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Public-Common Partnerships, *Autogestion*, and the Right to the City.

Keir Milburn and Bertie Russell

Contemporary politics is marked by a gap between the necessary and the possible. The necessary is conditioned by the reliance of human civilization on what Rockström et al. (2009) call earth-system processes. The best scientific estimates of the tipping points at which these processes will exit their stable states can be mapped into what can be considered the 'safe operating space for humanity'. It is necessary, Rockström et al. argue, for humanity to alter its social, economic, and technical systems so that it fits within this space. Raworth (2017) has usefully supplemented this schema by extrapolating from the UN convention on human rights to define 'social boundaries', which, when added to the natural boundaries mapped by Rockström, produce 'a safe *and just* operating space for humanity'. The complication for political strategy, however, is that the scale of transformation implied by these schemas is inversely linked to the timescale in which the transformation must be enacted. The longer serious action is put off the more dramatic the necessary action becomes.

Whilst this 'safe and just operating space' gives us a clear idea of what we need to collectively achieve, it currently seems impossible to get there. This gap between the necessary and the possible is the impasse within which humanity is currently caught. But while the natural boundaries that are conditioning the necessary must be taken as somewhat of a given, political possibility is much more amenable to human action. The point of producing schemas such as 'a safe and just operating space for humanity' is that we can *backcast* from where we need to arrive to determine the preconditions for arriving there. Yet any effort at *forecasting* from the limited sense of what's currently socially and politically possible leaves us in a bind –an impasse– where what is physically necessary appears socially and politically impossible.

If we are to bridge the gap between the necessary and the possible we must develop strategies which, as Kathi Weeks (2011: 220) puts it, 'point toward the possibility of a break, however partial, with the present. [They] must be capable of cognitively reorienting us far

enough out of the present organization of social relations that some kind of critical distance is achieved and the political imagination of a different future is called to work'. Such strategies will have to include what Erik Olin Wright (2010: 6) calls 'Real Utopias', which involve the 'utopian design of institutions' that can act as 'accessible waystations' oriented towards the necessary but on the very edge of what currently seems possible.

Commons, we argue, represent a good point of departure for such utopian institutional design. Unlike public institutions, they're a social form that presupposes not just common ownership but also common governance. Indeed, rather than simply a different form of property, the concept of the commons imply 'neither the resource, the community that gathers around it, nor the protocols for its stewardship, but the dynamic interaction between all these elements'. Taken together, these elements also contribute to the emergence of a 'paradigm shift' that sees 'commons and the act of commoning' as 'a world-view' (P2P Foundation 2019). While their widespread existence prove it's possible to create and tend commons under present conditions, and indeed that commons can co-exist with capitalism, they contain an institutional logic (or world-view) that points beyond contemporary constrictions of possibility. As Dardot and Laval argue, 'the politics of the common demands, in the most systematic and profound manner possible, the widespread introduction of institutional *self-government*' (Dardot & Laval 2019: 313).

The chapter will proceed through providing a critical engagement with Lefebvre's theorization of *autogestion* and the Right to the City, suggesting that it offers an entry point for conceptualizing a politics of self-government that is both in, against and beyond the state. Notwithstanding his vehement anti-statist perspective, we argue that Lefebvre warned against those projects or visions of commoning that contented themselves with producing a patchwork of initiatives 'outside' of the state, whilst disavowing engagement with broader questions of constituted power. Instead, his vision provides us with the abstract challenge of developing approaches to our collective self-governance –a politics of the common– that also finds ways to both utilize and turn the state against itself.

The remainder of the chapter will outline our proposed new model of ownership and governance which seeks to embody such a directional strategy, the Public-Common Partnership (PCP). We argue that PCPs offer a strategic approach that sets in motion

processes that work to shift the boundaries of social and political possibility, developing a politics of the common that takes the question of the state seriously. The project of *autogestion* should be seen precisely as both a movement and a horizon that is fundamentally directional in nature, one that recognizes yet pushes beyond our current social reality. Likewise, PCPs provide a realistic mode of departure that both challenges some of those forces that *restrict* political possibility whilst promoting forms of ownership and governance that *enable* different forms of social action.

