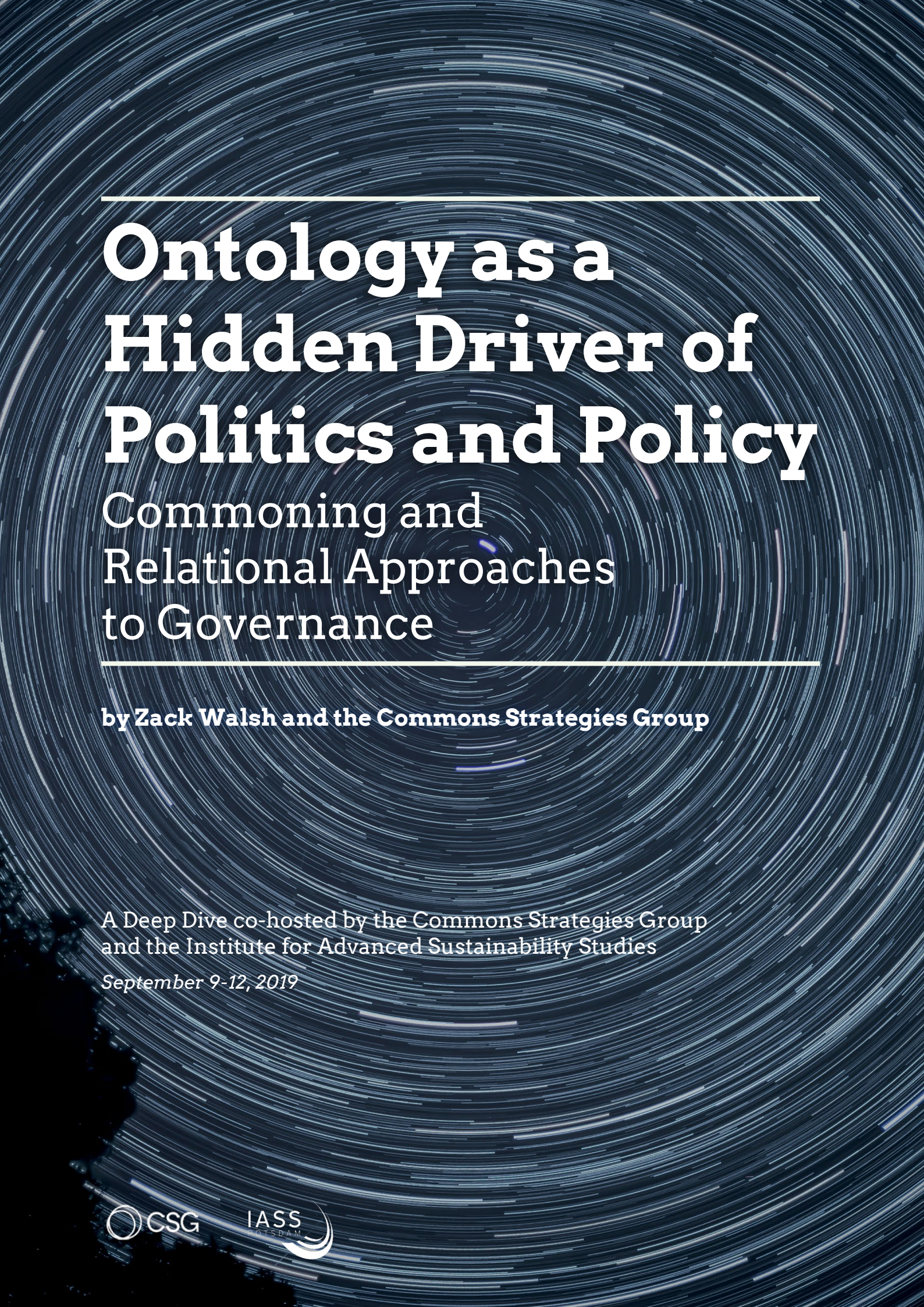


Ontology as a Hidden Driver of Politics and Policy

Commoning and Relational Approaches to Governance

by Zack Walsh and the Commons Strategies Group

A Deep Dive co-hosted by the Commons Strategies Group and the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies

September 9-12, 2019

CSG IASS POTSDAM

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Introduction

Our way of making sense of the world— our paradigm— shapes our ability to respond to crisis. Once a paradigm is established, it is extremely hard to think and behave outside its limits. The ecological crisis is a very intimate, as well as being a political and institutional crisis, because it calls on us to question the established paradigm within which society operates. It calls for a moment of deep liberation, liberating ourselves not only from unsustainable ways of being, but also from the old tools and languages that limit our responses. In this sense, the eco-crisis calls for a transformation at the deepest level—at the level of our way of making sense of the world.

Ontology is the study of how we perceive the nature of being. Reading political and economic texts through ontological perspectives allows us to uncover the underlying hidden assumptions informing them. Different frameworks of governance presuppose different assumptions about reality (Stout and Love, 2019). Today's mainstream political and economic discourses are increasingly sterile and unfit in large part because they are based on incorrect assumptions about the nature of being. The whole explanatory apparatus informing mainstream politics and economics is fundamentally Eurocentric and outdated, informed by centuries' old science and philosophy. In this moment of crisis, re-thinking governance requires more than re-thinking organizations, structures, and positions—it requires re-thinking the underlying belief systems, value systems, and ethics that inform them.

We must re-examine our assumptions about humans and nonhumans, agency, rationality, and society. This is especially true within the discourse on the commons. The logic of the commons is so different from liberal democracy and market capitalism that it is necessary to rethink the ontological premises informing it. Elinor Ostrom's institutional analysis and development framework, for example, is the dominant approach to understanding the commons, yet it takes for granted many of the same foundational assumptions of standard political and economic thought. Shifting the paradigm within which we understand governance offers immense transformative potential.

In their latest book, *Free, Fair, and Alive* (2019), the cofounders of the Commons Strategies Group, David Bollier and Silke Helfrich suggest that commons governance should be informed by an ontology that thinks fundamentally in terms of processes and relations, called process-relational ontology. Bollier and Helfrich use process-relational ontology to develop an alternative framework for

exploring the commons across three inter-related dimensions— provisioning, peer governance, and social life. Across each of these dimensions, they coin new terms to describe patterns for enacting the commons which are vital, but which were largely missed or underexplored by mainstream governance frameworks, including the Ostrom framework. Making an *OntoShift*, or ontological shift, toward process-relational ontology helps provide a better apparatus for explaining the complexity and diversity of the commons and offers much greater potential to transform society via the logic of the commons.

This report builds on this insight by offering a synthesis of findings from 18 experts who, at a three-day workshop, discussed how shifting the ontological premises of political and economic thought toward process-relational ontology could transform society. The workshop, called "Onto-seeding Societal Transformation," was co-hosted by the Commons Strategies Group and the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies, in Neudenau, Germany, between September 9-12, 2019. It consisted of three successive sessions focused on process-relational approaches to ontology, design patterns, and politics. A final, fourth session focused on the integration of ontology, patterns, and politics in concrete case studies. This report concludes with new questions and next steps for strategically advancing relational approaches to governance and the commons.



