

Marcus Meindel & the *Global Commoning System*-Project team

The Global Commoning System

A pattern-based framework to support the organization of commons to gradually raise the conditions of freedom. *Part 1: Basics.*

Welcome to a seven-part journey through the structure of a software, which, at least according to theory, is supposed to make the abolition of the capitalist mode of production possible in an emancipatory direction. This is meant quite seriously, but does not have to be taken seriously at this point. And of course, this software is not all that is necessary to overcome today's social problems. However, through the software a possibility arises to seize the world in order to build up self-organized cooperation structures in it, which purpose is nothing else than the satisfaction of human needs and which are structured only by the abilities and interests of the participants.

It is meant seriously: Through the Internet a form of society has become conceivable, in which we do not have to face each other as competitors, in which we do not need bureaucratic apparatuses and planning committees, in which we can grow according to our needs, abilities and interests, and in short: in which we become helper to each other without having to leave the technical achievements behind. But this *form of mediation*, which makes all this possible, does not arise by itself - it must be constructed and spread with the given possibilities. And this is the task which now lies before us.

Although I think that via this text series the structure of *Commoning* in general can become more understandable, it is primarily aimed at developers. And as well as any text related to the software is naturally under a *Creative Commons* license, development as *Free Software* is an absolute requirement.

This first part includes the theoretical basis, the structural formula of commoning and finally the basic structure of the software with the essential possibilities of action for the users. At the end of this part there is a brief overview of the following six parts. Parallel to the text series, the essay "*The Timeless Way of Re-Production*" (2019) has been published, in which the software structure was developed by an interpretation of Christopher Alexander's pattern theory.

In this sense: I am very glad that you have found your way to this text and I would be very grateful if you - in whatever way and in whatever concrete project - participate in the realization of this form of mediation.



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Prior theory knowledge I

Very briefly: Yes, the software can support small processes, such as cooking for each other in the neighborhood or organizing childcare together. But at the same time, it can be the basis for a fundamental change in society, as will be outlined below. Both moments are exactly the same - it is about caring for oneself and one's fellow human beings and becoming active accordingly. If you are not interested in the theory, just skip this chapter.

What kind of change in society should this be? The goal is the free development of every human being along his own abilities and interests. The prerequisite for this is that, at least within this structure one can not command over others, that money never stands between us and what we need and, in general, that we are not structurally excluded from the things we need for our lives.¹ And further, this goal can only be achieved if we can *consciously regulate as peers* the social structures to satisfy our needs. To be clear about what this means, it is necessary to briefly look at the situation today.

What is the situation today? Our life today is determined by money. We need it to pay our rent, we need it to get food, we need it for our leisure activities etc. And most of us get this money through wage labor or maybe self-employment. Both are the same in that way, that they *are subject* to the market. Those who are self-employed cannot do what he or she feels is right, but need appropriate customers who have enough money to pay for certain tasks. And those who work for wages need a job, which itself presupposes a running business. The company itself is subject to the market. It is in competition with other enterprises and must offer the own products better or cheaper than these. If the enterprise fails to do so, both the entrepreneurs and the shareholders make losses, but wage workers also lose their jobs. It is important for all those involved in the company to assert themselves in the market, so that one does not lose out oneself, but other market participants do. But to prevail in the market, you have to save costs. When companies save costs, this means that for wage workers: their wages must be as low as possible, in return they must work as intensively as possible and this for as large a part of their day and life as possible. And these wage-workers are us and so must be dealt with us. But saving costs also means: sourcing the necessary materials where they are cheapest. So on the one hand from other companies, in which the employees have as bad working conditions as possible (it has to be cheap), and on the other hand by raw materials from for example monocultures, deforestation and clearing up forests or by the use of cheap plastic and similarly harmful materials.

This is not the place to go into the whole dynamic which happens when we as human beings subordinate our activity to the market.² But only this much shall be said: Through the market, *society becomes an independent actor itself*. Through competition we cannot act as it seems to us ethically right. And the market and money are one and the same. And money is absolutely practical, because with it the most different works can be equated. And yes: Today's modern society is unthinkable without money. Precisely because it is at all a *form of mediation* through which the command of persons over one another can be dispensed. With the use of money, for example, the work of a child nurse from Germany can be equated with the work of an architect from Japan -

1 See also: Marx, *Grundrisse* (MEW42), p.91

2 Introductions to this are available both under Creative Commons license from my site (*The Capital and the Commons*) and for sale from e.g. Michael Heinrich (*Introduction to Political Economy*). Both are introductions to "*Das Kapital*" (MEW23-25) by Karl Marx. No matter what the world says: it is unreservedly worth reading.

without knowing each other, the one can become active for the other, if on the respective other side just a certain amount of money is available. Via money this becomes possible, however, money is also a *primitive form of mediation*. Exchange or mediation via money presupposes that every thing is reduced to a money value - *a single number*. The house has a monetary value, so does the table I sit at, and even my time when I work for a company. But does it really? Does the house really have a monetary value? This is more than a purely philosophical question and I wouldn't ask it if it wasn't necessarily related to this software. To understand this software, the question of *social form* must be addressed.