Autogestion and the Right to the City

Lefebvre first conceptualized the Right to the City (1968) as both *vision* and *practice*; a *vision* of a world in which our collective experience is no longer shaped by the abstract forces of capital, and those *practices* through which the collective capacities of citizens are activated to produce differentiated space. The Right to the City has, therefore, always been a fundamentally subversive and radically democratic concept, one that speaks to our visceral experience of relative powerlessness and disenfranchisement, but at the same time urges us to find methods to collectively shape our own affairs. That the Right to the City is experienced so viscerally may go some way to explaining its popularity; as Margit Mayer has noted, the slogan ‘resonates with activists, as it makes sense as a claim and a banner which to mobilize[...] an oppositional demand, which challenges the claims of the rich and powerful’. Yet at the same time, it has ‘gained significant traction with international NGOs and advocacy organizations [which] enumerate specific rights which a progressive urban politics should particularly protect’, but that foreclose any broader vision of transformation in favor of ‘claims for inclusion in the current system as it exists’ (2009: 367-9).

Rather than an abstracted set of rights to be guaranteed for a homogeneous and passive citizenry, Lefebvre’s vision of the Right to the City cannot be separated from his account of *autogestion*. As Mark Purcell has summarized, this concept of *autogestion* speaks to the:

“struggle from below by people who have decided to take on the responsibility of governing themselves, who gain confidence through their successes, and who

are able to demonstrate, bit by bit, that the state is no longer necessary[...] In autogestion, we do not smash the state and then begin managing our own affairs. Rather we manage our own affairs, we work hard at it, and we get to the point where it is evident that we can truly govern ourselves. Only then does the withering of the state truly kick in. Autogestion thus offers the possibility of a withering from below. It is a clear alternative to a failed model of a vanguard party seizing the state in order to impose conditions that will cause the state to wither away” (2013: 40-41).

Far from an abstracted set of liberal rights to be enshrined within the existing institutions of the state, the enactment of the Right to the City is thus an active process of *replacing* the state – understood not just as an institution but ‘a form of social relations, a class practice [and] a process which projects certain forms of organisation upon our everyday activity’ (London-Edinburgh Weekend Return Group 1979) – with diverse forms of collective social organization that enable citizens not only to ‘occupy already-produced urban space’ but also ‘to produce urban spaces so that it meets the needs of inhabitants’ (Purcell 2002: 103).

It is this vision of collective self-governance-beyond-the-state that has given rise to a wealth of research focused on subversive urban practices considered to be demonstrative of the Right to the City. From tent cities in Tel Aviv to social centres in Berlin (Kemp et al. 2015), squatting movements from Detroit to Spain (Vasudevan 2017) and Rome (Grazioli 2017), community greening and guerrilla gardening in Manhattan (Baudry 2012), and a wide range of ‘DIY-urbanisms’ that extend from the painting of public staircases in Istanbul to the DIY design of park benches in Copenhagen, an almost unintelligible breadth of practices are argued to be guided by a ‘Lefebvre-inspired logic, the right to use and shape the city is based on the activist’s inhabitation of the city’ (Fabian & Samson 2016: 168).

Whilst we share an enthusiasm for all those practices that contest how people experience, use, and produce the city, we concur with Iveson’s assessment that ‘appropriating urban space for unintended uses does not in itself give birth to a new kind of city’, and that there is nothing inherent to the ‘appropriation and alternative uses of urban space’ that suggests these initiatives will ‘coalesce into a wider politics of the city’ (2013: 942). Where some of

these examples offer somewhat ephemeral and symbolic moments of dissent against the dominant logics that (re)produce the city, others prove to be longer-lasting efforts at collective appropriation and self-management – not least initiatives such as community land-trusts that begin to enact different relationships of collective ownership and governance (see Thompson 2015). Yet, the fundamental challenge that many of these practices face is how to take the step *beyond* being small prefigurative lifeboats of ‘otherness’, and instead orientate themselves as part of a self-expansive dynamic capable of coalescing into the kind of broader project of transformation that the situation demands.