Participants share good food and conversation outside the venue — a historic southern German house from the 15th century! Photo credit: Zack Walsh

01.

How does ontology relate to policy making?



The purpose of the first session was to form a common understanding of the importance of ontological issues in general and process-relational ontology in particular for societal transformation. Understanding how trans-personal relationships are mediated through technology, media, law, institutions, and money, for example, are of particular relevance to policy making, so we decided to focus conversation on the relevance and challenges of working with relational ontologies.

In advance of the event, a 2012 article by Margaret Stout, a professor of public administration from West Virginia University, was distributed to participants. The article described four ideal-typical ontologies, which she calls undifferentiated individual, differentiated individual, undifferentiated relational, and differentiated relational. These concepts were meant to provide a starting point for conversation.

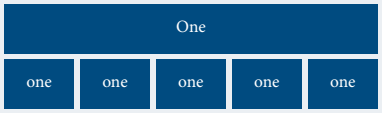
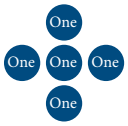
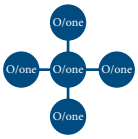
Undifferentiated individual ontology follows the logic of *hierarchy*. Individuals and their relationships to each other derive meaning and agency from some ultimate entity or first principles.	 Figure 1. Undifferentiated Individual Ontology
Differentiated individual ontology follows a logic of *fragmentation*. Individuals are atomized and there is no organizing being or principles structuring overall existence except social contracts.	 Figure 2. Differentiated Individual Ontology
Undifferentiated relational ontology follows the logic of *holism*. Everything is related to each other, but individual differences are subsumed within larger forms of collective identity.	 Figure 3. Undifferentiated Relational Ontology
Differentiated relational ontology maintains the tension between *identity and difference*. Everything maintains individual agency while being inter-related within larger, dynamic systems and organizing principles.	 Figure 4. Differentiated Relational Ontology

Table adapted from Stout 2012

As a participant in the Deep Dive, Margaret was given the opportunity to respond to reactions to these concepts. She explained that there was a much more robust typology (five ideal-types) presented in her 2016 and 2019 books with Jeannine Love (see Appendix C). This more advanced work clarifies the ontological dialectics at play and presents the synthesis generated by *relational process ontology* as a fifth ideal type. The relationships investigated from a process-

relational perspective extend much further and deeper than those within and among human beings. Process-relational ontologies posit that everything is co-created, constituted in and through relations to other things, human and nonhuman. We are literally in every moment of our existence co-creating one another and the world that we live in.

Many cultures, practices, and embodied ways of being in the world are informed by versions of process-relational ontology. Margaret introduced Native American traditions that consider both humans and nonhuman entities as persons. The stone and the river are seen as unique persons co-creating each other, which is why prayers often end with "for all my relations." Processes of emergence extend outward, mutually influencing each other to varying degrees, through complex interconnections in the web of life. Peter Doran, a law professor from Queen's University Belfast, introduced the Huayan tradition of Buddhism[1] which uses the metaphor of a jeweled net to describe the infinite complexity of a multi-causal universe. At each node of the cosmic net, there is a multifaceted jewel that reflects all the others while keeping its own unique position. When one thing arises, all things arise simultaneously. Everything in this net has mutual causality, so that what happens to one thing happens to the entire universe.

Margaret noted that a key distinction between undifferentiated and differentiated relational ontologies concerns the relationship between the parts and the whole. Undifferentiated relational ontologies completely fuse the parts within the whole, whereas differentiated relational ontologies maintain a distinction between parts and wholes. Soviet state communism is a good example of an oppressive governance structure that fuses individuals (parts) within larger forms of collectivism (wholes). Given that problematic sense of enclosure, Silke Helfrich and David Bollier explained why differentiated relational ontologies are better expressions of commons governance. Different individual agents collectively manage resources and organize society according to both their distinct agency, preferences, and values and at the same time, a collective understanding of how they can work together in larger systems of coordination and integration. Margaret noted that this understanding of commoning is a clear manifestation of Integrative Governance and its grounding in relational process ontology.

In *Free, Fair, and Alive* (2019), Helfrich and Bollier are particularly inspired by process-relational ontologies which have antecedents across many cultural

1 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huayan

geographies and histories. The most well-known version in Western academia was the process-relational ontology expounded by Alfred N. Whitehead during the first half of the 20th century. Margaret explained some basic characteristics of relational process ontology (see Appendix B: Brief Explanation of Relational Becoming) and explained how they share many insights in common with new academic trends informed by quantum physics, new materialism, and the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. The beauty of working with process-relational ontologies is that they aspire to integrate divergent truths in more coherent and comprehensive accounts of reality, but the challenge is to integrate divergent truths in non-exclusionary ways.

The beauty of working with process-relational ontologies is that they aspire to integrate divergent truths in more coherent and comprehensive accounts of reality

Petra Kuenkel, executive director of the Collective Leadership Institute in Germany, said, "We're captive of a system where we want to show others that we own the right outlook." There is a human tendency to take control, so we should be mindful of the desire to finalize any definition or ontological commitment and impose it on others. Differentiated relational ontologies, including process-relational ontology, are non-essentialist, meaning that they do not attribute a definitive character or essence to anything. Everything changes in relationship to everything else and the various potentials presented by each moment. It is therefore important to always leave concepts open for further reflection and definition.

Although process-relational ontologies have become an emerging topic of interest in recent scholarship, they have existed from time immemorial within indigenous traditions. As Zoe Todd (2016) explains, recent academic discourses often colonize that history. Academic discourse is often exclusionary and non-dialogical, highly rational and assertive, and not open to the profoundly spiritual and emotional aspects at the core of ontological claims. Ontological dialogue therefore requires not only theorizing but embodied ways of sensemaking. This is one of the reasons why the patterns approach was discussed in this workshop (see below).

Peter Doran questioned whether (and if so, how) it was appropriate to privilege any particular ontological claims. "When we convene to talk about ontology," he said, "we're asking for trouble, so we have to be very careful about entering into that conversation, trusting the conversation, trying to trust it with our bodies, our dispositions, and our relationship to one another." He emphasized that to create meaningful transformation, we have a responsibility to communicate emerging insights, placing them in open dialogue with each other, and using language with a spirit of generosity.

The modern frame is in active denial of some form of relationality

Furthermore, we have to acknowledge that the world doesn't equip us very well to take part in this conversation in a way that is generous and facilitates deep transformation. The modern frame is in active denial of some form of relationality. Western ontology, Peter said, is based on fear and security. He said our bids for ontological security are complex responses to our deep vulnerability as a species. The paradox is that the privileged Western response valorizes control, self-sufficiency, heroic individualism, and a disembodied disposition that are built on a denial of our vulnerability and mortality, resulting in individuals feeling deep disconnection.

