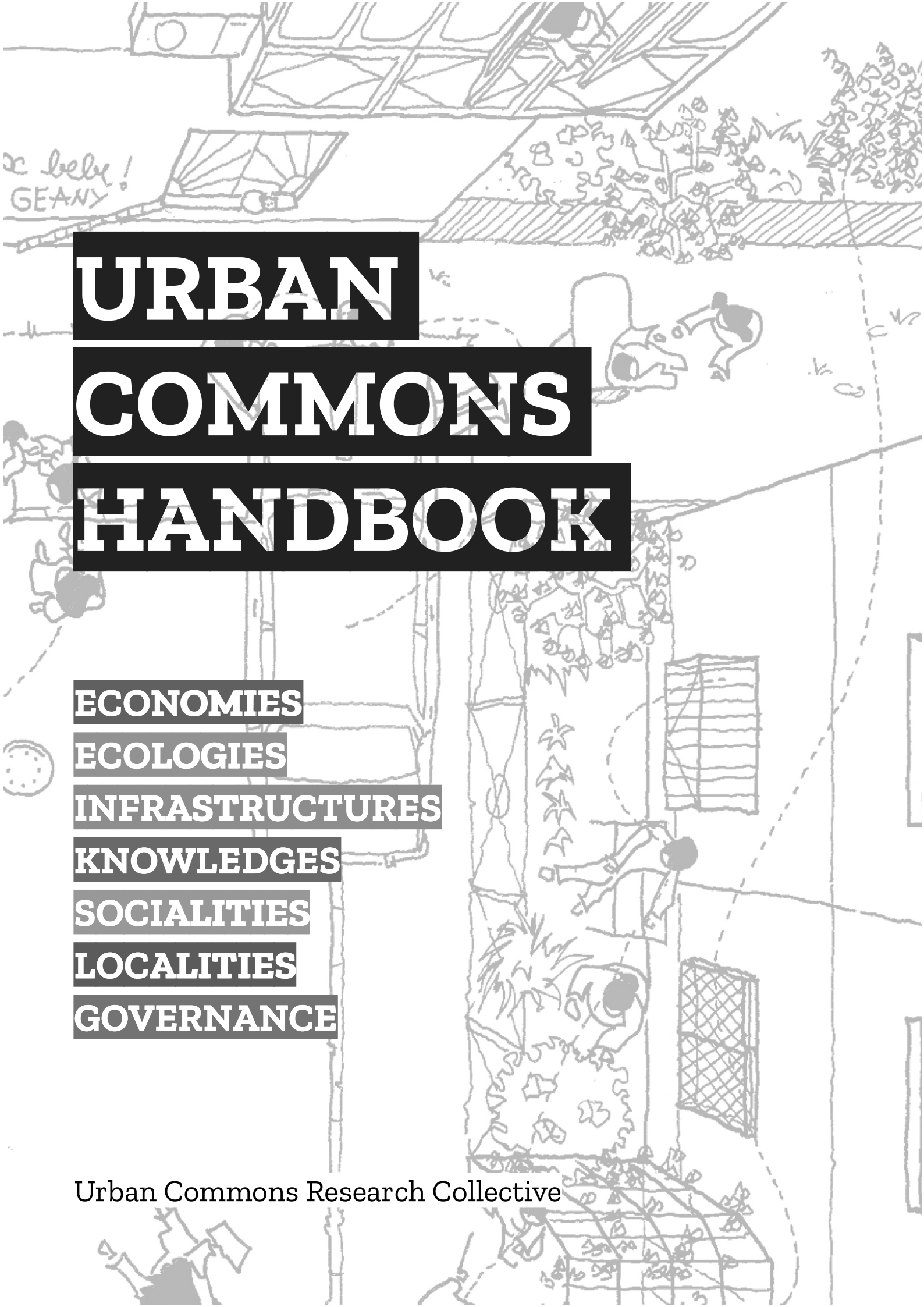

URBAN COMMONS HANDBOOK

ECONOMIES
ECOLOGIES
INFRASTRUCTURES
KNOWLEDGES
SOCIALITIES
LOCALITIES
GOVERNANCE

Urban Commons Research Collective

Urban Commons

The commons are generally constituted by three elements: a pool of common resources, a community that uses and reproduces these resources, and a set of values, protocols and norms for collaboration, sharing, and care that this community agrees upon. In the context of capitalism, these three elements need to be identified, created, defended, and expanded through the process of "commoning".[1]

Traditionally, the commons have been understood as common-pool resources[2] containing "all the creations of nature and society that we inherit jointly and freely, and hold in trust for future generations".[3] The most documented commons are those related to natural resources, such as land, waterways, forests, fisheries, and wild food catchment areas. At the same time, other kinds of emerging commons are taking more diverse and intangible forms.[4] Some use the concept of social commons (for example, care for elderly and children or open public space) or of intellectual and cultural commons (for example, music, digital, and creative skills as demonstrated by the P2P movement)—often termed "new commons".[5]

EMERGING COMMONS

The seminal work of economist Elinor Ostrom has evidenced the importance of governance when one speaks about commons, specifically traditional commons.[6] Self-governance addresses the shared concerns and the agreements needed to maintain, rather than destroy, the resources that a community shares. De Angelis and Harvie propose that the commons should be rather understood as a "social system in which resources are shared by a

SELF GOVERNANCE

1. Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (University of California Press, 2008).

2. Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*, *The Political Economy of Institutions and Decisions (*Cambridge University Press, 1990).

3. Stuart Hodkinson, 'Housing in Common: In Search of a Strategy for Housing Alterity in England in the 21st Century', in *Interrogating Alterity: Alternative Economic and Political Spaces*, ed. by Duncan Fuller and Andrew E.G Jonas (Routledge, 2010), pp. 241–258.

4. Maria Francesca De Tullio and Ana Sofía Acosta Alvarado, 'L'Asilo Filangieri Di Napoli, Percorso Pratico Di Una Teoria in Costruzione', in *I Beni Comuni in Cerca Di Autore*, ed. by Alessandra Algostino and Valentina Pazé, Talpa (Volere la luna, 2020) p. 21.

