

=== Slide 1: Title ===

Dimensions of Planning in Commonism

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Inclusive Solidarities

Reimagining Boundaries in Divided Times

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=== 0:00 - Slide 2: Generalization of commons and commoning ===

Hello everyone! My talk will last about 20 minutes.

First, I will give you a brief introduction to the concept of commonism. Essentially, it is the generalization of the commons. Any resource can be *made* a commons. For a resource to be a commons, it must be commonly available and managed by a community.

A commons is not just a resource, it is also the entire social process surrounding it. The same applies to commodities in capitalism: A commodity is not just a “thing”, it is also a social relationship between people. I’ll come back to that in a minute.

At the systems level we have commonism or capitalism. For a macro system to emerge from thousands of micro actions, there must be a general mediation process. In capitalism, this is realized via the market – or many markets – with which we are quite familiar. In contrast, in commonism, this is achieved through commoning, the social process of self-organization and coordination that creates and maintains the commons. Interpersonally, if we know everyone involved, this can be achieved through direct agreements. Transpersonally, when we no longer know the participants, this becomes much harder to accomplish. Here, we need mediated agreements. But how can we build anonymous, coherent, transpersonal mediation at the macro level of the society as a whole?

=== 1:40 - Slide 3: Logic of inclusion instead of exclusion ===

The social relationships I mentioned before emerge from the mode of cooperation and the availability of required resources. While capitalism is based on property, which excludes others by law, commonism is based on possession, which is the collective availability of the necessary means. An important insight of commons research is the clear distinction between property and possession: while property is based on exclusion by law and has no time or physical integrity limitations (meaning it can be destroyed at will), possession is bound to the use of the resource and requires care during the period of use. A thing in possession is lent to users by humankind.

Private property requires exchange in order to travel from one owner to another. Exchange is a mode of cooperation in which others also require property in order to receive commodities for their subsistence. If you don't own the means of production, you have to sell your labor force for money. Conversely, if you are a fortunate owner of these means, you must buy labor force to produce and sell commodities, in order to make money from it to make a living. Property and exchange generate compulsion and exclusion.

Conversely, in commonism, possession is combined with voluntary cooperation. ~~More on this later.~~ Both generate a logic of inclusion, because if you cannot force people to do what you want, you can only invite them. Voluntariness is essential because any form of coercion undermines motivation. Forcing people to work is an inhumane artifact of commodity-producing societies, such as capitalism and real socialism.

But how can the reliability and promptness of complex production chains be guaranteed on the basis of voluntariness?

=== 3:30 - Slide 4: Commonist coordination and planning ===

In a capitalist system, each enterprise operates independently of the others. Markets mediate between enterprises and consumers using money numbers as a signifier. In contrast to the decentralized, stigmergic, by-value mediation of capitalism, commonism involves polycentric, distributed coordination, comprising a mixture of decentralized, regional, sectoral, and central elements. Regulatory “signs” are embedded in production, which is usually called in-kind coordination. Rather than using a separate “by-value” cycle with its own profit logic, all coordinating signs are part the process itself: tons, liters, temperature, time, different qualities of materials, qualifications of workers, and so on.

~~But what about planning?~~ The same applies to planning as to coordination. Planning is mostly done along production chains, since all the steps in the chain must fit together like cogs in a machine.

But then the question arises, how can “central requirements” and “local wishes” be aligned?

=== 4:30 - Slide 5: On needs and voluntariness ===

Before going into more details on the planning issue, I would like to make a brief digression on needs and voluntariness. In most views, needs are reduced to what we ~~want in order to secure our existence~~. However, these sensual-vital or “receiving needs” as I call them are only half of the equation. The other half are the productive or “contributing needs”. ~~The question “Will people voluntarily contribute?” is a strange one, because~~ contribution, participation, caring, and proactive action are part of the societal nature of humans. We only feel safe, when have the means to proactively produce what we need. This precaution is also a need.