Western ontological discourses are still haunted by bids for an "onto-theology"—a flight from the real, from mortality, from vulnerability, and from complexity. Western ontology is privileged, nevertheless, due to the historical and geopolitical power of western societies. Therefore, it is important not to lose sight of the role of hegemonic political power in privileging certain ontological claims in the world. Indeed, a growing number of scholars such as William Connolly, Sergei Prozorov, Bruno Latour, Marisol de la Cadena, and Mario Blaser see ontological conflicts as the deeper source of many political conflicts.

Alexandros Kioupkiolis, a political scientist from Aristotle University, noted that attempts at political reform within the current paradigm are largely meaningless, because the paradigm itself is what drives today's social and ecological crises. It is really important therefore to discuss ontological issues to get at the root of contemporary political problems. In such discussions, however, it is difficult to determine which ontology (if any) offers a more accurate description of the world. Conversation can become challenging as you try to reconcile different ontologies, so it is important to consider how we speak about ontology. In *Sustaining Affirmation* (2000), Stephen White explores

how a "weak" ontology can affirm political commitments without recourse to traditional or dogmatic foundations of thought. Process-relational thinkers defend such a style characterized by openness, self-restraint, and humility, but Alexandros admits, it is not universal—it emerges out of a particular Western, liberal context— so it does not fully resolve the paradox of how to reconcile mutually exclusive ontologies.

A core question is how to facilitate the highest level of collective intelligence with groups whose members have different core beliefs, languages, and cultural values. Ferananda Ibarra, co-director of the Commons Engine,[2] shared how using "prime language" helps us remain open to a variety of conflicting, ontological standpoints. To practice prime language, you eliminate the verb "to be." This allows you to speak from your experience without invalidating other possible experiences. We need to be mindful not to discuss theories of existence as if they represent the only truth. Lieselotte Viaene, an anthropologist at Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, said the verb "to be" in fact does not exist among the indigenous peoples she's been working with.



David and Silke express their gratitude for everyone's involvement in the Deep Dive. Photo credit: Zack Walsh

2 https://commonsengine.org/

Another requirement of healthy dialogue is to address personality features that can strongly affect the quality of collective interaction. In the course of the conversation it became clear that enabling dialogue across ontological differences may pose particular demands to the process design and facilitation. For example it may be extremely difficult to facilitate conversation among strangers who feel vulnerable sharing deeply held beliefs. Also, there are people who are more or less assertive, emotionally sensitive or expressive, introverted or extroverted. Community agreements and rules of good conduct are needed to facilitate democratic and mutually respectful interaction. During the workshop, as inter-personal conflicts emerged, Brooke Lavelle, president of the Courage of Care Coalition, and Lucien Demaris, co-director of Relational Uprising, expertly facilitated a session to heal inter-personal conflicts, using several of the contemplative and somatic based practices they have developed.



02.

What is a patterns approach and how does it relate to relational ontologies?

In a second session, participants explored Christopher Alexander's pattern language and how it informs societal transformation. Silke Helfrich explained that a pattern language is a methodology for designing aspects of society based on the insights of process-relational ontology. Alexander defines a pattern as follows:

> "Each pattern describes a problem which occurs over and over again in our environment, and then describes the core of the solution to that problem, in such a way that you can use this solution a million times over, without ever doing it the same way twice."

A pattern is a summary of the many successful solutions to a problem, and a pattern language is an organized and coherent set of patterns within a specific field of expertise. These ideas were first expounded in *A Pattern Language: Towns, Building, Construction* (1977) and *The Timeless Way of Building* (1979). The most complete account, Silke said, is Alexander's four-volume work, *The Nature of Order: An Essay on the Art of Building and the Nature of the Universe* published between 2002–2005.

"Pattern mining" is a methodology for identifying patterns. Everybody contributes their knowledge of a problem, drawing from many different ways of knowing and bodies of knowledge, including, for example, embodied, scientific, or practical knowledge. Then, they assess what is at the core of the solutions to that problem. Once everyone combines their knowledge of successful practices that help solve a given problem, they name the pattern that reflects the core of those solutions. Patterns are not meant to unify or prescribe, but to describe already-existing real-world solutions that enhance wholeness and aliveness. Silke suggested that whenever coining a pattern, it is best to use a verb to give guidance to people about what to do in order to co-create their cities, their environment, their group process, their policies etc.

Power relations partly determine which patterns spread

Alexandros Kioupkiolis explained that patterns are very deeply connected with politics, because power relations partly determine which patterns spread. Politics involves various forms of social deliberation and action that either transforms or defends some aspects of the world or presents alternatives for how to construct the world. There are patterns of inclusion, sustainability,

and solidarity; but there are also patterns of discrimination, oppression, and colonization. Patterns become dominant or marginalized based on prevailing power relations.

Petra Kuenkel emphasized that we need to become pattern literate so we can better identify and cultivate patterns of aliveness. Christopher Alexander believed that since the universe generates living structure, patterns are an expression of "aliveness." Joined together, they create so-called pattern languages. Aliveness isn't something we create; it is intrinsic to human experience. Alexander takes the radical idea of interconnectedness in process-relational philosophy and concludes that life inhabits everything, including inorganic, fabricated structures like houses and buildings. Moreover, Alexander believed that specific patterns are empirically verifiable as part of reality's living structure. That is why certain patterns in architecture and urban design recur over the centuries and cross-culturally, in such a way that they become strikingly familiar design features of human societies.

Kuenkel and Waddock (2019) recently developed the idea of "systems aliveness" to illustrate how confluent patterns enliven each other and living systems as a whole. Since aliveness always comes from a connection to wholeness, Alexander replaces the concept of *structural transformation* with *wholeness-enhancing transformation*. This is not to be confused with harmony, Petra argues, because sometimes we need conflict and disruption in order to make sure people work towards regenerating aliveness. Andreas Weber's *Biology of Wonder* (2016) argues similarly that all living systems have a desire for aliveness and wholeness, and that this is a powerful force guiding evolution. Individuals become more alive the more they deepen their connection to the evolving whole.

Harnessing the experience of the 18 participants in the room, we identified which relational patterns emerge within our working contexts. Margaret noted that the process of "ideal typing" itself is a search for repeating patterns. Silke noted that one could consider Ostrom's eight design principles as patterns that solve problems in governing the commons. In *Free, Fair, and Alive* (2019), Silke and David identified 28 patterns that enact relational ontologies, reinterpreting Ostrom's framework in a different "ontological register."