5. Jane Holder and Tatiana Flessas, 'Emerging Commons', *Social & Legal Studies*, 17.3 (2008), pp. 299–310.

community of commoners users/producers, who also define the modes of use and production, distribution and circulation of these resources through democratic and horizontal forms of governance".[7] While Ostrom has demonstrated that the governance of common-pool resources needs to be formalised into clear governance principles in order to assure the sustainability of the common, for other scholars, commoning is implicit in spontaneous processes of sharing and doing in-common.[8] More political definitions of commoning speak about social processes and forms of organising not only in common but also for the common, intentionally creating and reproducing the commons to offer strategic social and political alternatives to capitalist society.

COMMONING

Commons are, as such, not only about governance but also about relationships. According to Linebaugh "the commons is an activity and, if anything, it expresses relationships in society that are inseparable from relations to nature"; therefore, "it might be better to keep the word as a verb, rather than as a noun, a substantive" in order to mark the continuous making and re-making of the commons through shared labour and capacities.[9] Commoning expresses the relation between the community and the resources on which it depends, that is a relation of situated interdependence between humans and non-humans that "negotiates, imperfectly, the various limits (needs) and possibilities (capacities) that arise in particular contexts".[10]

6. Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons*.

7. Massimo De Angelis and David Harvie, 'The Commons', in *Routledge Companion to Alternative Organization*, ed. by Martin Parker, George Cheney, Valérie Fournier, and Chris Land (Routledge, 2014), pp. 280–94.

8. Stavros Stavrides, *Common Space: The City as Commons* (Zed Books, 2016).

9. Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto*. (University of California Press, 2009). p. 279.

10. Patrick Bresnihan, 'The More-than-Human Commons: From Commons to Commoning', in *Space, Power and the Commons: The Struggle for Alternative Futures*, ed. by Leila Dawney, Samuel Kirwan, and Julian Brigstocke, Routledge Research in Place, Space and Politics (Routledge, 2016).

Care

The concept of "care" is helpful for articulating the ethos underlying the situated and negotiated practices of commoning. Tronto defines care as "everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair 'our world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all that we seek to interweave in a complex, life sustaining web".[11] Commoning practices require a foundation of care and ways of doing that respect and understand limits. These ethics centre the affective, moving beyond technical and output oriented resource management.[12]

ETHICS OF CARE

Commons and concomitant democratic and care-based "negotiation of the limits and possibilities" are a relevant proposal for our capacity to sustain more-than-human life on the planet. Federici[13] highlights that capitalism continually perpetuates itself precisely through the enclosure of our capacity to support and reproduce life. This capacity for social reproduction involves not only giving birth but a multitude of acts of bearing, protecting, feeding, and socialising that cannot be individualised and depend on collective care. By contrast, commoning practices can foster a resilient transition towards alternative social structures and relationships with nature across different scales.

Enclosure

Although the commons have proved to be a sustainable way of managing resources, they are under increasing pressures of commercialisation. As many have suggested, the enclosure of the commons was

11. Joan C Tronto, 'Caring Architecture', in *Critical Care: Architecture and Urbanism for a Broken Planet*, ed. by Angelika Fitz and Elke Krasny (MIT Press, 2019), pp. 26–32.

12. María Puig de la Bellacasa, 'Ethical Doings in Naturecultures', *Ethics, Place & Environment*, 13.2 (2010), p. 165.

13. Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Autonomedia, 2004).

not a one-off phase in the pre-history of capitalist development. Instead, it is a continuous process that has accompanied global capitalism since its colonial origins.[14]

Since the 1980s, neoliberal capitalism has opened new areas for enclosure: not only land and natural resources but also knowledge, digital innovation, the airwaves, the public domain of creative works, and even the DNA of plants, animals and humans.[15] Today, biodiversity and genetic commons have become new battlegrounds in the advanced stage of neoliberalism. The contemporary revolutionary project is concerned with capturing, diverting, appropriating, and reclaiming these commons that we produce as a key "constituent process".[16] It is a reclaiming but also a reinvention which needs new processes, new institutions, and new agencies that can become the foundation for new forms of democracy.

Relational

Being built on relations of collective care, regeneration, and resilience, commons can contribute to planetary ecological repair and provide an alternative to the extractive and exploitative relations of the capitalist economy. Learning how to govern our planet as a commons is imperative to becoming more resilient but also more democratic. The ecological question should not only be tackled in relation to the environmental crisis but also, as suggested by Guattari, in relation to political and cultural processes.[17] Additionally, it needs to be addressed in post-anthropocentric terms, going beyond the human world towards more-than-human life-worlds. In this regard, an important body of work has been compiled by anthropologists

14. Massimo De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia: On the Commons and the Transformation to Postcapitalism* (Zed Books, 2017); David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford University Press, 2003); Maria Mies and Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, 'Defending, Reclaiming and Reinventing the Commons', *Canadian Journal of Development Studies / Revue Canadienne d'études Du Développement*, 22.4 (2001), pp. 997–1023.

15. David Bollier, 'The Growth of the Commons Paradigm', in *Understanding Knowledge as a Commons: From Theory to Practice*, ed. by Charlotte Hess and Elinor Ostrom (MIT Press, 2007), pp. 27–40.

16. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Harvard University Press, 2009).

17. Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. by Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton. (The Athlone Press, 2005).

examining indigenous relations with nature and territory[18] alongside post-humanist and vital materialist theorists.[19] These contributions help to shift the methodological and epistemological lens away from subjects and objects towards the relations that constitute our world.

Differences

Understanding the planet as a commons opens up new possibilities for nurturing relationships across differences. The intertwined histories of global capitalism and neo-colonial dispossession are grounded in processes of othering: the categorisation and fragmentation of spaces, species, peoples and identities violently set apart and in conflict with each other.[20] On the other hand, the commons, as relational spaces, can form the basis of coalitions of differences that resist fragmentation and emphasize kinship and interdependence.[21] Stavros Stavrides understands the commons as thresholds: porous social and material constructions that "separate while connecting".[22] They allow connections towards the 'other' and a culture of mutual involvement and negotiation. In this view, commoning practices support the emergence of social networks. These hold the potential to counter othering proccesses while enabling differences across race, gender, class, sexuality, physical ability to be connected and mutualised.

18. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton University Press, 2015).

19. Karen Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28.3 (2003), pp. 801–31 ; Bennett, Jane, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Duke University Press, 2010).

20. Obioma Nnaemeka and Christine Eyene, '« Autres » *féminismes: Quand la femme africaine repousse les limites de la pensée et de l'action féministes."* Africultures 3 (2008), pp. 12-19.