One starting point for this is to return to a more nuanced reading of Lefebvre’s own conception of *autogestion*. Lefebvre was vehemently anti-statist, asserting that ‘there is no “good State”[...] The State crushes that which resists it; it makes difference disappear’ (1979: 130). Indeed, contrary to those revolutionary strategies premised on seizing the state, Lefebvre suggests that ‘*autogestion* calls the State into question as a constraining force erected above society as a whole, capturing and demanding the rationality that is inherent to social relations[...] *Autogestion* cannot escape this brutal obligation: to constitute itself as a power which is not that of the state’ (1979: 147). Whilst some have suggested that Lefebvre’s proclamations on the state demonstrate a strong anarchistic tendency, Lefebvre is nonetheless known to have declared “I’m a Marxist of course[...] so that one day we can all become anarchists!” (in Merrifield 2002: 128).

Nonetheless, Lefebvre’s irrefutable anti-statism has generally led to a somewhat polarized interpretation of *autogestion* – and the Right to the City more generally – that focuses on initiatives that exist ‘outside’ of the state and, at least nominally, function in opposition to the logic of capital. One thing shared by the roll-call of examples given above – from squatting movements to community greening – is that they are positioned as ‘alternatives’ that exist in-spite-of and despite the state. Yet Lefebvre himself warns against a ‘narrow, doomed conception’ of *autogestion* that ‘tends to dissolve society into distinct units, communes, businesses, services’, what we refer to as little lifeboats of autonomy, suggesting that ‘an *autogestion* that only organized itself into partial unities, without achieving globality [*le global*], would be destined to failure’ (1966: 148-9).

Indeed, Lefebvre’s conception of *autogestion* recognizes that ‘the global incorporates the level of strategic decision, of politics, of political parties’, and that ‘for *autogestion* to be consolidated and expanded, it has to occupy the strong points of a social structure that constantly bridle against it’ (1966: 148-157). As such, rather than a crude anti-statism that forecloses any consideration of what is to be done about the problem of the State, we read Lefebvre’s concept of *autogestion* as posing the seemingly paradoxical challenge of understanding *how* the State can be manipulated against itself as part of a general movement to govern ourselves *without* the State. Or to put it otherwise, given the socio-material assemblage that constitutes the State is unquestionably one of the many ‘strong points’ of our social structure, what would it mean for us to occupy these strong points whilst remaining committed to a self-propelling and expansive project of collective autonomy?

We are, of course, writing in a different historical period to the one Lefebvre was addressing. But the urgent need for radical transformation has, if anything, been increased by the multiple related crises we currently face. A radical democratization of society is required to avoid an authoritarian ‘climate leviathan’¹ solution, but that doesn’t mean putting hope in some ‘vanguard party seizing the state in order to impose conditions that will cause the state to wither away’ (Purcell 2013: 41). Rather, we need to take seriously Lefebvre’s thoughts on the place of the State within a general project of *autogestion*. With ‘the State unable to coexist peacefully alongside radicalized and generalized *autogestion*’, what would it mean for ‘the latter [to] submit the former to “grassroots” control’ (Lefebvre 1966: 150)? And what would it mean to take democracy – in every sense of the word – seriously?

In the remainder of this chapter, we set out one strategic vision for generalizing a ‘global’ project of *autogestion*, retaining a critical anti-statism, whilst taking seriously the challenge of incorporating ‘the level of strategic decision, of politics, of political parties’. Drawing on the innovative governance and ownership formation of an energy company in Wolfhagen, Germany, we’ve developed a conceptual framework that we term *Public-Common*

1

¹ Climate Leviathan is the name Mann and Wainwright (2018) give to potential for the huge threat posed by the climate crisis to predispose people to accept authoritarian rule.

Partnerships (PCPs). In an effort to 'reorientat[e] decision-making away from the state and toward the production of urban space', we argue PCPs provide us with a deliberate direction of travel and a dynamic and expansive process of 'fundamentally shifting control away from capital and the state and toward urban inhabitants' (Purcell 2002: 101).