One pattern they coined is "rely on heterarchy." Heterarchy combines the structure of hierarchies and peer-to-peer networks. To develop a pattern language of commoning, Silke and David used a federated wiki software platform that gives users the freedom to hyperlink pages of information in easy,

intuitive ways. Because the hyperlinked system is open and self-organized, it permits users to quickly input and locate information across multiple layers of complexity, enabling them to make abstract generalizations without falling into the trap of universal intellectual categories. Users have multiple ways to make meaning out of a diversity of content depending on their specific interests, needs, and contexts, and users can add or delete content as they see fit. This heterarchical structure of the federated wiki conjoins the logic of process-relational ontology with the pattern language of commoning.

This heterarchical structure of the federated wiki conjoins the logic of process-relational ontology with the pattern language of commoning

Zack Walsh, a researcher from the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies, explained that in his context, working with spiritual activists, it is important to "cultivate response-ability," defined as the ability to skillfully respond to any given situation. Response-ability requires being able to perceive a situation appropriately and effectively respond to what it demands with the requisite skills and capacities. Another pattern he introduced was to "create fields of agreement." Relationships are implicitly understood within fields of agreement, so that cooperation in complex situations is possible. Football players, for example, who practice intensively as a team learn how to inter-relate and effectively respond to almost any dynamic situation. Response-ability and fields of agreement both facilitate processes of alignment and attunement required for successful large-scale cooperation.

Lucien Demaris explained that in similar large group and community contexts, it is important to "practice healing first." In diverse groups, people will invariably carry internalized oppressions and traumas that limit their self-efficacy and compromise a group's ability to function well. Equipping groups to understand and mindfully address trauma and barriers around class and access is essential for successful commoning. Nobody has the same amount of agency, so if we are going to horizontalize agency via commoning, the issue of safety and community responses to harm become very important. There need to be developmental pathways for empowering individuals and organizations based on different developmental stages and needs. And there need to be techniques for cultivating inner transformation to help individuals grow as whole human beings.

Participants at our workshop in fact agreed that higher levels of engagement could have been achieved if we had developed a stronger foundation of understanding and community connection earlier in the facilitation process. We were not able to fully tap into the potential of the group because not everyone's diverse needs and expectations could be met. Some people expressed for example that they would have needed clearer expectations framing the workshop in order to engage more fully. Without building a foundation of community connection, trust, and safety, it was also difficult for people to engage topics they were unfamiliar with. In that sense, the group experienced the importance of what Lucien and Zack explained first-hand within their own group facilitation processes.

Several other members of the group identified patterns of communication that could have helped solve problems within the group. Thomas Bruhn, a researcher from the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies, said he was struggling with exploring ontologies primarily through language. Mark Lawrence, the co-director of the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies, posited that ontological concepts are really supra-verbal, so language is not completely adequate as a means of expression. It needs to be complemented by other means, such as embodied, creative, and artistic forms of expression. Many participants agreed that language may limit who and how someone can engage, especially when non-native speakers are asked to communicate in English. Brooke Lavelle agreed that personal and social connections need to be formed through relational practices as a precondition for dialogue to be effective.

Ontological concepts are really supra-verbal

Thomas reminded us that exploring ontologies touches deep (and usually unconscious) foundations of our identities, so we need to expect that people can easily feel challenged and even threatened in what they believe constitutes their identities. So, in his view, embodied communication skills that signal benign intent and effectively respond to perceived harm when it arises are preconditions for generative conversations about ontology. Andreas Weber, a biologist and philosopher, agreed and inquired how language and embodiment could be better woven with each other. He hypothesized that our relational practices and processes are communicative methods in themselves because they create fields of resonance that we later explicate and objectify through language. If we recognize that nearly all those peoples who still live according

to relational ontologies are enacting commons, it becomes clear that lived ontologies, as embodiments of commons, are best explored using other non-cognitive faculties like feeling, perception, and intuition rather than discursive reasoning. This is one of the reasons why the conveners connected the topics of this Deep Dive to the pattern methodology, because it considers intuition and feeling as key components of knowledge creation. We should first practice enacting other ways of togetherness, and then use language to communicate insights more broadly.

Nicole Dewandre, an advisor to the European Commission, admitted that although we may experience thinking as disembodied, without feeling, we also need to be careful not to believe that the other extreme—prioritizing the body over the mind—is the solution. Feeling without thinking can be just as problematic, she noted, leading, for example, to antisocial crowd dynamics and hooliganism. We need to communicate using language in ways that acknowledge our bodies and feelings. At the same time, Nicole said, the limits of language are not entirely problematic, because our failure to communicate what we wish to express (which always exceeds the capacities of language) reveals something deeper about us.

Lieselotte Viaene suggested that we could disrupt disembodied patterns of conceptualizing and discussing relational ontologies by introducing Arturo Escobar's (2014) concept of "thinking-feeling with the Earth" (*sentipiensan con la Tierra*). If we hosted our discussion by the river in the company of other beings, for example, we could deepen our connections between thinking and feeling. Thinking-feeling describes the ways indigenous peoples think, without the western habit of separating the mind and body, and reason and emotion. Andreas agreed, saying that if we discuss the term of "aliveness," we should start to "live aliveness." Why should we rely on discursive forms of reasoning and dialogue that limit our experience of aliveness? We in the West will always be trapped within the (artificial, ontological) divide between subjective and objective, and nature and culture, as long as we merely *conceptualize* these things without also *embodying* them. Whitehead (1920) claimed that the bifurcation of nature entailed a misalignment between perception and reality, Silke Helfrich noted. Since everything is alive, realizing aliveness is about realizing our profound interconnection with all things, not just in organic nature "out there" but also within each of us personally. Furthermore, she said, Alexander's pattern methodology requires that we cultivate an embodied understanding because you cannot come up with a pattern without being rooted in practice.

Peter Doran introduced the topic of self-cultivation. He said that ontologies consistent with commoning privilege compassion, interconnection, and communication. Cultivating these qualities means spontaneously acting out of a sense of ecological citizenship that is at home with the vulnerability and indebtedness of the human species to the communities of all other species. We must cultivate the skills of improvisation and liberating intimacy—a concept that Peter Hershock, Director of the Asian Studies Development Program at the East-West Center in Honolulu, defines as falling into love with all other beings and a vision of the world as fresh. Andreas Weber similarly said that his personal desire is to develop ways of individual being that presupposes the needs and desires of other individuals. Thomas Bruhn connected to that idea, emphasizing the importance that love underpins ontology—not love as defined in a romantic relationship, but love as a desire to understand and connect with the depths of reality through unconditional appreciation of what is.

We must cultivate the skills of improvisation and liberating intimacy

Cultivating these qualities takes training. People need to be co-holding a space that is as safe, accessible, and nonjudgmental as possible to make dialogue generative. Ferananda Ibarra noted that very little is possible when people become reactive due to misalignments of core beliefs and epistemologies. She suggests using various "psycho-technologies" to transform individuals and encourage dialogue, such as through storytelling, meditation, somatic practices, and process arts like Otto Scharmer's Theory U. Lucien then explained that he and his colleagues at Relational Uprising have developed a relational process that integrates embodied communication and relationship building. By sharing and finding resonance with each other's stories, participants in his programs begin to share values that are so strong that it becomes quite easy to connect through more complex and abstract conversation.

