggle to perform common viable relations (in time)' (Velicu and García-López, 2018: 55). The starting point of the dialogue could be summarized in Velicu and García-López's terms as follows: Ostrom situates the 'tragedy' of the Commons in the absence of relations of trust and reciprocity, collective action (cooperation), and rules (institutions), while critical commons scholars consider the enclosure of the Commons and individualist subjectivities – explained in different terms by Bargu (see below) – as the tragic threats to commoning. Commons research and practice should focus on the social practices engaged in the reclaiming and sustaining of collective reproduction of Commons. Inspired by Butler, Velicu and García-López widen the field of relational politics, which they define as the reconstitution of our-selves as subjects in relations of power, to make it engage 'with humans' boundedness and mutual vulnerability as well as with the performativity of such subjectivities: since subjects are performative – they are constituted in action/doing – their constitution itself is a set of relations' (Velicu and García-López, 2018: 57). From our literature survey we learned that both PE and anarchism show the key importance of political relations and the political in the building of Commons. In particular, we have shown how PE's interdisciplinary and polyhedral approach (though ever expansive) has allowed for deconstructing the commodification dynamics of land (see Chapter 4), showing through distinct cases the adverse socioeconomic effects of commodification processes and often managing to point out the structural problems that need regime changes or significant transition processes (Moulaert et al., 2022). Collective anarchist thought and practice provide possibilities for rebuilding the political with new political topologies that promote noncoercive, nonauthoritarian, and decentralist alternatives (Barnett, 2016; Clark, 1978). These offer alternative forms of resistance and reconstruction that stimulate thinking and reimagining of the political, which we argue is fundamental to commoning.

Interdisciplinary PE writings that address the Commons place subjectivities in the centre of their analyses whereby subjective, emotional, and performative experiences can be seen as driving forces for the politics of resistance (Dallman et al., 2013; Nightingale, 2011, 2013;

Sultana, 2015). (Re)subjectivation in the sense of developing solidaristic and cooperative behaviour and human relations is about overcoming individualist ethics, neoliberal modes of behaviour (pursuit of individual economic benefits, consumerism, high-speed socialization, …), and replacing them with attitudes of reciprocity, togetherness, belonging, and modes of behaviour of collective solidarity. These can be beneficial to building collective power to make Commons happen, but have a much more pervasive potential to (re)build commonality, compassion, mutual aid, etc. Building another world or rebuilding society requires a more solidaristic view of building subjectivity than 'how power relations, structural conditions and past experiences influence people's perception of (and relation to) themselves and others' (Velicu and García-López, 2018: 59). The connection to 'far-reaching political implications in terms of resisting neoliberal forms of life and experience and the convivial, communal way of life' (Velicu and García-López, 2018: 60, referring to Dawney, 2013: 33) is politically and analytically highly relevant, but it is especially the (re)building of the convivial, communal way of life that deserves our attention here – because, as we said, it is this central piece of commoning and recommoning that is underplayed in the literature.

PE's growing focus on of the self, consciousness, subjectivities, and emotions to better understand environmental conflicts (echoing broader debates on the subject, agency, and power of poststructuralist discussions) has brought about what some refer to as an 'emotional turn' and is interesting for us in that it draws out the 'nitty gritty' analyses of the 'interior life of politics' – looking at exactly what drives political activism. This turn draws from an emotional, psychological, and spiritual development perspective (Pulido, 2003: 47) to show how emotions can be triggers as well limiting factors for initiating and sustaining mobilization. In tune with this, González-Hidalgo (2017) examines how the relationship between fostering political fellowship and the formation of subjectivities stresses the relationships between subjectivities and emotions (González-Hidalgo, 2017). González-Hidalgo investigates an underexplored connection between PE and psychotherapy, asking whether psychotherapeutic practice can feed current debates on PE regarding the role of emotions in the formation of subjectivities and action (in particular referring to an experience of therapy for Indigenous and peasant activists in southern Chiapas). She stresses the subjectivation and community-building processes in commoning. These are essential elements of politicization, but are also important in and of themselves.