Refiguring the Circulation of Economic Value

The premise for our proposition of PCPs is that the commons can act as the elementary institutional form of a self-expansive project towards an ever deepening democratization of society. Whilst commons can be formed through a multitude of alternative types of ownership and governance, they are fundamentally 'not the same as government because, in its ideal form, it is about the commoners owning and managing resources as directly and locally as possible. It usually entails a significant measure of participation, transparency, decentralised control and accountability – factors that are not always present when the state is managing a resource' (Bollier 2007: 12). Commons are thus substantially different to the forms of public ownership that characterized the mid-20th Century project of the British Labor movement, which retained a top-down and often corporatized approach, and that in some cases (such as the National Coal Board) drew their executive class directly from private corporations.

Whilst we might include some of the cooperative and social enterprise sector as part of the commons, the legal form of the 'cooperative', 'community interest company', or otherwise is not synonymous with the commons. Just as we cannot make sense of 'capital' by simply looking at the corporate form of a limited liability company, so we cannot make sense of the commons simply by looking at an individual institutional form such as the cooperative. We rather need to look at how value is produced, captured and circulated, and how *different* institutional forms could contribute to the creation of *different* circuits of value. In referring to the PCP as an elementary institutional form, we are therefore not only focussing on intrinsic characteristics, but PCPs capacity for recombination and expansion as part of a wider circulation of the commons.

Of course, cooperatives and common-resource regimes have been around a long time and they have not yet expanded to world changing dimensions –in short, they have failed to develop into a material force capable of changing the horizons of political or social possibility. There are material reasons for that; chief amongst them is the difficulties cooperatives encounter in getting financing from the private sector, which serves to significantly limit present social and political possibility. PCPs set out to address this problem whilst also triggering a dynamic of definancialization, that is to decrease 'the role of financial motives, financial markets, financial actors and financial institutions in the operation of the domestic and international economies' (Lawrence 2014: n.p.). Crucially, if we can limit the conditioning of economic decisions by the needs of capital we will open up scope for alternative forms of governance. This, as we will explore a little later, provides a new lens through which to examine institutional structure. It produces the compulsion to facilitate the production and circulation of the competencies and forms of knowledge that truly democratic decision making (*autogestion*) requires.

We intend PCPs to function as the cutting edge of a wider project to socialize and commonize the way we process economic-social decisions. The aim is to produce a self-expansive circuit of the commons, one that will bypass the need for private financing, sidestep the mechanisms through which finance capital exercises its discipline and structures the economy, and help foster new capabilities and a new commonsense that changes how we relate to one another and the resources and infrastructure we rely upon.

Common Ingredients of Public-Common Partnerships

The PCP model is less a fixed institutional form, and more a series of principles and processes that need to be designed and implemented on a largely case-by-case basis. They are not limited in their application to any particular resource or asset, although there are certain areas which will be either more pressing (such as municipal energy production) or more easily implemented (such as the changes in land tenure) than others. In practice, there are likely to be some "stock recipes" that emerge as we become more experienced in the development of PCPs, but successful implementation will invariably require a blend of technical expertise, lived experience, and place-based knowledge.

Rather than a monocultural institutional form applied indiscriminately and without connection to the needs and desires of different contexts, PCPs should emerge as an overlapping patchwork of institutions that respond to the peculiarities of the asset and the scale at which the PCP will operate (whether it be city-region wide energy production in Greater Manchester or the commercial activity of a North London market), and those individuals and communities that will act together as commoners. The very design of PCPs must therefore be a democratic one which, from the outset, considers the most effective, responsive, and equitable institutional processes to facilitate us acting in common.

Notwithstanding their heterogeneity, there are a handful of common ingredients that define PCPs as institutional mechanisms orientated towards the capitalization of collective self-governance:

1. Joint Enterprise

Conventional understandings of democratic control see the state (whether that be local, regional or national) as owning the infrastructure (such as a municipal energy company), controlling who sits on the board of directors, and benefiting from any financial surplus produced by the enterprise. In this instance, the 'place' of democratic activity remains located firmly in the institutions of the state, primarily through representative politics at the local/national level, in some cases coupled with processes such as the limited co-production of services or small-scope participatory budgets. This is a non-expansive conception of democracy in which managerial knowledge and competencies are retained within a specialized sector of the population.