21. Marìa Lugones, 'Toward a Decolonial Feminism', *Hypatia*, 25.4 (2010), pp. 742–59.

22. Stavros Stavrides, *Common Space*.

Urban Commons

In the urban context, commons raise the question of how resources are governed or managed in cities and, further, how inhabitants can lay claim to common goods without privatizing or exercising public control over them.

Urban commons have much more porous definitions than traditional commons that are located in rural contexts and, therefore, require an understanding of the complexity of the urban—how the density of an urban area, the proximity of its inhabitants, and the diversity of its users interact with tangible and intangible resources. Urban commons cannot be delimited to a community of commoners but, rather, need to remain open and engage with external forces in the process of commoning. These communities are somehow continually in the making.

As the urban is a mix of material (the built environment) and immaterial (the social, economic, political, and cultural) components, the urban commons share some aspects of both. They can be either inherited, like the traditional commons studied by Ostrom, or constructed, like many of the "new commons".[23] This idea can be extended to the totality of the city which can be seen as a commons to be claimed collectively a "co-city".[24]

While, traditionally, commoning practices have focussed on access to and governance of a common pool of physical resources such as pastures, fishing waters, and forests, the urban commons include a broader array of resources, both material and immaterial. The everyday sustenance of these resources

23. Serge Gutwirth and Isabelle Stengers, 'Théorie du droit. Le droit à l'épreuve de la résurgence des commons', *Revue juridique de l'environnement*, 41.2 (2016), pp. 306–43.

24. Sheila Foster, and Christian Iaione, 'The City as a Commons', *Yale Law and Policy Review*, 32.2 (2016), pp. 281–349.

requires a flexible community and a set of collectively devised values, protocols, and norms. Going beyond the commons' traditional nature-based and economic reasoning, urban commoning can be considered as an open system that can transform its users and shape their relations based on principles of collaboration and solidarity.[25]

Urban commons can embody local forms of resistance and cooperation, to make claims on urban resources and city space as a commons. These claims do not simply assert the right to a resource; rather, they assert the existence of a common stake or common interest in resources, shared with other urban inhabitants, as a way of resisting privatization and/or commodification.[26]

25. David Bollier, 'Global Enclosures in the Service of Empire', in *The Wealth of the Commons: A World beyond Market and State*, ed. by David Bollier and Silke Helfrich (Levellers Press, 2012).

26. Amanda Huron, 'Working with Strangers in Saturated Space: Reclaiming and Maintaining the Urban Commons', *Antipode*, 47.4 (2015), 963–79.

The Handbook

The Handbook looks at a number of key, but not exhaustive, themes that characterise the urban commons in their multiplicity and diversity: Economies, ecologies, infrastructures, knowledges, socialities, localities and governance.

Each of these themes constitutes a section in the Handbook and is explored through two texts. First, a definition is given which introduces a thematic perspective and a set of concepts and references that can expand understandings of the urban commons. Each definition is accompanied by a story: as urban commons are always situated and in-the-making, we believe it is important that theoretical definitions are paired with examples of ongoing processes-experiments towards commoning. A number of practices worked with us to write their own commoning story: social-cultural centres, reclaimed cultural centres, community hubs, commons living labs, co-working spaces, resilience networks, political civic groups. Situated in different European contexts and linked to our collective field of action, these stories offer a contemporary practice-based perspective on urban commons.

Throughout the Handbook, we have highlighted a number of keywords.[27] These are the key concepts that inform our own thinking around the commons. Some of the keywords are specific to a theme, others connect across some or all of the different sections. Each keyword is linked to a set of bibliographic references that are collated in the archive at the end of the volume.

27. The Urban Commons tags were devised as a method of navigating the handbook across strands. The concepts and their transversal linkages can be found in the index. The colour of each tag represents the strand most relevant to the concept and in which a definition and/or links to relevant literature can be found.

ECONOMIES address how urban commons can support diverse, non-capitalist economies based on mutual interest, sharing, and collaboration. These economies are more just, environmentally friendly, and embedded in and supporting everyday life. Such economies are, however, in constant opposition to capitalist market forces and their practices which have sought to enclose common resources. The section explores this conflict and uses the story of Portland Works in Sheffield, England, to outline a shift from the sharing of industrial tools amongst mesters towards the creation of convivial tools that resist market enclosure.

ECOLOGIES states that urban commons, which are built on relations of collective care, regeneration, and resilience, can contribute to planetary ecological repair and provide an alternative to the extractive and exploitative relations of the capitalist economy. Urban eco-commoning processes can generate ecological benefits related to life-worlds at any scale. How can these benefits be scaled up? How can they be sustained over time? What is the role of designers in supporting eco-commoning? Chosen as a story for this section, the R-Urban project developed in Paris and London attempts to answer some of these questions.

INFRASTRUCTURES moves beyond a common understanding of physical and organisational structures/systems: streets, railways, water pipes, housing etc. towards a characterisation of commons as transformational infrastructures for "troubling troubled times".[28] Beyond crisis repair, commons can facilitate modes of transitioning towards new ways of world-building and care. This signals a shift from infrastructure as a

28. Lauren Berlant, 'The Commons: Infrastructures for Troubling Times*', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 34.3 (2016), pp. 393–419.

noun to "infrastructuring":[29] socio-material relational processes that can open spaces/times of possibility, catalyse mutual agency, and negotiate differences. We explore this idea through the story of the transformational infrastructures put in place by the network of La Foresta in Rovereto, Italy.

29. Gesche Joost, and Andreas Unteidig, 'Design and Social Change: The Changing Environment of a Discipline in Flux', in *Transformation Design*, ed. by Wolfgang Jonas, Sarah Zerwas, and Kristof von Anshelm (Birkhäuser, 2015), pp. 134–48.

KNOWLEDGES explores collective and collaborative approaches to the generation, management, and dissemination of knowledge; ones that are oriented towards social change and the transition towards a more just and sustainable society. In the context of the commons, a discussion on knowledge is relevant in at least two ways: in support of the commoning process and as a common resource in itself. This strand illustrates these two instances of knowledge, for and as commoning, through the story of the City School project in Bucharest, Romania.

SOCIALITIES is concerned with cooperating communities and their capacities to maintain, reproduce, and transform urban life through commoning practices that enable the transition to alternative futures. In this section, we present the Intersektionales Stadthaus in Vienna, Austria, as an exemplar story: housing is reimagined as a common infrastructure for the production of alternative socialities based on an intersectional praxis.