In capitalism these two aspects are separated and distorted: satisfying vital needs takes the form of commodity consumption in exchange for money, and productive needs manifest as forced, alienated labor separated from care. Traces of that distortion can be found in real socialism and many DEP approaches, for example in the focus on provision in exchange for money or tokens, and in the assumption that people must be forced to do what they should do.

The need concept presented here ~~is the result of evolutionary and anthropological studies in Critical Psychology, as developed by Klaus Holzkamp~~. It is one of the sources of commonism, because commonism is simply a society in which people can fulfill their needs, both receiving and contributing. This requires free access to the means of subsistence for all on the receiving side and motivating societal conditions on the contributing side, which is only possible if contributions are voluntary.

=== 6:10 - Slide 6: Five aspects of commonist planning ===

But now, let's jump to the five aspects of commonist planning.

- (1) ~~Planning as close to production as possible~~
- (2) ~~Meta-commons planning for other commons~~
- (3) ~~Planning in kind~~
- (4) ~~Planning based on digital networking~~
- (5) ~~Planning with consultation~~

=== 6:20 - Slide 7: (1) Planning as close to production as possible ===

The further away from production you are, the more alienated you are. This is why planning should be organized as close to production as possible. However, the diversity and complexity of tasks resulting from the variety of products leads to a combination of local, regional/sectoral and central planning. Most of the planning can be done locally; some requires regional or sectoral planning, and a few require central or global planning efforts. Polycentric networks are best suited to handling this diversity of planning.

Although the number of planning tasks creates a kind of pyramid, the real planning structure is not hierarchical, ...

=== 7:00 - Slide 8: Network of polycentric production and planning ===

... but rather a network with multiple centers of planning and coordination. The red and orange nodes represent these centers, while the yellow nodes represent local production sites. However, local production does not mean isolated production. They are all part of a large combination of production sites embedded in production chains of different lengths.

This brings us to the second point.

=== 7:20 - Slide 9: (2) Meta-commons planning for other commons ===

Small commons enterprises can plan independently. This is the most direct form of planning and production. However, as commons grow, planning becomes a specialized task that can be outsourced to meta-commons. Meta-commons produce the infrastructural conditions that enable other commons to produce, in other words: they produce plans and coordination.

Nevertheless, production chains may be too large even for meta-commons. To handle this, a long production chain can be split into sections. Technically useful sets of commons can form federations, which meta-commons then plan for. Merging commons into a federation reduces the number of interfaces and thus the complexity within the federation.

=== 8:10 - Slide 10: Reducing complexity: federations ===

In other words: Insourcing production sites means reducing manufacturing depth, whereas outsourcing means the opposite. It is as if parts of the production chain are folded/insourced or unfolded/outsourced as this illustration shows. Depending on the concrete challenges of a complex production network, both can be useful measures.

=== 8:30 - Slide 11: (3) Planning in kind ===

Now, let's look at a key feature of commonism and explain why it is so important. In short, having a unit of account creates two cycles within the economy: a needs-based cycle and an accounting cycle, which have special logics that are opposite in capitalism. Most, if not all, distortions stem from this dual logic.

We conclude that we should plan with real variables, not with accounting variables. Real products reflect vital needs – for comparison in capitalism it is the so-called “use value” of the commodity. Similarly, people’s real capabilities reflect productive needs – in capitalism it is the “use value” of a specific commodity, the labor force. However, a single unit of account in capitalism, “value”, abstracts from these qualities.

The advantages and disadvantages of by-value accounting are closely linked. On the one hand, comparing incommensurable things allows for process optimization and decision-making based on numbers. On the other hand, number-based process optimization inevitably creates exclusions and externalities, such as environmental issues, poor care and working conditions — and other “non-value” aspects. This is why we reject by-value mediation.