Feminist Political Ecology

Feminist Political Ecologists in particular show how Commons express gendered and other 'relationships in society that are inseparable from relations to nature,' (Linebaugh, 2008: 279)

and through this lens see the Commons as the product and site of communal acts of care and responsibility (there can be 'no commons without a community,' Mies, 2014: i106).

In problematizing the definition, production, and contestation of (gender) subjectivities linked to the governance of environments and livelihoods (Gonzáles-Hidalgo referring to Elmhirst, 2011), feminist political ecologists ask relevant questions for considering social relations in commoning and the every-day practices through which they are managed. Traditionally, these FPE studies take an intersectional approach by investigating how social relationships (i.e. reproductive, productive, and communitarian) within everyday spaces (i.e. households and communities) mutually influence access to resources, identities, and knowledge in practices of commoning. This intersectional lens opens up the way for understanding not only how practices of oppression function but also how practices of mutual support and negotiation can offer options for elaborating systems of well-being and fair socio-natural relations (Leder et al., 2019; Rap and Jaskolski, 2019). In so doing, such studies emphasize embodied subjectivities, seeing the body as an intimate site of struggle (Harcourt, 2009; Nightingale, 2011).

Ecofeminist theory and political activism has much to say about these every-day practices, expressing a concern for bringing up historical relations between 'women,' 'nature,' and the devaluation of both as being inferior to the male 'culture' (Warren, 2001); broadly speaking, it offers an inclusive understanding of the environment and a framework of caring (Sato and Alarcón, 2019). Ecofeminist author Karren Warren refers to Aldo Leopold's essay *Land Ethic* (1949) as a fundamental work to this ecofeminist conception, since Leopold was the first to pen an ethic for land that understands all nonhuman parts of that community (animals, plants, land, air, water) as equal to and in a relationship with humans. Though subject to debate for its possible essentialist tendencies (critique for reinforcing the same hierarchy patterns they are trying to overcome by emphasizing the dualities male/female, culture/nature, mind/body), what we highlight here is ecofeminism's focus on intellectual transformation of dominant modes of thought, its insistence on human and cultural diversity, and on learning from nature about nondualistic and nonhierarchical systems of relation for social transformation.

Singh (2017: 753) notes that 'a growing number of commons activists suggest that diverse commoning projects represent an alternative form of production in the making and are reminders that alternative social relations are entirely thinkable.' In particular, these projects can be understood as sites of 'affective socio-nature encounters…that can foster subjectivities of "being in common" with others' (ibid: 754). As such, the emphasis on subjectivities is not

solely limited to the body and psyche, but to its spatial dimension of engagement with specific contexts (Nightingale, 2013), allowing Commons studies to take into account the way in which alternative rationalities determine whether some well-designed institutions fail. In other words, the subjectivities at work in commoning – i.e. the inextricable link to social relations of power and the ways in which people understand their relationship to others (be it human or nonhuman) – take centre stage but, as aforementioned, we argue, they need to be seen in light of a broader notion of relational politics, such as that defined by Velicu and García-López.

Nightingale (2019: 16) warns of the fragility of this process: commoning (understood as 'a set of practices and performances that foster new relations and subjectivities') creates 'socio-natural inclusions and exclusions, and any moment of coming together can be succeeded by new challenges and relations that un-common the process of communing.' Understanding the social relations that may or may not be conducive to sustaining commoning efforts thus requires accepting the transitory, unpredictable, and deeply affective characteristics of commoning. In her studies of fisheries in Scotland, community forestry in Nepal, and other commoning communities around the world, she highlights emotional attachments and contradictory behaviours of commoners; she argues for the need to 'do commoning' and 'become' in common with an eye to becoming conscious of the unknown and unpredictable effects of these practices – which are always going to include forms of exclusion, consideration of others, and power over [others] because they involve 'normative choices about which humans, which non-humans and which socionatural relations to attend' (Nightingale, 2019: 31). Does this mean that understanding social relations of commoning is doomed to be lost in the complexities and unpredictable abilities of human behaviour? How do we bridge the gap between analyzing how affects circulate and subjectivity is produced in commoning, in order '[…] to find ways to nurture and expand our "response-ability" and "becoming with" the world that we share with many others' (Singh 2017: n.p.). Here we point to the role of pedagogy to which we will return in the conclusion.