LOCALITIES focuses on the values created within and from-below while making visible the broader power relations that surround urban commoning practices. A focus on localities emphasises the need to make visible the myriad situated stories of commoning alongside the diverse cultures and practices of sharing that inform them. At the same time, the potential of

bringing these stories together is highlighted; building trans-local networks of solidarity can challenge power across scales. The story of the Hands on Famagusta project in Cyprus reveals the relations between localised commoning experiments and their wider socio-political context.

GOVERNANCE argues that governing the commons is not a question of management but, rather, a political project where the common (in singular mode) is a principle of self-governance that prefigures the re-organisation of society as a whole. In this view, the production and re-production of commoning practices require a similar production and re-production of rules, norms, and protocols. These "common codes" identify and foster new types of communities and resources. The story of ex-Asilo Filangeri in Naples, Italy, demonstrates the development of an institutional framework to recognise emerging commons in the city and beyond.

This Handbook aims to contribute to a conversation on what the commons mean in an urban context and, further, what is specific about the commons in relation to the idea and experience of the city. As mentioned earlier, we find the urban commons to have much more porous definitions than traditional commons located in rural contexts. They are less clearly defined and the communities sustaining them tend to be more dense, diverse, and dynamic. In this sense, the Handbook hopes to contribute to a reflection on how questions of density, diversity, and temporality interact with the distribution and management of tangible and intangible resources in cities.

To explore this question, we focussed on a number of aspects related to the urban commons. The

Handbook's structuring into seven themes is, for us, a tool for thinking: one that allows us to highlight singularities and, simultaneously, to explore theory and practice as interconnected. We wrote stories and definitions at the same time and in dialogue with each other because we consider experience as generative of theory as much as theory helps us to understand experience.

This Handbook is very much a situated project. It is the outcome of our personal and collective positioning of this moment in our thinking in-common. For this reason, the Handbook is not exhaustive and covers only European contexts. We are aware of the specificities and recognise that other parts of the world, specifically in Latin America, are very rich in relevant examples of urban commons initiatives. We understand this as a work in progress, very much open to future additions and recalibrations, and as we write this introduction, we are also plotting the next steps in this initiative.

The first one has to do with building relations and opening up our work to new voices, positions and perspectives on the urban commons including by hosting further conversations and public events. A key tool for doing so will be sharing online the archive of texts, practices, and projects about the urban commons that we created at the early stages of our collaboration, and transforming it into an open-source repository for activism and scholarship on the urban commons. In the meantime, we hope that the reflections included in this Handbook will be useful to others students, practitioners, and researchers and that the Handbook can contribute to a broader intellectual and political project of expanding the commons; becoming a shared resource for others to take, use, and transform.

ENCLOSURE

The history of urban commons is closely interlinked with an ongoing process of wealth accumulation and enclosure which can be traced back to the 15th and 16th century in medieval Europe, particularly England.[1] The dispossession of common agricultural land, which had served as a means of subsistence for feudal serfs and peasants, led to people being separated from their means of survival/sustenance; therefore, they were forced to engage in wage labour in factories. This drove rapid urbanisation. With this displacement came alienation: the loss of both communal relations and shared knowledges regarding the land that had been established over generations. In England and Scotland, the purchase of vast swathes of land and accompanying eviction of tenants was possible due to the fortunes made from the enslavement of people in British Colonies.[2] Silvia Frederici points out that through violence (such as the witch hunts), the ground was prepared for capitalism: suppressing emerging peasant resistance to feudalism, controlling the bodies of women, and deepening divisions between men and women.[3] Reproductive work, mostly done by women, became naturalised as gendered, invisible, and devalued labour under capitalist production processes.

REPRODUCTIVE LABOUR

Capitalism requires continual expansion, and the enclosure of land has never ceased. Its contemporary articulations consist of accelerating gentrification processes and privatisation of urban centres around the world, constantly threatening the survival of urban commons practices and economies. Multinational corporations now own vast areas of major cities and towns, taking control of sites that were previous under a patchwork of

1. Peter Linebaugh, *Stop, Thief! The Commons, Enclosures and Resistance* (PM Press, 2014).

2. Ian MacKinnon and Andrew Mackillop, *Plantation Slavery and Landownership in the West Highlands and Islands: Legacies and Lessons*, Land and the Common Good (Community Land Scotland, 2020).

3. Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Autonomedia, 2004).

private and public ownership. In the global South, subsistence farmers are dispossessed of their small plots of land by large corporations with the empty promise of wealth in the 'free' market economy: the "new enclosures".[4]

People around the world counter these developments with relational practices based on mutuality, sharing, and cooperation—sometimes out of necessity, sometimes out of desire.[5] Such practices, in fact, have always formed social bonds and kept our societies alive: help amongst neighbours, friends, relatives; gifting, sharing, lending, repairing; caring for our more-than-human and human others. In contrast to capitalists, for whom price is the same as value, commoners realise that there are many generative living systems of value. The value created in commons is not denominated—nor is it generally monetized, protected under property law, supported by the state, or traded in markets. Among the more significant systems of commons-based value are everyday care work that happens in the home and communities; the eco-stewardship of Indigenous peoples; radical care work such as the migrant rescues;[6] traditional communities and community land trusts; alternative local and regional currencies; online collaborations that produce open source software, wikis, and open access journals; and countless digital communities for sharing design data, science, and more.[7] These already existing "diverse economies" offer a "heterogeneous economic landscape" which replaces, through a deconstructive process, the binary hierarchies of market/non-market activities;[8] once made visible, they could shift the current capitalocentric hegemony driven by the logics of

RELATIONAL

MORE THAN HUMAN

INVISIBLE VALUE

DIVERSE ECONOMIES

4. Midnight Notes Collective, 'Introduction to the New Enclosures', in *The New Enclosures* (Midnight Notes, 1990).

5. Dagmar Pelger, 'Spatial Commons versus Separate Spaces' (Doctoral Thesis, Technische Universität Berlin, 2021).

6. (Pirate Care, 2020 https://pirate.care/pages/texts/)

7. David Bollier, *Re-Imagining Value: Insights from the Care Economy, Commons, Cyberspace and Nature* (Heinrich Böll Foundation, 2016).