Commonist planning in-kind is both in situ and ex ante. “In situ” means, that production and distribution take place “in the same information realm”, and ex ante means that the planning of production and distribution is done before products are produced and distributed. In-situ planning enables all relevant aspects to be included, which sometimes requires a deliberation process to determine what and how to include. This leads to increased planning efforts compared to token- or money-based planning and simple process optimization. One alternative is scenario optimization, which involves calculating different scenarios based on real variables. This allows you to make an informed decision between different alternatives, where the pros and cons are completely clear. Instead of creating externalities, decisions are made consciously, taking all facts into account. Transparent deliberation requires that all data, including agreements and production data, is openly accessible. This leads us to the next point.

=== 11:10 - Slide 12: (4) Planning based on digital networking ===

In highly intertwined production processes, you can only adjust your local planning, if you have full insight into the entire production chain. There is the narrative, that this is impossible, for example in debates around the Supply Chain Act in Europe. But this is not true! Today, Life Cycle Analysis enables us to obtain all the necessary data – from the final product upstream into all branches of the production chain. Heyer and Zeug have demonstrated this convincingly.

In order to reach agreement and make adjustments along the production chain, protocols and tools are needed to facilitate the commitment process – in the sense: “All agree, production can go!” ~~This is a model-independent requirement.~~ Other models use centralized or cybernetic planning, which can even be found in capitalist production today. For example, Walmart uses ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning). But this is a hierarchical tool designed to maximize profit. What we need is a kind of a democratic CRP: democratic Chain Resource Planning. Although models for such democratic protocols already exist (e.g. ActivityPub), we lack democratic CRP systems. The ultimate goal is nothing less than to replace anonymous market relations.

=== 12:30 - Slide 13: Protocol-guided planning with single units ===

Here is a sketch of a protocol-guided planning process. On the left-hand side, you can see a user of life or care means, such as a hospital using an X-ray machine. The x-ray machine is delivered to the hospital by the machine producer, who receives intermediate products to build the machine – and so on up to resource generation. Black arrows indicate physical transfers, and red arrows indicate the information required to control the process. This information is fed into the so called “planning bus” in a structured way guided by a protocol. Societal goals are also fed into this “bus”, such as limits on production like maximum carbon emissions etc. All data is open to the public.

However, this scenario works only for very short production chains, or, in other words, with a very low manufacturing depth.

=== 13:30 - Slide 14: Federational planning with meta units ===

Longer chains require a reduction in complexity through splitting the entire chain into the aforementioned federations. Specialized meta-commons can then plan and coordinate the federation. The individual production unit is relieved of the need for complex communication with all production partners. However, planning remains very close to production compared to central planning.

=== 14:00 - Slide 15: (5) Planning with consultation ===

In commonism consultation is a peer relationship. There are stakeholders, who are experts due to their actual or potential involvement, and re/producers, who are the experts in creating the material, symbolic, and social means and services.

The important point here is, that the stakeholders can also organize themselves in commons, not only the re/producers. They are needed for production. In capitalism, success is clearly defined by the ability to sell commodities on market. Whether needs are covered is irrelevant because the main goal is profit, although some needs are met anyway. Without this indirect measure of success through market mediation, we can include needs directly in the planning and production process – and not only the receiving needs, but contributing needs too. This means that semi-autonomy, which is the basic relationship between production commons, also applies to stakeholder commons. Their knowledge is needed to develop and improve planning and production.

Moreover, think of stakeholders not only in terms of people who are directly affected, but also as experts who are very familiar with the needs of those “who cannot speak” for various reasons, including those in the more-than-human world.

~~In this sense, stakeholders can contribute to the planning process as consultants. This is a completely new definition of a consultant as we know it today.~~

However, this integration should not obscure the fact that receiving and contributing needs of stakeholders and producers with different focuses, could be in tension. This tension can lead to innovation, but this is not guaranteed.