Anarchism

Just as political ecologists do, recent anarchist scholarship underlines the importance of (collective) subjectivation and the community-building process for politization and rebuilding a democratic polity. Collective anarchist thought and practice provide possibilities for rebuilding the political with new political topologies that promote noncoercive, nonauthoritarian, and decentralist alternatives (Barnett, 2016; Clark, 1978). These offer alternative forms of resistance and reconstruction that stimulate thinking and reimagining of

the political, which we argue are fundamental to commoning. But from early-on, anarchist authors recognized the building of social relations for their own right. In today's anarchist turn, the building of community through social relations is prominent. In the introduction to their book *The Anarchist Turn*, Blumenfeld et al. (2013) explain how freedom can only be realized as freedom of equals. But freedom of equals is only possible if it can be lived and imagined in terms of micro-social relation building and how these social relations can foster self-emancipation as social beings. Two chapters in Blumenfeld et al.'s book address the building of micro-social relations and their importance for the political.

In *The politics of commensality* Banu Bargu proposes commensality (i.e. the act of eating together, though she interprets this more broadly) as being one of the most ordinary, practical forms of commoning. Bargu critiques Arendt's separation of the social and political and her division of public and private spheres, emphasizing through the study of commensality the possibility of social experience generating 'ties of friendship and solidarity that are indispensable for the constitution of citizens within egalitarian orientation, a common ethic and critical consciousness' (Bargu, 2013: 40). In other words, Bargu proposes that the private sphere – deemed as the nonpolitical (or 'not worthy of politics') – is the one within which 'a critical and autonomous political culture can develop' that approaches freedom, precisely because it is distinct from formal existing politics (ibid: 40). Once the concept of commensality is expanded from eating together to building commonality, in which shared meals remain central, 'the common table is [remains] a site where social relations, ideas and projects are negotiated' (ibid: 43). Referring to Bloch, Bargu delineates multiple by-products of commensality, arguing that the act of sharing food cultivates a sense of care; rejects self-interested behaviour (it 'de-individualizes'); fosters both 'communicative and deliberative skills' as well as civic values; 'moulds subjectivities by counteracting hierarchy'; reduces social distance; and nurtures solidarity (ibid: 51). These subjectivities are essential both for personal emancipation in (egalitarian) communities – real freedom – but also for building civic attitudes needed for building democratic communities and federations. Bargu counters existing scholarship, framing commensality as safeguarding the social order (through 'mechanisms of exclusion and the reproduction of internal hierarchies,' ibid: 44) by drawing on her own work to argue that, on the contrary, commensality fosters popular participation, builds networks of solidarity, and takes a critical and even subversive attitude upsetting hierarchical and social ordering (ibid: 44). As such, she presents commensality as being a concrete form of commoning that remediates the continuing shrinking of the social (which occurs because of the dual forces of the 'juridical conception of the political based on rights

and liberties, on the one hand, and by the commercial relations of private exchange in the market, on the other hand,' ibid: 50). Bargu explains how forces of laws of the state and market 'suffocate the shared life worlds of ordinary people, atomise individuals and "set them free" from the land and its products that are shared in common.' Understanding commensality under the rubric of commoning thus reinterprets the simple act of eating together as an act of resistance (against capitalism, atomisation, and the continued separation of political rights from social rights, ibid: 50). Commensality generates communal belonging without necessarily transforming that belonging into a 'rigid, ossified and exclusionary identity' (ibid: 50). And quite important, although as the author recognizes insufficient to achieve the human condition as meant by Arendt, 'commensal practices could prove to be fertile ground for the development of a new political imaginary for contemporary anarcho communism.' (ibid: 52). This insight leads to a broader interpretation of commensality, grounded in social practice, as defended by Paula Fernandez-Wulff who claims that in a world where social rights have become more discourse than practice, local practice should and often does enhance their materialization. Here we understand the 'local' as a spatial, jurisdictional, and political delimitation of activism and policy spaces where active social rights can be advanced closest to those who exert them (Fernandez-Wulff, 2018: 170; Moulaert and Simmons, forthcoming).