What is a "social form" A social form is something that arises from a certain way in which we as humans deal with the things of the world. The house has today a monetary value, but no scientist in the world will be able to find even one atom of value within its walls. If you look around now, you will be able to ascribe such a monetary value to every thing you see. And when someone comes to you now and wants some of it and the thing is also yours, then you could name for it a price that seems fair to you for it. Regardless of whether you want to sell it now or not. I ask you to look around for a moment and check it out for yourself. I really mean it.

You can ascribe a such number to any thing, but this does not change the *matter* of the thing itself. You can sell it for money because it is your private property and you can decide what to do with it. That's how our society works today. But the social dynamic of private property leads to fewer and fewer people having more and more power of control, that is, to be able to command how things in the world are dealt with. Probably, therefore, you do not live in your *own* apartment, but it belongs to someone else and you have to pass on a good part of your wages (or earnings of your self-employed work) to this person, so that you are allowed to live in it. In other words, this means: a few days a month you work only *for that person*. Private property always excludes everyone else first of all, and this structural exclusion can be used to advantage - as in the example of housing - so that others have to go to work for you. When the things of the world are dealt with in this way, these things have the social form of *commodity*. Anything can thereby become a commodity if it is or can be exchanged only for money. In the software structure, however, we deal with things not as *commodities*, but as *commons*.

What is a commons? *Commons* is the social form of things used in *commoning* processes. And activities fall into the category of commoning when they are "voluntary and inclusively self-organized activities and mediation of peers who aim at satisfying needs".³ In the process of this series of texts, it will become clearer exactly what this means. And if it should really be possible that we manage to become independent of the market and money through Commoning, then you will also realize that social change always means individual change. Then you look around in the room and the things have no more money value, but only the purpose to satisfy the needs of people (in this case yours) and are subject to certain agreements and rules. That would be the moment when you would probably find it absurd to work for other people month after month just because you want to live in an apartment. You would live in an apartment because you needed an apartment to live and that apartment was simply available.

³ Both terms (Commons/Commoning) follow the definitions of Commons Institute activist Johannes Euler: „Commoning shall be described as voluntary and inclusively self-organized activities and mediation of peers who aim at satisfying needs" and " Commons is the social form of (tangible and/or intangible) matter that is determined by commoning" (*Conceptualizing the Commons*“, in *Ecological Economics* 143, P.12).

And again, what is the purpose of this software? To capture all things that can be used for commoning, to support the social process regulating their usage, and to enable complex structures for satisfying mediated needs, in which one can be involved according to one's own abilities and interests through the process of self-assignment.

And what is the context of the text series? The need for a software-based form of mediation to undo capitalist relations was addressed in the essay *"The urge to expand of modern commons"* (*Der Ausdehnungsdrang moderner Commons*, Meindel, 2018). It elaborated *"Kapitalismus aufheben"* (2018) by Stefan Meretz and Simon Sutterlütli, highlighting that two forms of commoning can be distinguished and must function differently: (interpersonal) commoning, when concrete persons refer directly to each other, and (transpersonal) commoning, when in mediation *one does not* refer to concrete persons. The software is specifically concerned with the last form mentioned. Meretz and Sutterlütli are activists in the Commons Institute, to which Silke Helfrich also belongs. The text series is in the context of Helfrich's work in that Helfrich, together with David Bollier, opens up a new commons perspective in whose structures and terms software mediation also moves. Absolutely noteworthy is their work *"Free, Fair, and Alive"* (2019). A work worth mentioning in the context of the Commons Institute - even if it has no direct influence on the present concept - is *"Beitragen statt Tauschen"* (2007) by Christian Siefkes, who in this work tries to think material production according to the model of Free Software. The theoretical approach of this series of texts is further integrated into the current of *value critique* and is thus also intended to be an answer to the question of what society-changing potential lies outside of the class question.

The fourth part of the text series continues the theory prior knowledge.

Structural formula of the commoning

Following the process is represented, from the need over its mediation and the cooperative process to its satisfaction. A *demand* arises in this process only when a *means* is needed for an activity necessary to satisfy the need. We differentiate these means themselves according to how they can be *shared*. That is, whether they must be *divided* as they are material goods, which are getting used up (as food for example). Whether they can be *used together* (like a machine), which may entail appropriate arrangements for sharing. Or whether they can be *distributed* as they - like information, ideas, codes, etc. - multiply through the process of sharing.⁴

<i>need (n-)</i>		<i>activity</i>	<i>satisfaction (n+)</i>
<i>demand (m-)</i>	– mediation – ...commoning... <	<i>cooperation of peers</i>	– <i>coverage (m+)</i>
<i>problematic state of means (s-)</i>		<i>use of means</i>	<i>conservation state (s+)</i>

Insight: At this point, there are three ways to initiate activities in the social reproduction process: Someone becomes aware of their own need or the need of another person (*n-*). Someone recognizes the demand for a resource (*m-*) that is necessary for an activity in commoning. Or someone recognizes the problematic state of a means (*s-*).⁵ This *insight*, needs excluded, can also be mediated without human intervention under certain conditions.