8. J.K. Gibson-Graham, 'Diverse Economies: Performative Practices for `other Worlds", *Progress in Human Geography*, 32.5 (2008).

exchange and capital accumulation towards a "commonization" of values.[9]

Urban commons economies are closely linked to this deconstructive process: they deeply question the role of property, monetised relations, and value by offering alternative spatialities where access, distribution, and reproduction are negotiated—according to need and ability rather than a logics of exchange—on a mutual and non-commodified basis.[10] However, there are significant differences amongst the diverse commons movements regarding the relationship to state and market. The more radical movements take inspiration from the Italian Autonomia movement, the Marxist-feminist movement, and the Zapatista uprising that oppose capitalism and its individualising mechanisms to engage with the commons as a revolutionary horizon. The more liberal movements follow the Ostromian tradition, which can be both neoliberal and anti-neoliberal in their approach, where the commons are recognised "as an antidote to the failures or oversights of states and markets – at worst a supplement, at best an equal partner with the state and market in the reproduction of modern economic life."[11] The tensions between these different approaches to commons and commoning are where politics occurs.

Urban Commons must not be commodified and, therefore, they require other mechanisms for the valuing, allocation, maintenance, and reproduction of resources. The urban context engenders specific challenges that are related to population diversity and needs, saturated property rights, and potential atomisation because of differing work patterns

9. Laura Centemeri, 'Commons and the new environmentalism of everyday life. Alternative value practices and multispecies commoning in the permaculture movement', *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*, 2 (2018).

10. Friederike Habermann, *Ecommony: Um-CARE zum Miteinander*, Konzepte /Materialien, 9 (Ulrike Helmer Verlag, 2016).

11. Max Haiven, 'The Commons against Neoliberalism, the Commons of Neoliberalism, the Commons beyond Neoliberalism', in *The Handbook of Neoliberalism*, ed. by Simon Springer, Kean Birch, and Julie MacLeavy (Routledge, 2016).

and lifestyles. Such heterogeneity, however, also offers great potential to work together across difference in ways that are productive and energetic. This is a space of opportunity to reveal an ethical moment of negotiation and to produce different social, ecological, and spatial relations and subjectivities.[12] The aim is to dislodge the notion of capitalism as the only possible economic logic; this should be understood as an ongoing process of cultivating capacities rather than one of assuming power.[13]

Meanwhile, both state and market forces increasingly aim to capture the social capital embedded in such diversions from economic logic and turn them towards strengthening the neoliberal agenda of contemporary market capitalism. Through austerity programs—combined with rhetoric such as the UK's 'Big Society' or Brazil's 'expenditure ceiling'—governments are seeking to roll back the welfare state and government spending while transferring social responsibilities to individuals and the newly emerging collectives of the urban commons.[14] This co-opts the networks and relationships strengthened through urban collective actions as a means to delegate responsibility for social service provision. Similarly, the market has begun to commodify the social capacities of urban commons through new business models and organisations, such as Uber and AirBnB, that reframe social production as the "sharing economy"[15] while profoundly affecting how we navigate urban environments. It is also important to note that through regeneration schemes, the state often supports gentrification of neighbourhoods, making commoning projects less likely due to the

12. Alvaro Sevilla-Buitrago, 'Capitalist Formations of Enclosure: Space and the Extinction of the Commons: Capitalist Formations of Enclosure', *Antipode*, 47.4 (2015).

13. Ethan Miller, 'Community Economy: Ontology, Ethics, and Politics for Radically Democratic Economic Organizing', *Rethinking Marxism*, 25.4 (2013).

14. Andrew Williams, Mark Goodwin, and Paul Cloke, 'Neoliberalism, Big Society, and Progressive Localism', *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 46.12 (2014).

15. Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* (Yale University Press, 2006).

increased property values.[16] This coincides with a "crisis of care":[17] society's ability to sustain social relationships is affected by the need for increased working hours in the precarious, financialised market alongside cut-backs and privatisations of public services and spaces by the state. Both the state and the market are demanding more from the commons to address the inherent costs of capitalism.

Whilst these urban commoning practices largely depend on public funding and project-based grants, the diverse economies framework opens up a field to experiment with and find ways to resist dependencies on and subordination to the "precarising capitalist relations" of market and state mentioned above.[18] Thus, Gibson-Graham[19] lay the ground for practitioners and researchers of such diverse economies to "engage in ethical projects of extending the local imagination to what is outside, enrolling an understanding of place 'as generous and hospitable'—towards infrastructures that 'provoke commoning"[20] and spaces which constitute an "outside, but 'inside' the capitalist relations and structures" they seek to challenge.[21] If the challenge for Urban Commons is to proliferate, and to resist enclosure, what are the tactics that are required? Firstly, they need to make visible non-capitalist and anticapitalist models of value and social reproduction. Secondly, they need to support the creation, replication, and care of mutually supportive networks and practices of everyday commoning. Finally, they need to critically engage with the state and its institutions to advocate for alternative economic approaches that are durable and meaningful.

DIVERSE ECONOMIES

INFRA-STRUCTURING

SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

16. David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (Verso, 2012).

17. Nancy Fraser, 'Capitalism's Crisis of Care', *Dissent Magazine* 63.4 (2016).

18. Fabio Franz and Bianca Elzenbaumer, 'Commons & Community Economies: Entry Points to Design for Eco-Social Justice?', *DRS Biennial Conference Series* (2016).

19. J.K. Gibson-Graham, 'Diverse Economies: Performative Practices for `other Worlds", op. cit.

20. Doina Petrescu et al, 'Calculating the Value of the Commons: Generating Resilient Urban Futures', *Environmental Policy and Governance*, 31.3 (2021).

21. Mathijs van de Sande, 'The Prefigurative Power of the Common(s)', in *Perspectives on Commoning: Autonomist Principles and Practices*, ed. by Guido T. Ruivenkamp and Andy Hilton, In Common (Zed Books, 2017).

Posters on the facade of Portland Works making visible the activities and diverse economies of the building's residents. @ Studio Polpo, 2013

PORTLAND WORKS

With Julia Udall and Studio Polpo

Sheffield (UK)

Portland Works is a large Grade II* listed cutlery works, built in the late 1870s, occupied at its height by over 100 master craftsmen, known as the Little Mesters. Since industrial activity began to decline in the city during the 1970s, the tenants of the building began to diversify to include artists, musicians, distillers and joiners, cheek by jowl with longer standing engravers, toolmakers, knifemakers, and other metalworkers. A planning application for the conversion of the building into residential accommodation in the 2000s threatened permanent closure and led to a campaign to save it that catalysed the production of an urban common. These processes were provoked by a battle to ensure the invisible and under-valued labours of its tenants were represented in urban planning policy decisions as a means to ultimately save the livelihoods of a diverse community of artisan makers, some of whom had been resident in the building for forty years. This existential crisis laid bare the contradictions and impossibilities of such livelihoods within a capitalist system, where the financialization of the property market demanded ever increasing rents, but also revealed how the associated practices and relations embedded within these forms of production can prefigure the commons. This story outlines both the continuous process of commoning necessary to resist the forces of enclosure while observing the potential of urban commons to imagine and create new forms of urban spatial economy beyond the market.