Todd May's chapter 'Friendship as Resistance' (also in Blumenfeld et al., 2013) addresses the building of micro-social relations and their importance for the political by investigating the political possibilities of some types of friendship. Similar to Bargu, May recognizes the relevance of building social relationships for their own sake; at the same time he considers the building of solidarity-based social relations as essential for systems transformation. Unwilling to isolate the essence of friendship itself, he is particularly interested in the political possibilities of some types of friendship, seeking to understand how friendship as a basic attitude and behaviour can break through the mental frames and 'rationalist' behaviour inherent to neoliberalism (which frames our social relationships around our roles in a neoliberal society as consumerist consumers and profit-eager investors). Why should we place our personal resources into activities that offered the greatest yield, knowing that by doing so we may end up in a suffocating consumption drift and a neglect of our deepest emotions and friendly affinities? May's definition of friendship comes close to that in Elizabeth Telfer's 1970 article *Friendship*. According to Telfer, there are three necessary conditions for friendship: shared activities, the passions of friendship, and the acknowledgement of the fulfilment of the first two conditions (cited from Telfer, 1991: 257).

The latter means that friendship is not just a sharing and a passion but also a recognition that these are actually there (May, 2013: 65). May specifies that Telfer's definition also includes other-regarding: '…friendships at least the ones most of us admire, to one degree or another seek the good of the other for the sake of the other, and not simply for the friend's own sake' (ibid: 66). It is about sharing a common bond, and very often a common concern; in this way, friendship freezes or removes the 'specific borders erected by economistic self-understandings' (ibid 69). May refers to Michel Foucault regarding friendship 'as a way of life as threatening the social order by offering ways to form new alliances and lines of force. These new alliances and lines of force consist in meaningful ways of conducting our lives with one another that resist the reduction to the figures of neoliberalism' (ibid: 69). We look at our friends as equals; we take friendship without measure '[…] seeing friends as those whose own stakes are importantly our stakes, in resisting the reduction of social relationships to pleasures or investments […]' (ibid: 70). To complete his investigation of friendship, he cites Marilyn Friedman who points out that 'the fact that friendship is a "voluntary choice" allows it to act as an egalitarian type of relationship that cuts across the traditional structures of a police order and allows alternative and disruptive communities to form' (ibid: 70–71). Friendship, as compared to other relationships and because of its voluntary nature, will 'be grounded and sustained by shared interests and values, mutual affection, and possibilities for generating reciprocal respect and esteem' (ibid: 71).

Taken all together, these solidaristic dimensions of friendship represent what May suggests is 'the ground for progressive political solidarity'; by fostering social interactions that run against the grain of neoliberalism, friendship can be understood as a basic requirement for any movement seeking to stand up to neoliberal dominance (ibid: 72).

3. Reflecting on the literature: Social relations, agency, and institutions in Commons

The synthesis of the literature that we surveyed on social relations and which is schematized in Table 5.1 provides us with a thick conception of what social relations are according to different disciplines and scientific schools, which type of agency they represent (or refute), what their relevance is for commoning and building Commons, and what their message is in terms of institutionalization.