PCPs are models of joint ownership and governance, in which the two principal parties are a state agent (such as a municipal council) and a Common Association (such as a cooperative or community interest company). In the first instance, the Common Association sits on the board of directors of the Joint Enterprise alongside representatives of the local authorities and a panel of stakeholders relevant to the operations of the PCP. While the State would represent wider (and complex) social interests beyond those of the Common Association, the panel of stakeholders either represents more specific interest groups relevant to the PCP

in question (such as trade unions or consumer groups) or represent holders of specific knowledge and expertise related to the context within the specific PCP operates. These might include bodies such as the environment agency or independent experts whose knowledge would be vital to the PCPs operations. As we will elucidate further, we anticipate a certain transformation in the role of such experts as their knowledge base circulates through the commoners association.

Whilst there are numerous examples that demonstrate how the state and civic society can be brought together in the directorate of public utilities –such as the governing council of *Eau de Paris* (the Parisian water company that was brought back into public control in 2010), *SEMAPA* (the Cochabamban water company that was democratized following the Bolivian 'water wars' in 2000) or the Sacramento Municipal Utility District (the sixth largest community-owned energy company in the US)– there are relatively few cases, in which a Common Association is a key feature.

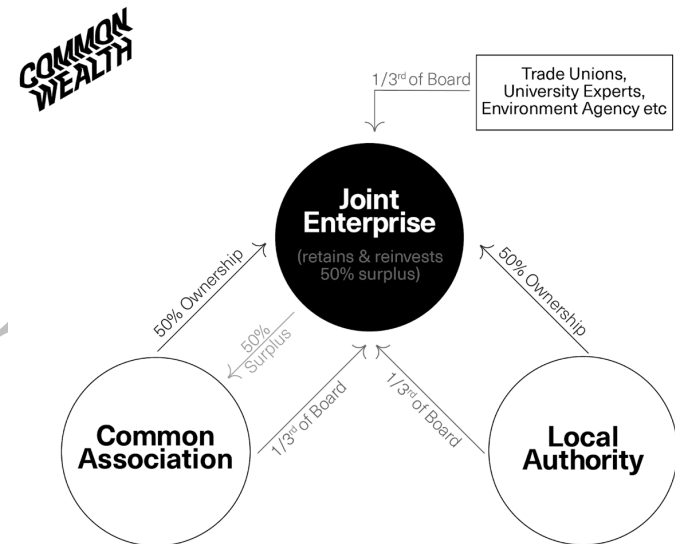


Figure 1: Visualization of PCP structure

The structure of the Joint Enterprise produces *three* democratic fora:

- The state apparatus, where the democratic act is primarily representative electoral politics;
- The governance of the Joint Enterprise (comprised of representatives of the local authority, the Common Association, and parties appropriate to the Joint Enterprise);
- The Common Association itself, with its own membership and independent mechanisms of participation and decision-making.

The democratic structure and membership of the Common Association is highly contingent on the nature of the Joint Enterprise. For example, in the German town of Wolfhagen (one of the few examples of where a Common Association sits on the board of directors), a joint enterprise energy company was established between the local authority and 264 citizens that had constituted a new cooperative, the BEG Wolfhagen. While membership in the cooperative was initially open to any citizen of Wolfhagen that purchased a membership share, membership of the cooperative is now open to anyone who purchases their energy from the company². In some cases, such a membership structure would be relatively straightforward to replicate (such as for a water utility). A community land trust, social care service, or local market would however demand careful consideration of the most appropriate scale, legal form, and membership criteria.

B. *Distributed Democratic Control of Surplus Value*

A core feature of all PCPs is the substantial democratic control of surplus value produced through the Joint Enterprise. This feature is essential to the capitalization of collective self-governance and the wider disarticulation of the state. In the first instance, a portion of any surplus is retained by the joint enterprise to be reinvested towards its operational goals (such as delivering a zero-carbon energy supply for the city, building repairs to a market, and so on), and is thus under the collective control of the board of directors (which variously will include worker representatives, technical experts, and so on, alongside the appropriate state authorities and the Common Association). Crucially however, a significant portion of surplus value would be transferred directly to the Common Association which, through its own

² For more information on the structure of Wolfhagen's energy system, see Russell (2019).

democratic structures, are responsible for its redistribution in support of the development of further commoning projects.

