

## Commoning Work and Healthcare – Potentials for transformative care

Luca Tschiderer, Sarah Hartmann, Susan Thieme – Institute of Geography, University of Bern

The Commons have gained increased attention in sustainability and social transformation debates at least since Elinor Ostrom's "Governing of the Commons" in 1990 and her subsequent award of the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economy in 2009. However, until recently most debates concerning the commons were focused on specific resources and their governance, so "resources held in common" (de Angelis 2017, p11) rather than on the social processes behind the Commons. More recent literature however points our attention away from resources and starts to think the Commons through the relational processes of social organization inherent in Commons, namely 'commoning' (de Angelis 2017, Caffentzis & Federici 2014, and others). For de Angelis (2017) in particular, a foundational element of the Commons implies that a plurality claims ownership of not only a resource but the process and governance of that what it is to be commoned. This means, that commoning is always more than a material transformation but also a social and political transformation of social organization (ibid). In this sense, thinking through the Commons opens up opportunities to rethink central categories of capitalist (re)production such as work, care and health through the Commons: what kind of transformations, emancipations, enclosures, (re)appropriations, in short systems of collective self-governance are opening up in everyday work, and with it labour struggles, that point towards (re)claiming work and care as Commons?

Some research to this regard has already been done on worker recuperated companies. For instance, Azzellini (2018a,b), following Marx's distinction between labour and labour power, argues that the best way to use and organize labour would be 'to govern it collectively as a commons' (Azzellini 2018a, 767). Worker recuperated companies (WRCs), companies that are self-managed and reclaimed by workers after they have been closed down by their owners, are one example and entry point into commoning practices of work. While they still operate in a capitalist economy and hence are prone to capitalist enclosures, they offer a counter-rationality to the capitalist organization of work Azzellini argues. Exactly here, in the dialectic relationship between the Commons, state laws and capitalist markets WRCs define a space for struggle and conflict that is essential for the production of new values and practices 'based on solidarity and mutualism' (Azzellini 2018a, 773) and hence show their transformative potential. Similarly, Zechner (2021) has shown how child-care is organized as a Commons in Barcelona, highlighting above all the vital aspect of exercising commoning practices to build power:

„When we speak of the production of the common, we don't just speak about a way of managing or a kind of access or some such thing, we are talking about unfolding the collective capacity to generate material wealth – autonomous in some form – that can allow us to conquest fields of political autonomy“ (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2017 in Zechner 2021, 55)

In a similar vein Grenzdörffer (2021) investigates worker cooperatives by integrating the labour geographical concept of 'labour agency' with debates in research on socio-ecological transformations. Labour agency highlights the potentials of (wage) workers in transforming their workplaces, not only in regard to health- and wellbeing but also, and this is central, in their capacity to build (new) structures of participation and decision making in how production, and labour, is organized in a specific work setting. Worker-owned or worker managed companies provide a prime example that highlights the transformative effects workers can have on creating new paradigms, especially on „spaces of reproduction and economic practices *beyond* growth“ (Grenzdörffer 2021, 10, italics in original). Labour agency hence is an invitation to refocus the attention of transformation research on the people and everyday practices already existing at the margins of capitalist economies and thus shares some of the ideas and debates generated in the Commons or also community economies literature. However, as Grenzdörffer (2021) already mentions, the majority of workers are still subjugated under wage relations based on capital accumulation, the question hence remains „how forms of transformative labour geographies can be transferred and extended to different scales“ (ibid, 11)?

The following contribution to the Momentum 2022 congress takes up the invitation of Grenzdörffer to discuss the potential of this new and promising field of inquiry by focusing on care and explicitly health-care. Health care represents the more general tendency of the commodification of work, health and care-related knowledge and

technologies and raises questions about capacities and capabilities for social, economic, ecological innovation, emancipation, and justice in search for more sustainable 'work'. Furthermore the topic of health care requires linking with scholars of mobility justice and more recently the commoning of mobility (e.g. Nikolaeva et al. 2018) - acknowledging the high (international) mobility of health care workers, patients and technologies (e.g. Thieme et al. 2022, Hartmann 2019). We are extending the scale of *transformative labour geographies* to classical and highly institutional places of reproduction such as hospitals, care homes and in-house care and are asking to what extent these strictly hierarchical, but highly diverse spaces with a multiplicity of interrelations to health, education, work, community, mobility and power regimes can still offer spaces to practice transformative labour agency? What potentials lie in using strategies of commoning to transform the institutional health-care system into a more just, inclusive, and emancipating place of work? How can we contribute to debates on the future of work, moving beyond small-scale, niche interventions and changes to truly transformative new politics of work? But also, what pitfalls, enclosures and even risks for capitalist appropriation and labour intensification through enacting „false“ responsibilities or new governmentalities of self-exploitation could emerge in these approaches? This contribution shall provide a theoretical discussion of these aspects, linking debates in the literature around Commons with labour geographies and care geographies.

### Literature:

De Angelis, Massimo. 2017. „Omnia Sunt Communia: On the Commons and the Transformation to Postcapitalism.“ Bloomsbury Academic.

Azzellini, Dario. 2018a. “Labour as a Commons: The Example of Worker-Recuperated Companies.” *Critical Sociology* 44 (4–5): 763–76.

Azzellini, Dario. 2018b. „vom protest zum sozialen prozess: betriebsbesetzungen und arbeiten in selbstverwaltung.“ Eine Flugschrift, VSA: Verlag Hamburg

Caffentzis, G., Federici, S. 2014. „Commons against and beyond Capitalism.“ *Community Development Journal*, 49. <http://cdj.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/doi/10.1093/cdj/bsu006> .

Grenzdörffer, Sinje Marlene. 2021. “Transformative Perspectives on Labour Geographies – The Role of Labour Agency in Processes of Socioecological Transformations.” *Geography Compass* 15 (6). <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12565>.

Hartmann S. 2019. „Mobilising patients towards transnational healthcare markets – insights into the mobilising work of medical travel facilitators in Delhi.“ *Mobilities*. 14:1. 71-86.

Nikolaeva A, Adey P, Cresswell T, Lee JY, Nóvoa A, Temenos C. 2019. „Commoning mobility: Towards a new politics of mobility transitions.“ *Trans Inst Br Geogr*. 2019;00:1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12287>

Thieme, S.; Richter, M. & Ammann, C. 2022. „Economic Rationalities and Notions of ‘Good Cure and Care’.“ *Medical Anthropology*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01459740.2022.2037082>

Zechner, Manuela. 2021. „Commoning Care & Collective Power: Childcare Commons and the Micropolitics of Municipalism in Barcelona.“ *transversal texts*.