Mediation: All three possibilities can be mediated outside or inside the software structure. Outside the software, mediation in this case depends on personal contacts and other structures known to the person in question. For us especially relevant is the mediation within the software structure, in which needs, demands and problematic states of means – in whatever form – can be fed in and read out.

Commoning: The software supports the process of commoning. Relevant to the software structure is that it always involves concrete human *activities*, whose *cooperation is on peer-level* and in which (normally) *means are used*.

Completion: An activity is completed when it either satisfies a need (*n+*), satisfies a demand for a particular agent (*m+*), or (re)establishes the conservation status of a means (*s+*).

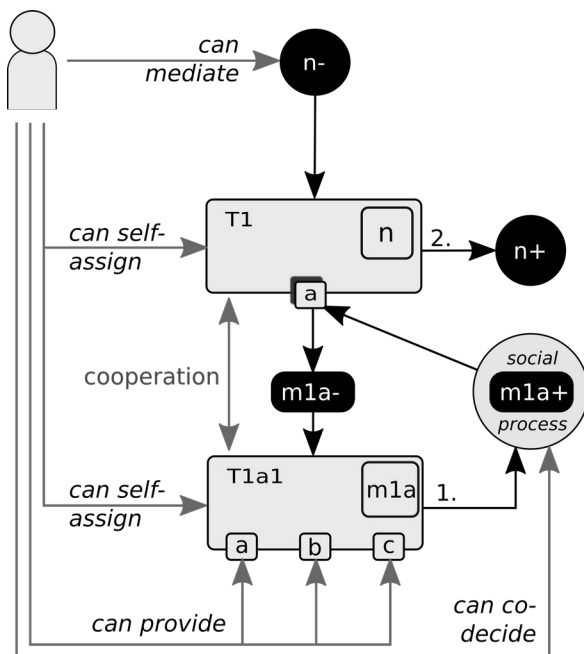
4 Here we follow Helfrich/Bollier. Cf. *Free, Fair and Alive*, p.85, whereby the "pass on" used by them was replaced with the m.M.n. for the matter clearer "spread".

5 The third possibility becomes relevant only from the third part of the text series (→*moments of total effort*)

Basics of the software structure.

The structure of the software is presented in detail in the process of the text series. Following it concerns therefore only the *Basic structure* and how a single person can participate in it.

Since the purpose of the software is to support processes of need satisfaction, these needs (n^-) must be able to be mediated. Each need is satisfied via an activity - here in the diagram this activity is called "T1". To perform the activity T1, it needs *the means* (a) or, referring to the activity, $M1a$. The means $M1a$ can be made available via the activity $T1a1$.



Who performs these activities? Since we move in a structure, in which persons may never command over other persons, the assignment to necessary activities can happen only by the respective persons themselves. We call this the process of *self-assignment*⁶, which is to be supported via various software functions. The *cooperation* itself happens between the people performing the interrelated activities. And noted at this point: *Whenever a person is spoken of, a group is also always meant by it.* Whether a person alone or a group together contributes to the software structure is not relevant.

With the means, which are used with the respective activities, we differentiate between two categories, whereby the borders between them are fluid: *Private means* and *common goods*. Private means are the property of a concrete person, who alone may determine their use. This person may decide to use these means only for herself or he or she may set *terms of use* in which others may also use it. Accordingly, depending on which person

therefore assigns himself to an activity, it may also differ which means must still be made available for this activity.

For the social form of the *commons* such property relations are irrelevant, even if private property is threatened with constant *exclusion* by the owner. It is different with common goods, even though it is not a clear category, but it will be broken down in more detail in the fourth part of the text series. At this point, we make the abbreviated assumption that any resource that is made available through a commoning activity is a common good and no one is excluded from using it.

About the use of commons, *agreements* and *rules* can be made, as well as *sanctions* for rule violation and, for instance, *restrictions on use* to prevent, for example, the overuse of natural assets. The fact that no one is structurally excluded from the use of common goods means for the software that around every common good a *social process* must be able to arise in which the use can be clarified. This social process must be supported by appropriate communication functions or, for example, the trans-

⁶ The concept of *self-assignment* within the framework of commoning has been particularly introduced by Meretz/Sutterlütli in the context of "*commonist stigmery*" (e.g., *Kapitalismus aufheben* p.178)

parency of agreements. In addition to the *mediation of needs*, the *self-assignment*, the *providing* of private means, the right to *participate in the decision-making to use the means available* is the ultimate fundamental agency of users and users.

Overview of the text series

Part 1: *Prior theory knowledge I, structural formula, basics of the software structure*

Part 2: *The activity-pattern. Configurations. Skills. Qualifications.*

Part 4: *Theory Prior Knowledge II. Commons in social process. Reputation. Importance.*

Part 5: *Identification and trust. Conditions of use of funds. Transparency of agreements and rules. Sanctions. Integrated associations.*

Part 6: *Interpersonal relations and communication. Integrated associations. Developing language skills .*

Part 7: *Mediation of needs. Pattern of means. Conservation and maintenance of social means. Details of patterns of activities.*

Additional: *Requirements for the software.*

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