Wolfhagen's energy partnership provides some limited inspiration for this. Whilst members in the cooperative receive an annual dividend (which was around 4% in 2016), the remaining funds flow into the cooperative's energy saving fund. Overseen by the cooperatives Energy Advisory Board (comprised of 9 cooperative members along with one each from the local energy agency, the Stadtwerk, and the municipality), the fund is then redistributed to support strategies and initiatives for increasing energy efficiency among its members. In practice, this fund has been used towards quite modest consumer-oriented goals, such as providing subsidies on the purchase of electric bikes and programmable radiator thermostats.

In the case of PCPs, where joint capitalization has been part of the process of establishing a Joint Enterprise (as discussed in the forthcoming point), any personal return should be capped at the total value of the initial stake provided by members of the Common Association (e.g. those who invested a £250 membership share would receive a maximum lifetime return of £250 plus interest on that share). More significantly –and essential to the definition of a PCP– are the restrictions and guidelines as to how the Common Association utilizes the net surplus. Unlike the Wolfhagen case, the principle usage of any surplus managed by the Common Association is to provide financial support to other PCP *without expectation of financial return*.

Whether done independently or in collaboration with other PCPs, this works (in the first instance) as a wealth transfer to support the development of other PCPs. For example, the Common Association of a Greater Manchester Energy Company could help finance a Haringey-based Common Association (with its own membership, democratic structures, and so on) in their purchase of the Seven Sisters market, supporting the implementation of their current community plan, whilst bringing that asset under the governance of a separate PCP.

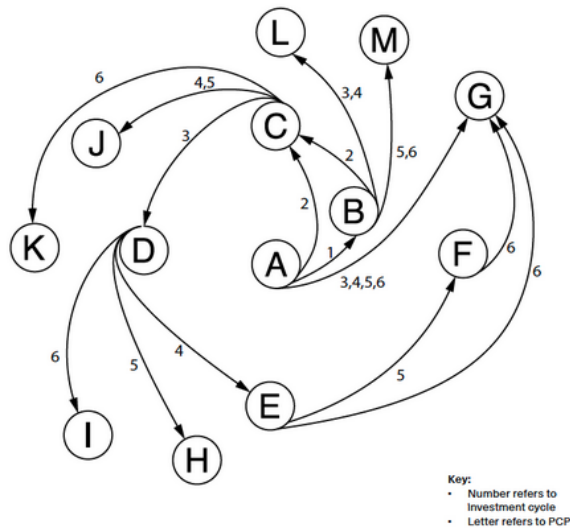


Figure 2. Self-expanding 'centrifugal' capitalization of PCPs

It is this centrifugal financial dynamic (see Fig. 2) that allows us to emphasize the importance of thinking of PCPs not in isolation, but as part of a self-expanding circuit. For every new PCP supported through such a process, the net capacity of the circuit increases, which in turn accelerates the capacity for financial support of further (and potentially more expensive) PCPs. Not only is wealth *transferred* from one initiative to another, the wealth is *transformed* from 'surplus value' produced through one PCP into common use value. Rather than surplus value being treated as a source of investment and future returns (i.e. capital), it becomes a source of power that enables Common Associations to support the development of further projects of commoning. The net effect of this is to create an ever-expanding movement of decommodification and collective democratization, which is why we identify the underlying purpose of this circuit of PCPs as *the capitalization of collective self-governance*.

C. Joint Capitalization

In cases where assets are already owned by the state, joint capitalization may not be necessary; in the case of the Seven Sisters market, for example, the land (owned by Transport for London) could be directly transferred into a PCP. Whilst therefore not a necessary condition, there is an opportunity for joint capitalization of a PCP, with the state-agent providing direct contributions, loans and underwriting of non-state contributions, and the Common Association most likely contributing through crowdfunding, bonds and membership-shares (along, crucially, with inward capitalization from other PCPs).