At its industrial height during the 18th and 19th century, Portland Works was one of the many homes for Sheffield's 'little mesters' whose workshops gave urban form to the city. For larger jobs,

specialists would carry out one aspect of production and goods were carted between shops and factories, forging, grinding, and finishing. The distinct historical development of industrial production around clusters of 'little Mesters' in Sheffield allowed for instances of resistance against the ever more dominant employment of wage labour; the factory system was not controlled by a single factory owner but, rather, had a number of self-employed Mesters. The Mesters themselves owned the means of production, resulting in greater freedom of employment and the development of "practices of interdependence" between craftspeople.[1] These groups of self-employed 'master craftsmen' would rent small workshops and studios within larger factory buildings, sharing resources such as the furnace, to each carry out a different skilled part of a manufacturing process, resulting in products produced through collaborative activity.

The Mesters were subject to difficult conditions due to the precarity caused by buyers paying on approval; the dangers of heavy machinery, fine dust, and fire; and the pressures exerted on the body through long days of heavy manual labour from a very young age. Yet, the social forms of production, such precarious work required, created the latent subjectivities alongside material and practiced relations from which the urban commons later emerged. At Portland Works, the tenants have developed forms of sociality intimately entwined with their economies that allow them to get by with very fine profit margins or during difficult times: they lend tools; negotiate shared spaces and facilities, such as the central courtyard; and offer mutual support in the form of various kinds of skilled labour. The

1. Julia Udall, 'Mending the Commons with the "Little Mesters"', *Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organization,* 19.2 (2019).


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Photomontage of the public facing facade of Portland Works @ Studio Polpo.

relations, spaces, and modes are an infrastructure that supports such activity and holds potential for more egalitarian or commoning practices.

Margaret Thatcher's impact on Sheffield was significant: seen through cuts and privatisation of the steel and coal industries and the decimation of the public sector during the 1980s. This led to a 50% unemployment rate, the scraping of manufacturing equipment and tools, and many vacant factories in the city centre. As a form of resistance, DIY forms of making and culture led to a development of the arts and music scene of Sheffield side-by-side in the left behind vacant spaces of industry. These were people often explicitly working outside of capitalism, developing means and modes of producing cultural and social activity in other ways. For the first time, the Mesters left behind by the Thatcher regime were brought side-by-side with these figures of counter-culture, not necessarily sharing the same views, politics, cultures, history or work; but they often formed generous and convivial social relations nonetheless.

As industry declined in the centre of Sheffield and other northern UK cities, financialisation of the property market led to speculation on what were often attractive brick buildings. For the Mesters' Works, ownership of these communal buildings passed from factory owners with a close working relationship with the tenants to remote owners whose interest in the works was entirely abstract to the interests of the workers. This new wave of landlords saw urban spaces such as Portland Works as interchangeable assets, placing the remaining Mesters in a conflicting relationship with their

Portland Works Courtyard party @ Studio Polpo, 2011.

ENCLOSURE

means of production. In 2009, a Change of Use planning application was submitted by the landowners to transform Portland Works into residential property which, if successful, would see the Mesters, musicians and artists removed from the property entirely. As a strategy to place pressure on Sheffield City Council's planners, the owners' Planning Application sought to render the small-scale activities of Portland Works residents invisible, claiming they were of no (financial) value or businesses were too precarious to continue. The constant threat of speculation and gentrification meant that it was no longer possible for the maker community to operate within this system. This would lead to the latent social relations—which had been developed over centuries, across the neighbourhood and beyond—to be fundamentally damaged by having to keep up with the constant growth of the market, making many unviable.

2. J.K. Gibson-Graham, 'Diverse Economies: Performative Practices for "other Worlds"', *Progress in Human Geography*, 32.5 (2008).

GENTRIFICATION

At the time the planning application was submitted to transform Portland Works into private flats, the building was home to 35 tenants. All of the tenants were occupied making things: including rock, pop, and experimental music; fine and performance art; tools, kitchens, windows, coat pegs, motorcycles, chastity belts, motors for the car industry, and knives. Alongside the individual outputs of these craftspeople and artists, the emerging and latent commoning practices of resource-sharing and self-management were beginning to emerge as tools of commoning. The threat of eviction ignited an urban imaginary of the Works that reclaimed its immense value to the city; further, this gathered and catalysed a community to kickstart a process of commoning through its already present "diverse

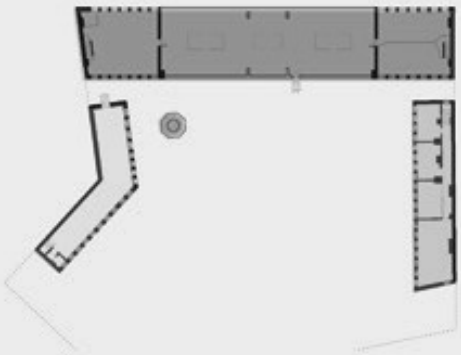
DIVERSE ECONOMIES

economies".[2] The process would be realised through work given for free, including cleaning, maintenance (building care), repair, awareness-raising, protesting, teaching, archiving, debating, communicating, and holding meetings. By recognising the alternative values beyond monetary, Portland Works and its tenants were ultimately able to reclaim "value sovereignty", protecting these value-based economies and ensuring the market was not able to "appropriate the fruits of the commons".[3]

This instance of contestation catalysed a network of tenants, professionals, and local people to exchange their relevant skills through a process of care which would ultimately resist the potential enclosure of Portland Works by market forces, seeing the building purchased collectively by a group of commoners. Over 500 people bought shares under a one person, one vote governance system. They brought with them not just the money to buy the building and begin the process of repair; but new ways of doing, the willingness to do the work, and questions about what Portland Works' role might be within the city. The tenants, previously separated by their experience and specialities, became entwined in a process of building and social maintenance—through open days and exhibitions—in which their skills formed the basis for which they came together.