Table 5.1 Social relations, agency, and institutions

		Process/ Agency Features			
		Social relations features	**Typical behaviour/ agency**	**Relevance Commoning – Commons**	**Institutionalization/Institutions/Building collectivity or Commons**
Theories/ Disciplines	**From the 'tripod' Commons literature**: • Ostromians • Political • Ecology • Anarchism	Ostrom: possibilities of cooperation	Collective action	Cooperation as linked to organizational structures, self-governance in the Commons	Local democracy structures
		Political Ecology: Possibilities for resisting and transforming power relations, subjectivities	Reciprocity; togetherness, belonging; modes of behaviour of collective solidarity	Building collective power	Deconstructing the commodification dynamics of land and pointing to structural dynamics of commoning
		Anarchism: Possibilities for building non-coercive, nonauthoritarian, and decentralist social relations	Trust, solidarity, and friendship	Reimagining the political from the communities-up	Anarchism: anti-authoritarian education and learning models and practices
	Sociology …	'…aspects of the social reality that have been called 'social processes' (Hayes following Chicago School)	Social relations (re)produced through competition, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation	Building community and society…persons develop an organic, sympathetic responsiveness to one another's claims and attitudes	The complexity of the construction of social relations sheds light on relational politics.
	Sociology continued		Social relationships can be open or closed to outsiders or newcomers; they can either allow participation or exclude, limit, and condition it through certain rules	Communal vs. associative social relations (following M. Weber) 'dynamic effect (then becoming a form) of a continuous and constitutive relational integration among individuals' (Simmel)	Simmel: the formation of social entities through the content and forms of interaction. 'Forms' of association (*Vergesellschaftung*), which are the result of the relational and primary mechanism of 'reciprocity'
	Psychology and **Social Psychology**	Search for belongingness Search for shared values, ethical deliberation	Search for freedom and independence Critical Action Learning	Psychological sense of community Allowing for arenas for the interplay of emotional, political, and social relations	Negotiation spaces for social value (systems) – media, social networks, social movements
	Social Innovation	Interaction between organizational, socio-cultural and personal relations	Multi-vocal communication, co-decision-making, participatory governance, co-learning	Building empathic, mutual aid-based governance relationships	Building bottom-linked governance modes; interaction with state and corporate institutions and their power relations (hybrid governance)
	Political Ecology on commoning	Rebuild commonality – the relationships between subjectivities and emotions	Collective subjectivation in the sense of developing solidaristic behaviour and human relations	Building political fellowship and the formation of collective subjectivities –	From collective subjectivation to building movements through commoning practices

				The role of emotions in the formation of subjectivities and action	
Theories/Disciplines		**Social relations features**	**Typical behaviour/ agency**	**Relevance Commoning - Commons**	**Institutionalization / institutions / building collectivity or Commons**
	Ecofeminism	Commons express gendered and other 'relationships in society that are inseparable from relations to nature'	Practices of mutual support and negotiation can offer options for elaborating systems of well-being and fair socio-natural relations. Embodied subjectivities, seeing the body as an intimate site of struggle.	Many commoning projects can be understood as sites of 'affective socio-nature encounters…that can foster subjectivities of "being in common"' Commoning creates 'socio-natural inclusions and exclusions. Understanding the social relations that may or may not be conducive to sustaining commoning efforts thus requires accepting the transitory, unpredictable, and deeply affective characteristics of commoning'.	Focus on intellectual transformation of dominant modes of thought, its insistence on human and cultural diversity, and learning from nature about nondualistic and nonhierarchical systems of relation for social transformation.
	Recent anarchism scholarship on commoning	*Commensality*: from sharing meals to sharing activities and visions *Friendship*: how friendship as a basic attitude and behaviour can break through the mental frames and 'rationalist' behaviour inherent to neoliberalism	Commensality fosters a sense of care for the other while it eliminates a sense of possessiveness and self-interested behaviour; it de-individualizes. Three necessary conditions for friendship: shared activities, the passions of friendship, and the acknowledgement of their fulfilment. 'Other regarding' (beyond the person-to-person friendship)	Commensality as fostering popular participation, building networks of solidarity and disorder hierarchical ordering. Friendship is a voluntary choice that allows it to act as an egalitarian type of relationship that cuts across the traditional structures of a police order and allows alternative and disruptive communities to form.	Commensal practices could prove to be fertile ground for the development of a new political imaginary for contemporary anarcho-communism. Friendship can give a picture of solidarity, it can be a movement of solidarity, it can provide a knowhow that is the ground for progressive political solidarity.

