WS CO-DESIGNING AND COMMONING

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ABSTRACT

This workshop explores the relevance of *commons* as an **objective** and *commoning* **as a way of doing** and **being** for design. How can these concepts help us critically support sustainable futures for communities of humans and non-humans?

INTRODUCTION

Commons are often referred to as resources or resource systems that are shared and generated by a group of people. Such resources are vulnerable to social dilemmas and require that the community develop various mechanisms and rules to sustain them (Hess & Ostrom 2007). From a broader perspective, commons can also be described as "*all the things that we inherit from past generations that enable our livelihoods*." (Helfrich 2012). Whereas the theme of the commons has previously concentrated more on the management of shared natural resources (Ostrom 1991), it has been also increasingly linked to cultural practices such as music, software and shared spaces like cities or libraries (see Hess 2008 for an overview of the new commons, Bollier & Helfrich 2012 for accounts of activist positions and Gil & Baldwin 2014 for infrastructures).

There is currently a lively debate hinging on the notion of commons as a principle for an alternative way of organizing social production. Commons challenge the basic assumption that private property or centralized control are the only options when protecting and managing shared resources against depletion and waste. Instead, commons-based forms of organizing typically rely on communication, awareness and self-regulation among the contributors, which in turn are dependent on the infrastructures that make visible an eventual abuse of resources — free-riding or vandalism (Hardin, 1968) — and the range of reactions available against them.

The cultivation of commons has attracted some attention of design researchers, activists, and practitioners interested in overcoming the limitation of resource scarcity models when working on new cultural, humanitarian, or educational projects. This interest comes with the increasing use of resources produced in commons such as open source software and hardware, or Creative Commons licensed content. These interests raise awareness for the moral responsibility of giving back to the commons, and the limitations of intellectual property right systems and authorship practices; however, how to advance these issues is not very clear by now. What can design researchers, activists, and practitioners contribute to commons? How can they contribute to common-based design and production? In software commons, at the least, this is not a trivial question since designers may not be able to contribute with software code. What to say about urban commons in which designers are not necessarily living in the local area?

Design has, nevertheless, an enduring tradition of collaborative practices that can uptake those questions. Participatory Design, for example, strives to involve stakeholders on the design of things/Things (Simonsen & Robertson 2012). With an initial focus on work settings, this approach has raised new issues to the forefront, including lately the role of infrastructures and infrastructuring in our everyday life (Bjögvinsson *et al* 2012, Karasti 2014). Infrastructures are common purpose structures built to support human action. Infrastructures are ready for use and practically invisible (Star & Ruhleder, 1994) thus requiring a more critical look, questioning the technology taken for granted in human action. Changing the infrastructure, or "infrastructuring", has been considered an important step to reshape human action (Dantec & DiSalvo, 2013).

There seems to be currently a lack of infrastructures to cultivate and care for commons. The available technologies, spaces and organization principles are mainly focused in dealing with scarcity and private property. There is a need to look for broader spectrum

issues, not to run the risk of making it too easy to abuse resources or too difficult to make contributions. Co-designing infrastructures with the contributors seems to be a sensible way of constructing new types of agency (Till, 2014) taking seriously also abundance and sustainability.

WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES AND FORMAT

In this workshop we aim to explore the relevance of *the commons* as an **objective** and *commoning* **as a way of doing and being** for design activities, especially for those that aim seriously and critically at supporting sustainable futures for all (not only humans). We seek contributions that highlight, reflect and raise awareness around some of these questions:

How can we design better infrastructures and frameworks that enable, mediate and foster commoning practices? What new design principles and practices are needed to co-design commons?

How to articulate –long-lived and open ended - collaborative practices that rely on sharing resources, and produce collective outcomes?

Our intention is to continue on going efforts to link discussions and research done in "commons" framework to collaborative practices found in design around human centred design, participatory design and open design (See e.g. Marttila et al. 2013, Marttila et al. 2014 and Seravalli 2014). Interested researchers and practitioners are invited to send position papers reflecting on a current project or case, in relationship to the theme of the workshop (4 pages). Organizers will collect also cases and examples as a basis for hands-on mapping and discussion during the workshop.

In the first part of the workshop participants will shortly present their cases (5-10 minutes). The aim will be to discuss the nature of the commons that is at play in each case and what kind of design practices and principles have been used (could be used) in its development. Challenges and issues related to the design or the unfolding of commons practices will be discussed. Participants will then be asked to collectively identify possible connections and shared themes between the cases: the nature of commons, the approaches that have been at play in their development as well as challenges. We will select some of these issues and discuss more in depth what type of design research agendas we need, and from those that already exist which ones are promising directions. At the end of the workshop, there will be a collective design activity to infrastructure future collaborations between the initiatives presented. The possibilities for creating shared resources will be availed.

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