Each maker had different networks that brought different skills to the site. They worked from their individual passions, desires, understandings, and practices in a process of 'not-knowing together', creating value beyond the financial or monetary. For example, as spatial practitioners, the social enterprise architecture practice Studio Polpo developed

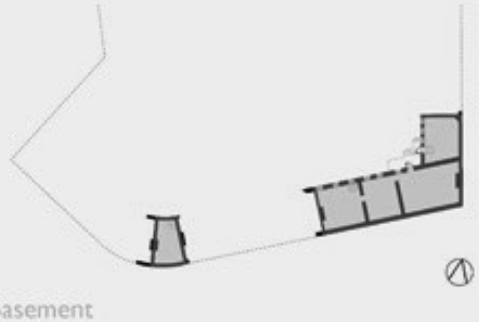
3. David Bollier, *Re-Imagining Value: Insights from the Care Economy, Commons, Cyberspace and Nature* (Heinrich Böll Foundation, 2016).



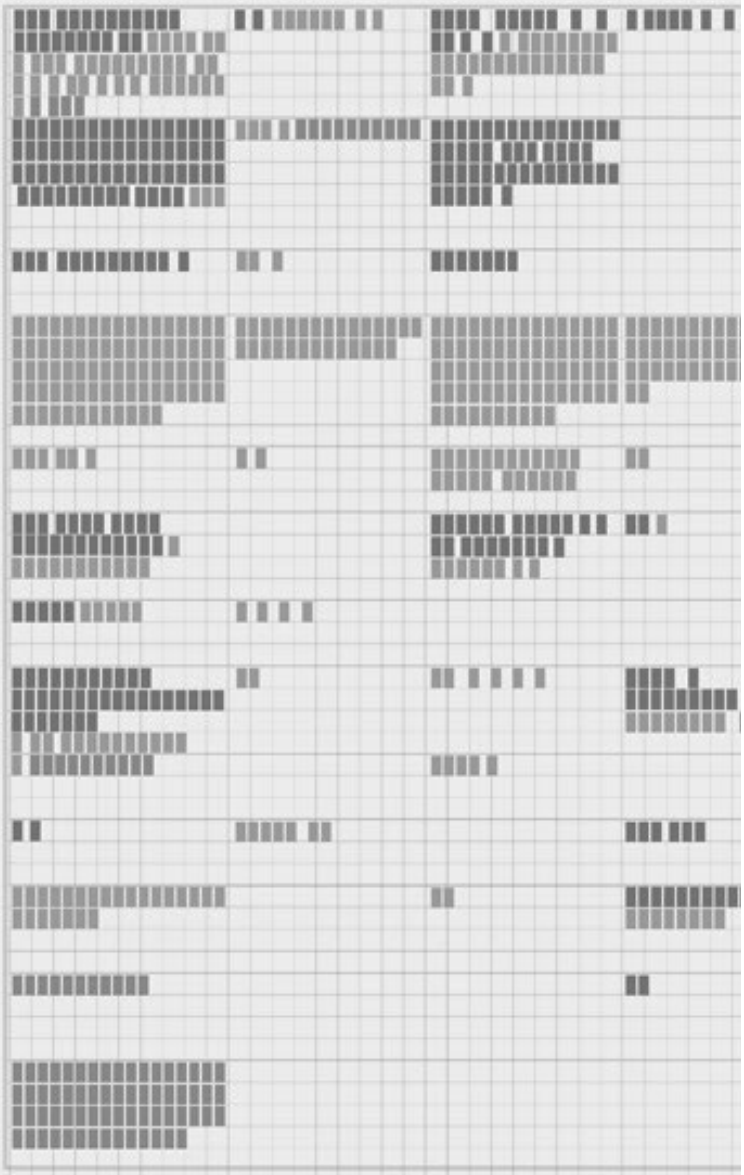
Second Floor

First Floor

Ground Floor



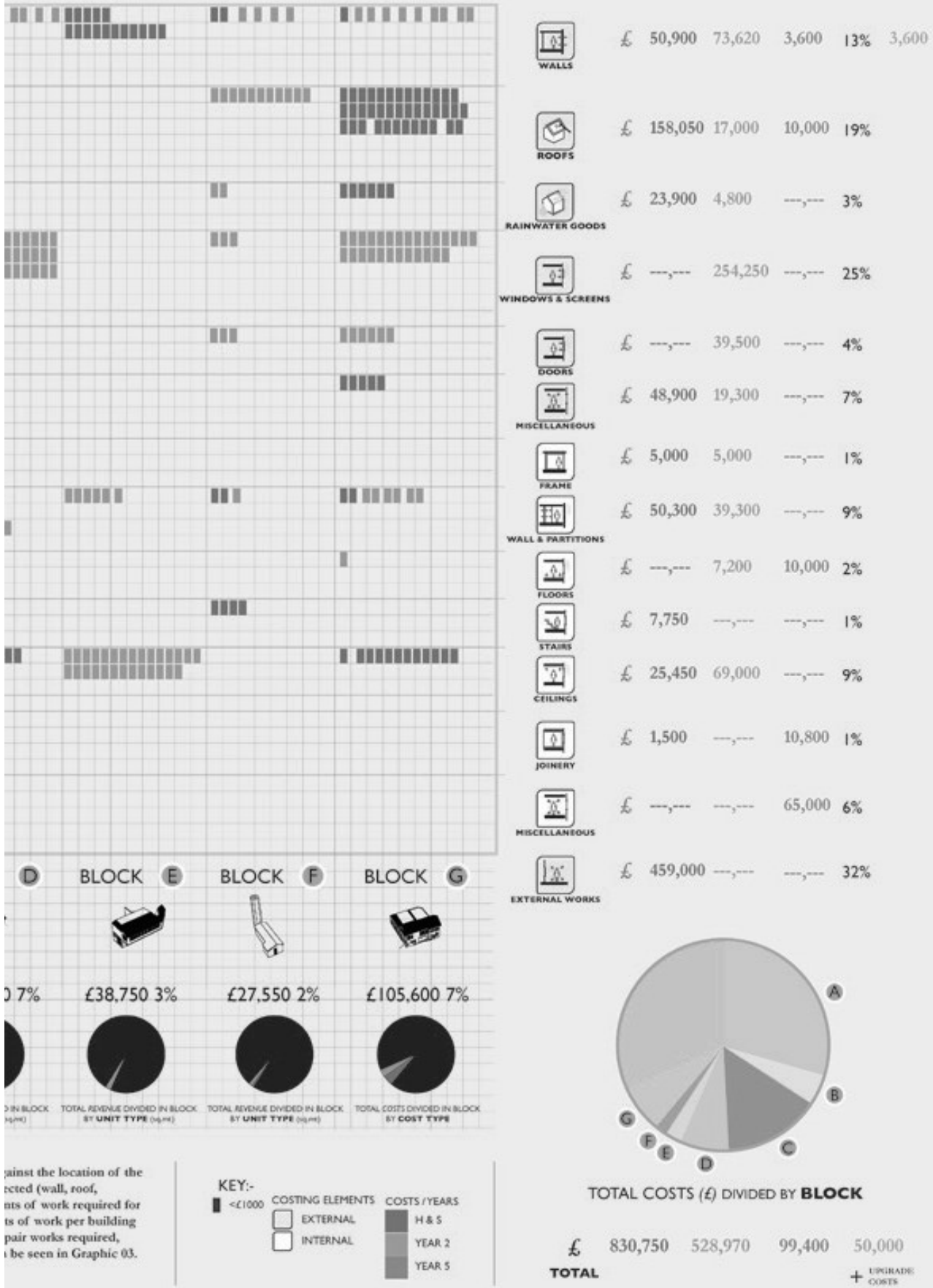
Basement



PORTLAND WORKS

This chart maps budget repair costs, and their priority, ag
work, both in terms of blocks and particular elements affe
windows and doors etc.). The urgency and relative amoun
each block in total can be easily compared, as can amoun
element. This graphic, as well as giving an overview of re
allows funding bids, or strategies to be mapped on, as can

Studio Polpo, September 2013



ainst the location of the
ected (wall, roof,
nts of work required for
ts of work per building
pair works required,
be seen in Graphic 03.

Mapping existing uses in Portland Works @ Studio Polpo, 2013

their role to make these processes visible. They undertook mappings and report making as a form of activist research practice: to mobilise political and local authority and consider how the building could be repaired and developed in ways that could support the existing makers. As suggested by Doina Petrescu et al.,[4] such tools can be used to track inputs and outputs of money, labour, care, and conviviality amongst commoners as a form of "alternative value accounting". As such, they can capture value from the dominant system, in this case, protecting the building from market enclosure and gentrification.

4. Doina Petrescu et al, 'Calculating the Value of the Commons: Generating Resilient Urban Futures', *Environmental Policy and Governance*, 31.3 (2021).

The network was further expanded through the university, linking Portland Works to teaching and research activity at the Sheffield School of Architecture where students speculated and explored relationships between space and activity in the building. Concurrently, volunteers from the neighbourhood carried out surveys of the area to contest the planning application; and cleaned, repaired, and adapted the building and its surroundings. As the organisation began to grow—and the risk and responsibilities became greater—it became increasingly important to find methods of organisation and structure to maintain the commons, ensure security for the tenants with the most significant risk and contribution, and resist further enclosure.

Perhaps the most notable of these modes of organisation was the application of an 'Asset Lock' associated with the purchase. The collective ownership of the building was associated with its community benefit—declared in its articles at Company

House—and shares could not be sold for profit. The property was taken out of the market, and therefore not subject to speculation or imminent enclosure. Rents could be maintained at an affordable level, ensuring tenants could operate without the same pressure to continually grow their business and generate ever larger profits. The value, relating to both cultural value and physical assets, was retained by those who produce it in ways that enable solidarity and generosity. For example, with their added security, makers were able to offer education and training, host events, give to the community both within and beyond the site—and in ways that supported their desires for the continuation and development of their artisan labour and creative work.