Source: Authors' elaboration

From sociology we retain two main views on the role of social relations in building society. One is more in line with the traditional, not to say neo-functionalist, interpretation of what social relations mean for human agency within capitalism and democracy: people are agents in social relations and their behaviour should be understood in terms of the functions and behavioural patterns emanating from these relations. The second one is more normative: people are looking for alternative ways of togetherness or belongingness and build social relations allowing for this. We also find the latter view in the psychology literature we have considered. The other literatures develop what we could call different faces of together-ness. Social psychology stresses the shared search through ethical deliberation for shared values. Very recent contributions in PE on commoning underline the relationships between building subjectivities of commoning agents and the sharing of emotions. Ecofeminism stresses the value of such relationships. It stresses the role of gender and other relationships in society that are inseparable from relations to nature. From freshly-baked anarchism scholarship we highlight two modes of building sociality, i.e. commensality and friendship. Commensality is interpreted in an expansive way, from sharing meals to sharing activities and visions, and collectively materializing social rights. Friendship is approached as a basic attitude and behaviour that can break through the mental frames and 'rationalist' behaviour inherent to neoliberalism. The latter is also the view of social innovation and community approaches: organizing social life through building mutual aid-based social relations, shared ethics, modes of organization, and governance.

These literatures stress particular features of agency within or activated through the dynamics of these social relations. Most approaches – in line with our survey of established Commons approaches in Chapter 4 – highlight the importance of collective action based on reciprocity, togetherness, trust, solidarity, and friendship. Exceptions to this general observation are traditional sociology, which stresses how social relations are (re)created through competition, conflict, interpersonal accommodation, and assimilation. Traditional sociology also explains how societal structures, hierarchy, and power are reproduced through these typical agencies. The anarchist perspective on psychology stresses the search for freedom and independence that are essential for developing a psychological sense of community. This is not contradictory to building community, but underlines the rightness of individual freedom within emancipating communities. Social innovation literature gives clear indications on how multi-vocal communication, co-decision making, participatory governance, and co-learning can even the path from individuality to collectivity. Along this line, recent PE scholarship on commoning stresses the importance of collective subjectivation in the sense of developing

solidaristic behaviour. Ecofeminism sings a similar tune, explaining how practises of mutual support and negotiation can offer options for elaborating systems of well-being and fair social natural relations. It also stresses the relationship between humans and other nature, embodied subjectivities, seeing the body as an intimate site of struggle.

Most of the contributions we surveyed offer important insights on the (inter) subjective dynamics of agents building social relations but also on the intricate relationship between building community and building polity. Despite its often functionalist and systems confirming orientation, sociology stresses that people build community by developing an organic sympathetic responsiveness to one another's claims and attitudes. Psychology and social psychology stress the importance of the interplay of emotional, political, and social relations. Social innovation and community development literature are in line with this. They explain, drawing on case study work, how building empathetic and mutual aid relationships are essential to forming bottom-linked governance modes, with opportunities to vacate space for commoning within the thick, hybrid governance web dominated by corporate and state institutions. PE continues to emphasize the role of emotions in the building of political fellowship and collective subjectivities for action. Commoning naturally generates shifting layers of inclusion and exclusion in the social and natural spheres and as such, sustaining the Commons entails embracing the transient, variable, and deeply affective features of commoning. Ecofeminism's emphasis on the value of intuition, an ethic of caring, and human–nature interrelationships shows us how social relations in commoning can be understood within a framework of care. This does not contradict with the more conventional interpretation of political relationality. Quite contrarily, it stresses the importance of caring (subjects and leaders) in building polity not only at the local level – on common grounds – but also at higher spatial scales.

Forming polity in, from, and through commoning requires forming solidarity relations, learning processes, etc. through the agencies we just looked at. But more is needed.

First, as several authors argued, it is essential to break through the dominant ideology of neoliberalism. Commoning itself shows how alternative, solidarity-based social relations can be applied. Commoning experiences, along with other learning trajectories, are instrumental in the intellectual transformation of dominant modes of thought and practice. Such trajectories should insist on human and cultural diversity; these should also adopt lessons learned from nature about nondualistic and nonhierarchical systems of relationality – based on mutuality rather than self-interest – that can lead to social transformation, as ecofeminism explains. Second, co-learning is essential for commoning, in order for it to have a socio-

political impact. It can work through commensality; through friendship as a picture of progressive political solidarity. Social psychology, but also participation practice in planning, design, and community building, offer a rich portfolio of experienced methods. In the case study method based on TdC+, we refer to Critical Action Learning (CAL) which has partly influenced the way in which we have developed our AR.