For example, the 264 citizens that established BEG Wolfhagen pursued a cooperative share offer (valued at €500 each, with a maximum of 5 per member), which raised €1.47m of the €2.3m required to gain a 25% stake in the energy company. Given the shortfall between cooperative capital and the valuation of the 25% stake, the city granted the cooperative the option to gradually capitalize its stake through a loan. This further period of capitalization took around 12 months, with the cooperative fully covering its €2.3million share by the Spring of 2013. At the end of 2016, BEG Wolfhagen had 814 members –representing almost 7% of Wolfhagen's population– with a cooperative wealth of more than €3.9 million. Now established, any new cooperative members are given a two-year period to pay for their initial share in €20 instalments, helping to broaden access to the cooperative for lower income households.

As the circuit of the commons develops, it will likely take on more of the burden of capitalizing the Common Associations of PCPs. But what incentives does the model offer on the public side of the partnership? In practice, PCPs begin to address two of the determining risks that causes conservative decision making among local authorities –political risk and cost. The opportunity of joint capitalization, especially when this comes inwards from other PCPs, has the potential to address financial barriers (such as the establishment of the energy company infrastructure, the collective purchasing of a market building, initial subsidization of a platform taxi cooperative, the purchasing of land for a community land trust, and so on). Whether there has been joint capitalization or not, joint enterprises also go some way to address issues of political risk. Whereas state authorities are often averse to risk-taking for fear of losing political capital –and ultimately power– joint enterprises address this through reframing initiatives as collaborations and shared experiments to be worked on.

Refiguring the Circulation of Knowledge

The common ingredients of a PCP aim to insulate its governance from the disciplining effects of finance. This dynamic of definancialization is key to overcoming one of the principal ideological and material limits to the current sense of social and political possibility, but it does, of course, open up problems of its own. With maximizing returns on investment no longer acting as the bottom line of decision-making, then what values or principles should replace it and what model of governance will follow?³

The short answer is that partial protection from the logic of capital opens up room for commoners to collectively decide on the values upon which they wish to operate. The role of the joint governance structure is to set certain limits or conditions on such discussion. These limits include the requirement to consider the interests of those outside the Common Association. Other limits, however, will be of a more technical nature determined by the experts on the panel of stakeholders. It is this latter consideration that presents another angle from which to think through *autogestion*. In addition to the circulation of economic surplus we should consider the circulation of knowledge and competencies. We can do so in regards to two related problems.

Firstly, we can say that bottom-up *autogestion* can produce better, more robust decisions than top-down management because it provides better access to the kinds of tacit knowledge or know-how that gets built up through actually doing a task. Tacit knowledge is more difficult to communicate and therefore circulates more slowly than explicit knowledge. The coordination costs of bottom-up *autogestion* appear to be higher than those of top-down managerialism but the extra time required is really the cost of including tacit knowledge in decision-making.⁴

³ While expanding the circuit of the commons requires a surplus across the circuit as a whole, the protection provided by PCPs from the demands of financialization reduce the production of surplus to just one strategic consideration among others. For an examination of how this might work out see Milburn and Russell (2019).

⁴ For a discussion of the link between tacit knowledge and democratic decision-making see Wainwright (2018).

Secondly, in contemporary management a great deal of operating knowledge is siloed within a small managerial or technical class, meaning that even under conditions of nominal equality in decision making, there exists a substantial democratic deficit because the knowledge *does not flow*. If PCPs –and other models of collective ownership– are to help develop new parameters of social and political possibility, then this technical knowledge must be made to circulate. There will always be an accumulation of technical knowledge which is both necessary and specialist, and that will never be generalized across a population. Yet without increased porosity between this technical knowledge and the wider population, a fundamental disjuncture between *technical* and *socio-political* possibility will remain.

Establishing the correct degree of porosity in the flow of knowledge requires establishing the mode through which expert knowledge can best interact with tacit knowledge. We would, for instance, want to prevent the overflow of the authority attached to experts into problems and areas beyond the scope of their expertise. In this we can return to where we began. Rockström et.al (2009) use their expert knowledge to establish the parameters of a safe operating space for humanity within which the precise organizational and economic models to be adopted can be experimented with and therefore freely worked out. Similarly, we have endeavored to outline only the common ingredients of PCP rather than an explicit blueprint to allow the specificities of each project to be worked out in situ.