INVISIBLE VALUE

By shifting the view of Portland Works from being a static, closed entity to one in a continual process of becoming-common, the project can be reconfigured as a multitude of tools each with specific agencies and timelines. Alongside economic benefit, the ability of people to access and use resources, there are benefits found in learning and proposition in the form of knowledge which is shared amongst the ever-growing network of actors. There are also social and symbolic benefits, particularly when considering the growth from the original 35 tenants to a 500 strong community of shareholders and their associated networks.

This viewing of Portland Works, then, as a progression from the historical sharing of industrial tools amongst the mesters, as latent commons, to the emergence of what Ivan Illich might call 'convivial tools', which "bring people together in creative

CONVIVIALITY

intercourse, and in contact with their environment",[5] does not pretend to be a perfect system. In the urban context—which brings together diverse interests and motivations and layered property rights—they enabled negotiation across difference, resistance to enclosure, and the reduction of value to market economics. Formats ranged from hosting talks about diverse economies as part of a city-wide art festival, producing fundraising albums from musicians based on site, and setting up volunteer training programmes with a retired builder experienced with listed buildings. Shares were issued from June 2011 to June 2012 and the Directors of the company implemented a one-member, one vote-policy; whether somebody had invested £100 or £20,000, they still had the same voting rights in the organisation. Launched with a performance by Portland Works resident musicians, existing and new tenants could purchase 50 shares for as little as £50, or invest up to £20,000, ensuring more just representation and control over the company. It also acknowledged the uneven risk felt by tenants and other shareholders. These convivial tools iteratively and continually resist the forces of enclosure and support the struggle to maintain the urban commons—sometimes emerging from within the group of commoners, sometimes adapting the tools of the market to their own ends.

5. Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (Harper & Row, 1973).

A key moment in the history of the Works was taking the building out of the property market. The success of this move was because the mode for doing so grew roots up by careful and long-term work to understand the nuances and needs of the businesses and tenants. The Industrial and Provident Society, which later became the Community Benefit

Visitors and tenants attending a Portland Works Open Day @ Andy Denial, 2012.

Society, allowed Portland Works to involve numerous members with clearly defined community purpose, specific to the context and capacities of the locality. The greatest cost (and risk) of the project was the repair and maintenance of the building, which was Grade II* Listed, and any programme for renovation. In respect of this, it was crucial that the requirements of grants and funding bodies could be aligned with the sustainability and diversity of the businesses. The businesses could not afford to close for any extended period of time, so renovation programmes had to work around these needs. Finally, the wealth that was held together around Portland Works was in the motivations and care of many different actors. For this to remain sustainable, those who carried out the work also should be those who make the decisions about the project's future.

Opposite page: Poster calling for community participants to help purchase Portland Works building @ Studio Polpo, 2013.