=== 15:40 - Slide 16: Federational planning with meta and consultant units ===

In conclusion, I would say, that consultation is deeply embedded in polycentric structures. Here, you can see the extension of the previous graphs with the consultants' unit. They are embedded in the entire federational planning process.

I would like to emphasize that this sketch is just one possibility, but it is the most far-reaching one based on the basic structure of commons and commoning. You can imagine the old structures that we know from bourgeois societies, such as representative parliaments, public votes, and even council structures. These structures emerged in an exclusionary society of opposing interests, where one group's victory comes at the expense of another group and ultimately the more-than-human world. The transition from capitalism to commonism is also a transition from exclusionary to inclusive logics, where differences are the source of creativity and energy. This is hard to imagine from today's perspective.

=== 16:50 - Slide 17: Most advanced approach of Heyer/Zeug ===

I am a big fan of Jacob Heyer and Walther Zeug's cybernetic approach. When I elaborate on my critique below, I do so out of sympathy and in an attempt to improve their approach where possible. ~~The best approach would be to merge it with commonism.~~

~~Heyer and Zeug themselves describe their approach as "intermediate", meaning that it should be viewed as a transitional step towards a much more advanced society, such as commonism. But is that possible? A brief sketch.~~

First, based on Life Cycle Analysis, they propose calculating per capita budgets that respect planetary limits. These per capita budgets would then be distributed among five sectors: universal basic income, universal basic services, care, investment, and reserves. Secondly, they calculate a three-dimensional price for all products, taking into account raw material use, CO2 equivalent emissions, and working time. Feedback loops are then used to align budgets and prices. Coordination takes place through (limited) markets and competition between the enterprises. Since tokens are non-circulating and non-accumulating the Good–Token–Good cycle is analogous to the Commodity–Money–Commodity cycle that Marx identified in early stages of capitalism.

=== 18:00 - Slide 18: Mediation, coupling, and coherence ===

This is what you get when you put the different approaches in a diagram. The vertical axis shows the type of mediation, ranging from by-value mediation at the bottom to in-kind mediation at the top. The horizontal axis shows the degree of coupling between the productive units, ranging from low coupling and relatively independent units on the left side to high coupling on the right. This corresponds with the meshing type on the top horizontal axis, where low coupling is associated with decentralized decision-making and high coupling with centralized decision-making; polycentrality lies between these two extremes.

Free market is found in the lower left corner, involving by-value mediation of independent units and decentralized decision-making. State socialism is found somewhere to the right, ranging between rather by-value mediation and rather in-kind mediation. There are different types of these. Market socialism is then somewhere between the free market and state socialism, but mostly on the side of by-value mediation. Commonism is clearly a polycentric model of in-kind mediation at the middle top of the diagram, and Cybernetism can be understood as a model en route to commonism.

=== 19:20 - Slide 19: Problems of the Cybernetic Model ===

Let us now discuss the problems with the cybernetic approach on the last slide. While this model could provide a transitional path to commonism, there are some potential pitfalls.

Firstly, with the doubled cycle of goods and tokens operating under different logics, you may inherit a problem similar to that of capitalism, which I discussed previously. Secondly, the coupling of receiving and contributing undermines motivation and creates a compulsion to work, although this is weakened due to the substantial general transfers to the people. Thirdly, enterprises must compete for tokens in order to produce; thus, bankruptcy is possible. ~~This introduces another external driver that is alien to the needs of the people.~~ Fourthly, a state or a state-like institution with the power to redistribute taxes (UBS, UBI) is necessary, including the power to control, sanction, and execute. And fifthly, it is unclear whether property rights would exist under this system, and if so, the destructive exclusion logic they would entail.

In conclusion, I would say, that using tokens, markets, the state, and competition as coordination mechanisms might eliminate inconvenient mediation tasks, but it could create many of the problems found in today's capitalism. It is good approach, but not consequent enough to really break free from all the obstacles of capitalism.

=== 20:50 - Slide 20: Discussion ===

Thank you very much!