Very little is possible when people become reactive due to misalignments of core beliefs and epistemologies



Participants make a toast to celebrate their time together. Photo credit: Jacques Paysan



03.

From ontology to policies: Real world considerations

The purpose of the third session was to explore how relational ontologies and patterns might be translated into political practice and new forms of governance. We considered what constitutes a relational approach to politics and how it could spread.

Political thought still views agents as rational subjects

Nicole Dewandre first summarized the modern political paradigm. She argued that contemporary political discourse continues to be trapped in modernity even though scientific thinking has surpassed the modernist paradigm since the beginning of the 20th century. Political thought still views agents as rational subjects, based on the legacy of Descartes placing rationality at the core of what it means to be human (i.e. *cogito ergo sum*). Political discourse also interprets relations primarily in terms of notions of simple causality between a cause and effect, as explained by the Newtonian worldview. Political agents are considered to be either active agents or passive objects. Either they are rational subjects in a position of authority, or they need to be compliant. If agents don't achieve their political objectives, it's typically conceived that they lack the means (i.e. power, knowledge, etc…), or because someone was not compliant.

Political discourse also interprets relations primarily in terms of notions of simple causality

In this framework, the only way to create a more stable world and avoid abuse of power is to create a balance in which clashing forces neutralize each other. The whole of modern politics builds on notions of control. And although people are increasingly using concepts of co-creation or cooperation, these ideas tend to have little traction in mainstream circles.

Given the severe failings of the modern paradigm, Nicole then presented Hannah Arendt's thought to help us consider an alternative relational framework for politics. Arendt distinguishes three ways of being active: labor, work, and action. "Labor" is the act of consuming energy out of the necessity to sustain life; "work" is the act of controlling and using others as instrumental means to achieve objectives; and "action" is freely expressing one's identity by acting together with others. Labor is a necessary prerequisite for work, and work is a prerequisite for action. We are both biological and rational subjects,

but Arendt claims, we are also relational selves. We are all equal and unique, even equal in the fact of being unique, and if we address each other as human qua human, it is who we are (our identity) that matters. We are vulnerable and we can never fully grasp who we are, however, because our identities reveal themselves through peer interaction. Each of us is both individual and plural at the same time.

We are all equal and unique, even equal in the fact of being unique

In modernity, Nicole said, prestige has become a routine but poor proxy for identity, as status (i.e. wealth, fame, etc.) determines your social identity. Modernity has denied relational concepts of identity (identity is seen as essentialist and not revealed through dynamic interactions), so it's no accident that identity issues are explosive in politics. The modern framework based on the rational subject cannot make sense of identity and agency as pluralistic. Modern politics is frequently informed by singular and essentialist concepts, like East vs. West, modern vs. pre-modern, civilized vs. uncivilized. For example, Man Fang, a researcher from the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies, explained that Chinese people share a common cultural identity despite political differences, whereas Zack argued that Chinese people from Hong Kong, Taiwan, or Tibet would not identify as being "Chinese" in the same way. Each of these identities are internally differentiated, dynamic, and plural. Similarly, Alexandros Kioupkiolis argued, there are community traditions in Europe that would not identify as Western, but as pre-modern and non-Western.

The discussion then turned to how we can promote the commons through concepts of co-creative (not sovereign individual) agency. Alexandros said one of the major practical and political issues concerning the expansion of the commons is not that we lack ideas about different forms or patterns of commoning. David and Silke have done great work in articulating the ideas and practices that already exist. We even have some ideas about what kind of new institutions we can create, and how we could change existing institutions to be more in line with the commons. What is really lacking today is a sense of collective agency as a broader project of historical change akin to the scale of the socialist or communist movements. Commoners don't have economic or material power, but they do have the power of their agency—the power of the people. As the commons increasingly develops and expands, whether in the economy, education, or agriculture, at some point it will face greater resistance

from the state (and state legislation) and the market. So, what we need is a new form of collective agency committed to the project of the commons and capable of organizing enough collective power to fight existing powers.

There are crucial infrastructure and institutions (i.e., education, water, energy) that cannot be created anew from scratch. Alexandros said, we need to transform existing infrastructure including large scale industry towards the commons, because we cannot afford under the present ecological circumstances to create new industry. In the beginning, this will involve an extraordinary power struggle. The challenge is that we do not know where new forms of collective agency will emerge, though there are existing social movements that provide some initial answers. The municipalist movement is one example. A municipalist platform in Barcelona, called Barcelona en Comú, succeeded in forming a new collective political organization committed to the idea of the commons, based in part on earlier movements in Spain. Barcelona en Comú has introduced fluid structures of collective leadership, mechanisms for ensuring accountability by alternating positions of power, and local possibilities for citizen participation. They use online tools to extend democratic participation to all citizens, so they can harvest the collective intelligence of the city as a whole.

Ferananda Ibarra presented the example of Holochain, a new set of digital protocols for networked collaboration, to illustrate how technology can facilitate the expansion of the commons. Holochain is a Distributed Ledger Technology (DLT) intended to enhance human agency following commons-based design principles. The technology allows groups of people the freedom to design their own systems of governance using digital tools that can assure the "digital integrity" of the community by, for example, preventing anyone from tampering with the data and helping identify when someone is defying the rules. The technology is agent-centric— it allows individuals within the community to determine rules of governance and how they wish to respond to infractions. Communities can decide what happens with surpluses, for example, so that rather than giving surpluses back to a company that owns the rights to critical resources, as conventional market economies do, communities could instead treat the resources as tradeable currencies and reinvest surpluses according to community needs and priorities. Rather than a person returning the excess solar energy from their houses to a company that owns the electrical grid, for example, they could share it with neighboring schools or organizations in need. Technologies like Holochain have the potential to fundamentally transform production and distribution of food, energy, water and other sectors into commons. The Commons Engine, which Ferananda co-directs, is investigating

ways to apply these technologies to social innovation in managing energy, water, land and other resources.

To expand the commons, we need to cultivate possibilities within existing institutions that allow for another logic and way of relating. Zack Walsh spoke of how the IASS provided him the freedom to really do something transformative, because they were provided funding without asking for explicit deliverables, similar to the idea of a universal basic income. Lieselotte Viaene mentioned how rewriting the constitution in Ecuador based on the idea of *buen vivir* generated new possibilities for state governance. Both Zack and Lieselotte warned, however, that people tend to internalize old structures and lifeways so much they often reproduce habits and re-inscribe the old structures and patterns within new systems, severely limiting their transformative potential. As a result, not only do we need to create new possibilities within existing institutions, we need to train people and institutions how to embody and enact new ways of being. Even if we transform structures through collaborative or network governance, if everybody in those structures still behaves in a hierarchical manner, power dynamics will not change, and certain people will continue to have more control than others. Blockchain, for example, is an innovative technology, but it has not radically transformed society, because its design architecture engenders capitalist logics (e.g. market exchange and speculation). Holochain, on the other hand, was designed according to commons-based logics (e.g. cooperation) that engender changes in social practices and beliefs.