4. Social relations, co-learning and Action Research

Social relations between commoners and other agents, as well as between the commoning community and its embedding world, hold plenty of opportunities for cooperation and co-construction of empowering and supportive organizational modalities and institutional structures. However, they also involve tensions and conflicts between diverse organizational or institutional logics and intricacies linked to personal emotions and alienation, the upheaval of personal and collective subjectivities, external threats to the building of cohesive relations, and so on. From practice as well as from the latest literature, we know that Commons are *learning grounds* for rediscovering mutuality, solidarity, compassion, reciprocity, associational interaction, multi-vocal ways of communication, and shared decision-making in governance. In this way, they show opportunities for rebuilding political life and democracy 2.0 from the micro-level up. This chapter sought to show that building social relations through different types of agencies, shared ethics, modes of communication, empathy, and compassion is essential to break through the neoliberal habitus and rebuild polity. Such learning requires the use of democratic pedagogies defended in contemporary anarchist literature, applied by Freire (1970) and in commoning and participatory AR experiences (Bradbury, 2010). Such pedagogies take into account real-life conditions stemming from existent and developing social relations and interactions between commoners and other actors in the commoning process. They start from the principle that everybody has the right to learn, to become an expert, and to have access to any type of knowledge. To make the right to learn real it is necessary, however, to create fora in which all participants have a voice and can use their own language, one in which effective tools are provided for translating from one life world to the other. This can only occur in learning environments that are essentially nonhierarchical and provide space and time for all participants to express themselves – justify themselves, negotiate, co-produce etc., as we will see in the next chapter.

The following citation from William T. Armaline's (2009: 136–146) essay *Thoughts on Anarchist Pedagogy and Epistemology* expresses the common denominator of what an anarchist pedagogy stands for:

> Educational scholars such as Dewey (1938, 1944) and Freire (1970) have suggested and demonstrated the liberating possibilities of minimizing power relationships in learning environments (between "teachers" and "students" for example) such that space is created for the active deconstruction of oppressive elements of society and the creation of situated knowledge and grassroots community. This is to say that in free educational space everyone is a "teacher" and a "student" in the sense that learning and the creation of knowledge is a mutual and reflexive activity. Everyone in a free educational space brings something valuable to the table, and just as in theoretically democratic societies, everyone would be encouraged to bring their perspectives, thoughts, and situated know – ledge(s) to light.

Many commoning experiences uncover a segregation between the *process* of commoning and the *material*-concrete LCs itself. The deeper understanding of social relations and socio-ecological relations that we acquired in this chapter should be instrumental for overcoming this segregation. Such understanding can only grow through a democratic, interactive learning process. This interrogation will be essential to justify and calibrate the approach we are using in case study analysis in the subsequent chapters, in other words the operational framework of the Théorie des Cités plus (TdC+), as we will discover in depth, in the next chapter (Chapters 6 and 7).

In the AR methodology for our case study work in subsequent chapters we will borrow elements from this deeper understanding of social relations and we will consider it as the main pillar of co-learning, not only between person–actors, but also individually and collectively by person–actors from nonhuman, natural actors, and actants who share the (natural) space of a LCs. Of course, AR remains situational, and as we will see, some case studies go deeper into social relations, interpersonal interaction, the role of conflicts and occasionally emotions, the shared building of collective objectives in interaction with nature than others do. In this process, co-learning, supported by a methodology rooted in the TdC, will play a central role. In the next chapter we will explain TdC and justify how we modify it to turn it into an analytical framework that allows one to analyze the dynamics of justification, negotiation, agreement, and disagreement as well as co-construction of a LCs among person–actors. Such dynamics involve the social relations, but also politico-institutional relations and the (socio-)psychological patterns that affect the behaviour of actors in the commoning process.

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[i] 'The Fragmentary Character of Life' (*Der Fragmentcharakter des Lebens*) first appeared in August 1916 in the journal *Logos*. and is in part a preparatory study for Chapter 2 of Simmel's last great philosophical testament, his 'View of Life,' or *Lebensanschauung*. of September 1918 (see Simmel, 2012).

[ii] Yet the author points out that in the process of competition there is also a sense of cooperation, at least involving the reciprocal dependence of the competing individuals or groups.