Conclusion

Lefebvre noted that whilst '*autogestion* can be only one element of a political strategy [...] it will be the essential element, giving value to the rest, and without which the rest would be worth nothing' (1966: 150). As we have contended, this is not a call for us to abandon the state in our thinking, but rather to consider how we can use the state against itself; engaging with the 'level of strategic decision' (ibid: 148) so as to 'reorientat[e] decision-making away from the state and towards the production of urban space' (Purcell 2002: 101). In doing so, the generalized movement of *autogestion* demands the fundamental reconstruction of democratic agency, a new collective relationship to (the production of) space, and the opening of new political horizons.

As Dardot & Laval have argued, ‘examining the common as the effective principle of institutional transformation thus presupposes an exercise in political imagination’, a search for ‘forms of self-governance [that] is necessarily difficult and tentative’ (2019: 311-312). Yet in the broadest sense, it is precisely this ‘political imagination’ that is in crisis. It is not enough for a handful of enthusiastic theorists, activists and progressive politicians to write that another world is possible; the crisis of the political imagination is a societal condition, defined by the fundamental disconnect between what is socially and ecologically *necessary*, and what is believed to be possible. For the politics of the common to be strategically sufficient for our current moment – rather than a vision of a world to come ‘after the revolution’– it cannot satisfy itself with producing a patchwork of little utopias. Rather, it must confront this crisis of the political imagination as one of its central challenges; how can we develop a politics of the commons that helps precipitate this hegemonic shift? How can a politics of the common help develop the common as a generalized ‘world-view’ of social action and political possibility?

We’ve offered PCPs as one institutional mechanism that, in developing on Lefebvre’s theoretical proposition, starts to provide a strategic answer to these challenges. The intention is to contribute to a politics of the commons that addresses both the material and the subjective elements that constrain the political imagination, moving beyond the ‘narrow, doomed conception [of] distinct units, communes, businesses [and] services’ that tends to avoid ‘the level of strategic decision, of politics, [and] of political parties’ (1966: 149, 148). This means focussing not only on the myriad of forms that the commons could take, but also how they function as part of a project that is expansive of both material and ‘imaginative’ possibility.

If the desired outcome of participation in projects of commoning is the development of a broader ‘world-view’ (P2P Foundation 2019), we see this as being the product of the micro-politics of participation in commoning, something akin to a training in how to think and act as a democratic subject. Yet we anticipate that such a subjective shift is not limited to those directly participating in PCPs, but has the potential to ‘spill over’ and help to set the conditions for a radical democratization of wider society. It is the transformation in the

political imagination *coupled with* the expansion of material possibility that enables such a circuit of the commons to develop the capacity to intervene *outside* of this circuit – from materially supporting those withdrawing their labor during strikes to providing a socialized infrastructure that weakens the capacity of reactionary governments to discipline and contain emerging movements.

Nonetheless, we also see the complex implications of developing commoning projects integrated alongside institutions of the state. Just as the participation of workers on management boards can lead to an ‘institutionalization’ that further entrenches established governing logics, there is an open question about the subjective effect on the participants in Common Associations working alongside institutions of the state. We anticipate a relative autonomy that fosters many of the alternative democratic practices, and subsequent subjective shifts and emerging world-views, that commoning needs to promote. Yet deeper theorization and research is needed into what potentially negative subjective shifts may result from the micro-political practice of integrating so closely with state institutions.

Of all the possible socio-economic models which could fit into the safe operating space for humanity it is vital that we adopt the most democratic. This is not a moral argument based on why ‘democracy’ is more virtuous than any other way of arranging our societies, but a principle driven by the fundamental disconnect we face between material necessity and political possibility. Like all societies stratified by class, this democratic urgency is felt far less by those wealthy enough to insulate themselves from the impacts of ecological collapse, and whom by extension calculate the risk of inadequate action quite differently. Our popular response must thus be one that democratizes decision-making *in the name* of increasing political possibilities, such that we are able to bridge this endemic crisis of political imagination.

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