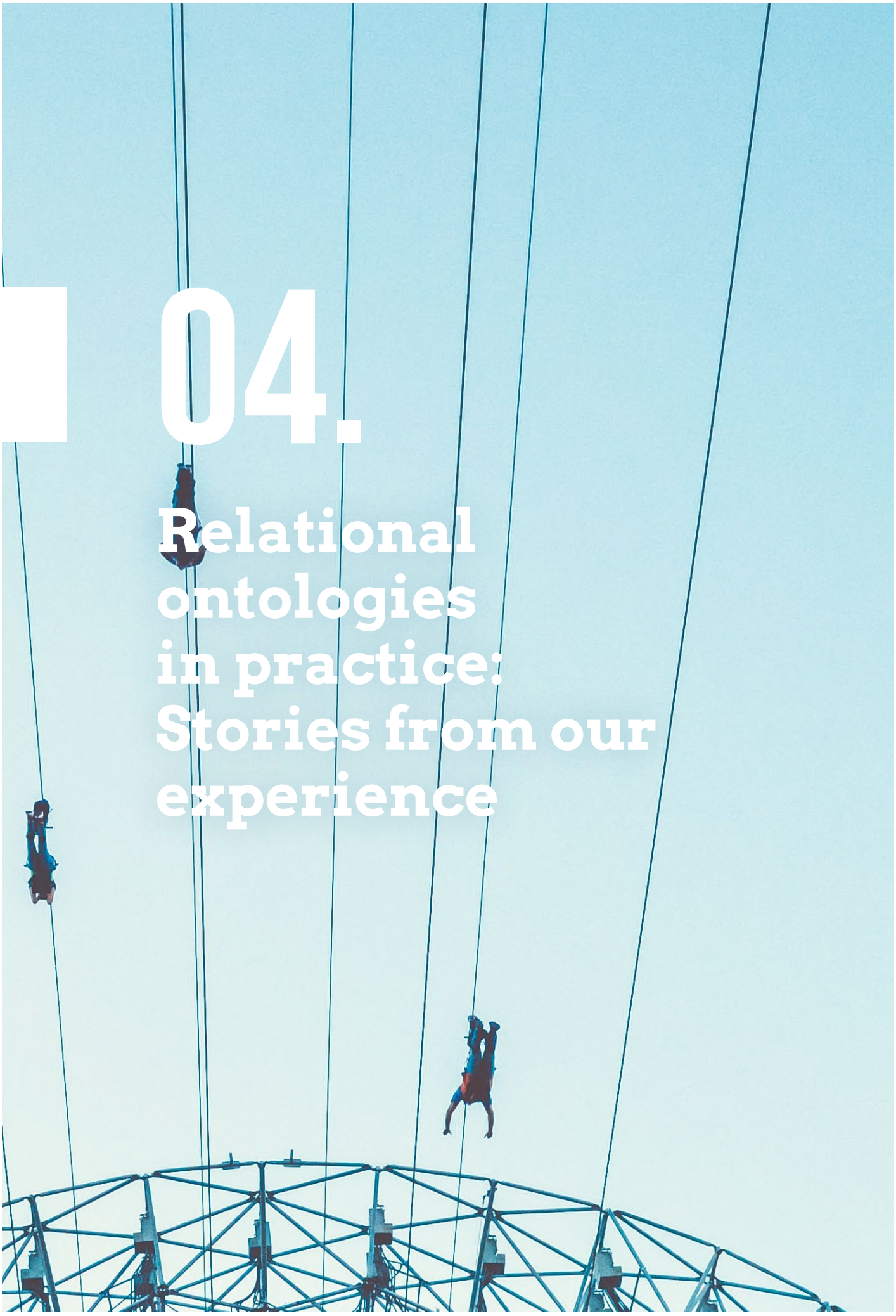
Alexandros Kioupkiolis explained that power accrues through social trust, activity, and habit, which naturally influences how we approach the future. Institutions consolidate that social energy and lock it in place. But it is important to remember that since power exists only when individuals allow their consent to be aggregated, power can always be disaggregated and dissolved, too. Alexandros agreed that we need to change the fundamental ontological assumptions and practices of society, because just changing practices alone does not create sustained change in the end. But his question is, how do we do that? How do we change ontological assumptions? How do we transform ourselves and our society from one ontology to another, considering how deeply ingrained they are? For Zack and Lieselotte that requires a lot of retraining of our sensemaking capacities, so that we can learn to practice new ways of being in relationship with each other. It's not sufficient to cognitively understand new pathways forward; we have to retrain the body-mind to alter our physiology and shift our social relationships to support change.



Participants share dinner at the pub in Neudenau. Photo credit: Jacques Paysan

04.

Relational ontologies in practice: Stories from our experience



The final session attempted to synthesize information from the three prior sessions. We split the participants into two working groups that focused on the integration of ontology, patterns, and politics in concrete case studies. The conveners of the workshop held the assumption that process-relational ontologies and the pattern language informed by them can help us design policies that nurture commoning. The working groups attempted to test that assumption by applying the pattern methodology to real-world cases. We asked what would change if policy design stems from process-relational ontology? How can we discover patterns based on process-relational ontology that translate the commons into new types of institutions, governance, and policy practice?

How can we discover patterns based on process-relational ontology that translate the commons into new types of institutions, governance, and policy practice?

The conveners realized that most commons are small scale, so one intention of the workshop was to ask how to make commons more widespread and consequential. As commons grow in scale and impact, they must learn to effectively deal with state and market power which is deeply aligned with capital. We wanted to think through how the commons could still be an expansionary, transformative force, taking realistic account of standard legal and economic systems and narratives, without either being utopian or simply incrementalistic about it. We wished to identify openings where a new paradigm could emerge, so that commons could spread organically, maintaining the integrity of their ontological premises, and avoid co-optation and absorption into the existing system.

David Bollier and Silke Helfrich had begun thinking about this challenge in the third part of their recent book, *Free, Fair and Alive* (2019), where they explored how to reimagine some of the deep premises of property law to take account of the social aspects of commoning. They asked, for instance, how communities and resources could be socially embedded and how we might re-imagine the concept of property, so it isn't conceived only as private property to be controlled by money and markets. Although state and market systems often operate within a paradigm incommensurate with the commons, perhaps a *modus vivendi* could be reached so that commoning could be inscribed within

law and state power. For example, a number of public-commons partnerships, especially at the municipal level, are demonstrating this possibility.

We wanted to think through how the commons could still be an expansionary, transformative force, taking realistic account of standard legal and economic systems and narratives, without either being utopian or simply incrementalistic about it

Silke and David claimed that we need an ontological shift, or *OntoShift*, that can animate other structures of society, so that changes are deeply rooted in another paradigm, enough to sustain and avoid co-optation. Margaret Stout similarly claimed that if you don't change fundamental understandings of our being (ontology) in relation to other social structures, eventually whatever you change in one social dimension will re-emerge according to your original (ontological) premises and the pathological behaviors associated with them. Changing the ontological underpinnings of society creates transformation at the deepest level—at the level of the mindset or paradigm—which can then influence all other social dimensions.

Margaret presented a typology of governance, developed with Jeannine Love, that identifies how specific ontological assumptions shape mutually exclusive social structures. They identify four "ideal-types" of governance that we find most often—Hierarchical, Atomistic, Fragmented, and Holographic. Although everything in reality is a hybrid of these different types, ideal-types are a useful tool for identifying foundational patterns amidst a vast diversity of phenomena.

Each of the four types possess a pathological dimension if taken to an extreme. For example, if society is ordered primarily by supposedly natural hierarchies that place power in the hands of a select few individuals or organizations, then the pathology of bondage emerges. If society is structured primarily by the logic of atomistic individualism and liberty is conceived in terms of the supremacy of individual rights, then the pathology of isolation emerges. If society is organized around fragmented, socially constructed identities and

freedom is conceived as complete individual autonomy, then alienation arises. If society follows the logic of holographic sameness, such that collective welfare is viewed as more important than individual welfare, then the pathology of social absorption emerges.

Margaret and Jeannine propose a fifth ideal-type called Integrative Governance which is informed by relational process ontology and which uses dialectical synthesis to integrate the positive features of the other four types without taking on their pathologies. The idea of Integrative Governance was inspired by Mary Parker Follett, an American pragmatist who wrote *The New State* (1998 [1918]) and who studied at Radcliffe, the women's college that integrated with Harvard University, around the same time Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and Alfred N. Whitehead were professors. Margaret and Jeannine systematized Follett's ideas in their 2015 book, *Integrative Process*.

Participants of the Deep Dive used the Integrative Governance framework (see Appendix C) to examine a number of case studies and how they align with different ontological assumptions, how ontological tensions manifest and play out in the real-world, and how we might better overcome ontological conflicts by identifying where our work still operates according to old paradigms and where we can align it more with Integrative Governance. Information about the case studies were first provided and challenges were identified. Then, participants combined their vast knowledge (theoretical, practical, embodied, etc.) to suggest creative solutions to those challenges informed by Integrative Governance.

4.1. Indigenous Ontologies and Human Rights

Lieselotte Viaene presented a case study based on her work on indigenous water ontologies and human rights— a five-year project called RIVERS funded by the European Research Council that involves indigenous people in Colombia and Nepal, and the United Nations. For indigenous peoples, humans and nonhumans are both persons, so the concept of genocides and reparations which refers to humans, should also refer to nonhumans such as rivers, mountains, and wildlife. Discussing nonhumans within the context of human rights is a very recent development, however. It has been largely concentrated in Latin America and especially Ecuador starting in 2008 and Bolivia in 2009, ultimately resulting in legal recognition of the personhood of rivers in 2017.

The translation of "nature" from a conservation perspective to an indigenous perspective, using concepts of the Earth as a living being— *Pachamama*— has met long-standing resistance from conventional western law, nation-states, and the UN, however.

Lieselotte explained that the whole human rights paradigm is still entrenched in the modern divide between nature and culture, and nonhuman and human. Indigenous concerns are incorporated into the UN system under the UN framework of "intercultural dialogue." Within this framework, indigenous views of nonhuman persons and their rights are considered beliefs, and as beliefs, they are considered less valid sources of knowledge than, say, scientific studies. The social environmental impact studies that mining companies use to justify the development of mines therefore carry more legal weight than indigenous beliefs.

Lieselotte also explained that intercultural dialogue within the UN framework is not really a dialogue between competing beliefs; it's a collision of worldviews that define peoples, communities, and worlds. She noted that although many of our workshop discussions examined ontologies as foundations of culture and belief, her project takes an anthropological perspective that considers indigenous claims on their own terms, as ontologically real. She has been working with people she calls "knowledge brokers and ontological diplomats" to try to overcome epistemological and ontological conflicts.

Knowledge brokers and "ontological diplomats" try to overcome epistemological and ontological conflicts

Maritieuw Chimère Diaw, Director General of the African Model Forest Network, complemented Lieselotte's experience by sharing a similar challenge he faces doing work with indigenous Africans. Based on his experience doing participatory action research in the context of multi-stakeholder landscape governance, he concluded that transformational governance in complex socio-ecological systems is an art in accommodating multiple ontologies, interests, and values. Pluralism, he argued, is key to deliberative governance processes. Chimère challenged the assumption that process-relational ontology leads to the most appropriate governance framework, because in his experience, appropriate governance frameworks must be based on different ontologies. Others contended, however,

that process-relational ontology is open and pluralistic by definition, so it offers ways to integrate different perspectives in an inclusive and expansive framework.

Chimère expressed a deep worry that all-encompassing frameworks claim universality, but because they are epistemically limited to some (not all) perspectives, they invariably crush the capacity of other ways of being to exist. He illustrated this point by noting how claims made on behalf of "humans" are often depoliticized, obscuring how universal claims privilege the experience of Western humans at the expense of others. Several participants expressed concerns that the Integrative Governance framework was typecast as the most valuable model when in fact, the underlying values and epistemology informing it are exclusive to Western, academic, and theoretical communities.

Lieselotte's case study on the UN framework of intercultural dialogue illustrated the dangers of framing a process of dialogue and integration in such exclusive ways. There may be integrative forms of governance that we haven't discussed, for example, in South America, because they are much more embedded within cultures than represented in academic discourse. Many peoples and cultures who practice commoning around the world surely have not even heard of the language and structure of process-relational ontology and the Integrative Governance framework informed by it.

Lieselotte added that the fact that our discussions have focused on Western ontologies using Western language is highly significant. There are other ways of being that are not part of our conversation, but they should be. Moreover, several participants said they did not feel comfortable expressing themselves in English, because they are not sensitive to the nuances of a non-native language and feared being judged. This in itself, Silke said, constitutes linguistic colonialism. It predefines who *can* be invited to the conversation— such as this deep dive— and who can participate more comfortably in the conversation, whose papers are most circulated and quoted, and so on. This dynamic not only manifests in our group discussions, David said, but also in the way how texts are written and how laws are formulated. By inscribing ontologies of non-Western and indigenous peoples within Western frameworks and languages, we limit their transformative potential to modern liberal property systems and its political understandings of rights and representation.

Based on his experience with human rights law, said Peter Doran, there are not only epistemological blind spots that eliminate certain types of knowledge and ethical concerns; there are also social and economic factors that can

make rights essentially unenforceable. In a society like his, Northern Ireland, discussion of human rights plays an instrumental role, but often they permit and institutionalize injustice and are often reduced to expressions of virtue signaling.

Peter Doran and Andreas Weber both argued that the separation of nature and culture is usually decoupled from its colonial history and the political economy of primitive accumulation that generated it. Modern conservation, for example, continues to be predicated on the extermination and disenfranchisement of indigenous peoples. The heyday of American Conservation and even the romanticism of nature, for example, coincided with indigenous genocide. Lucien explained that today, conservation biologists continue to remove indigenous people from land to make national parks, claiming that scientific conservation is more ecological than indigenous stewardship of land. Peter emphasized that transformation depends on our ability to acknowledge how these exclusions, exploitations, and genocides problematically reside in the same categories with which we wish to address transformation.

Peter asked whether Lieselotte can imagine what the rights claims would look like if the community of human rights advocates were to shift the basis of their defense and advocacy to include nonhumans. He also wondered what strategies exist for reaching a new mutual understanding beyond dialogue, and whether that would require a power struggle or cultural transformation. Could insurgent ontologies find ways to transform the dominant ontology within dominant state power and governance structures, or not? Rather than provide answers to such questions, Lieselotte mentioned the method of controlled equivocation developed by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2004) as a starting point for beginning to translate dialogue across different ontological perspectives and life worlds.

Chimère argued that since multi-stakeholder governance necessarily involves negotiating multiple values and interests, it may be more helpful to take an interest-based approach to level the playing field between vastly different groups of people. If people can express their needs and interests, they can somehow start to negotiate without the need to reference a singular dominant framework. If we relate to rights as a dominant framework, for example, then we will implicitly look to the state for a vindication of rights, which will always privilege dominant theories about whatever or whoever has rights.

Andreas further explicated that it's relatively easy to admit that others have needs, and since we all have needs, we can address each other at the same level.

Furthermore, if we admit that nonhuman beings also have needs and interests and that the world is alive, full of its own needs and interests, then we can start to negotiate conflicts without reference to dominant power structures. Lucien was slightly skeptical whether we could sufficiently interpret the needs of non-human beings. He also questioned how we could formulate the value of life in inclusive ways.

4.2. Scaling Commons Governance

A second group of participants discussed Ferananda Ibarra's work with the Unified Field Corporation (UFC). As co-director of the Commons Engine, Ferananda is working to design the organizational architecture of UFC and its currencies and governance structures. Unified Field Corporation is a decade-old company that produces agricultural products using a proprietary technology called gentle drying. The company purchases organic food that the market does not want—the 25% that goes to waste—and dries such ingredients as cranberries, bananas, and blueberries at high heats to produce pure ingredients (food crystals) with high nutritional value and a ten-year shelf life. UFC strives to address the problem of waste, mitigate climate change, and provide greater food security. The profit UFC generates by repurposing food waste, for example, is allocated to disaster relief projects and to food reserves across the world.

UFC's overall vision is to create an economic engine that provides incentives for farmers to migrate from organic to regenerative agriculture. Although organic farming does not use chemicals such as pesticides, it still degrades the health of the soil. Ferananda warned that the world's topsoil will be depleted in about 60 years if soil degradation continues at current rates (Arsenault, 2014). It is especially important to practice regenerative, not organic agriculture, because it restores the microbiome of the soil and mitigates climate change by sequestering more carbon. Regenerative agriculture also improves people's health because the health of Earth's microbiome directly supports the health of peoples' microbiomes. Right now, the soil is so depleted that not even organic food has the minerals and the nutrients people need.

Currently, UFC has one processing plant and seven associates in Klamath Falls, Oregon, but it is expected to have 30 associates over the next year and launch five or six new plants around the world in the next 5-6 years. Each plant can make up to $5 million a year, and although currently the CEO, David

Rose, owns the plants, he plans to make each plant employee-owned after a period of five years. One of UFC's major challenges is to design governance systems that allow every plant to operate as self-organized living systems as they scale up. UFC fears that by allowing employees to self-own and self-manage plants too soon, the plants may collapse or else transform into business-as-usual enterprises. Margaret mentioned the New Belgium Brewing Company, as a good example of an organization that successfully transitioned from corporate ownership to employee ownership by staging its development process.

Ferananda has explored the basis for self-organizing and distributed systems within organizations and has taken special interest in non-hierarchical decision-making processes following principles of radical democracy. For the past year, Ferananda has been developing the architecture for on-boarding and for self-management. When employees join UFC, she said, they are told they have two jobs—one is their regular job and the other is building a culture of wellness. Ferananda defined a culture of wellness as a thriving culture in which each individual has a high quality of life and a feeling of oneness, based on a collective sense of stewardship, belonging, and ownership. UFC uses a "culture map"— an idea developed by the company Gortex— to allow employees the right to participate in any decision-making process. Ferananda said UFC is trying to develop a process where you can make any decision you want, but you have to consult with people who are going to be impacted by the decision—which could be a lot of people, depending on how consequential a decision is.

Margaret noted that addressing this challenge entails determining how different domains of authority interact. She suggested that each plant could form a governing body consisting of representatives from all the functions of the organization, and that each of those governing bodies could become federated, so that representatives from each plant comprise an overall governing body for UFC. This form of governance follows principles of sociocracy. Ferananda said that UFC might create a representative of operations and a representative of culture at each plant, then convene all the representatives within a given region to make decisions that affect everyone.

Another challenge, Ferananda said, is that many employees do not want the responsibility of making all decisions especially when certain decisions entail a lot of risk. People who have only worked at the company for three months, for example, cannot make a decision that influences the company's vision or direction. So, Ferananda asked, how can we help people practice decision-making at smaller scales with less risk, and then over a period of five years, train

people to be involved in any decision they want? How can we determine which decisions people can make during the transition period, and which parameters should we provide for making decisions?

Silke Helfrich suggested one way is to create collective criteria for decision-making, so that every person, every employee can make a decision— even individually— as long as they make sure, that the decision is based upon the collective criteria. For example, if we want to decide what to have for dinner, everyone can suggest criteria for making a good decision (e.g., it should be fresh, local, healthy, etc.) and then the decision can be left up to a smaller group or even individuals who respect those criteria.

Silke used the example of Cecosesola to illustrate her point. Cecosesola is an association of 40 cooperatives in Venezuela. People do not have positions; they organize around tasks. There is a differential distribution of tasks based on a heterarchy. Heterarchy combines the logic of hierarchies with peer-to-peer networks. It differentiates domains of authority based on the different functions within an organization, but it does not allow any person to exert a higher authority over others. Decision-making authority is thus functionally differentiated so that specific functions that require specific expertise are distributed among those people with that expertise (e.g. only professional doctors can perform surgery); but a decision that affects everybody, like the organization's pay scale for example, includes everybody.

In hierarchies, power is centralized and consolidated. There is a point of reference (e.g., an executive branch) where power originates and flows out from. In a heterarchy, by contrast, some people and tasks exert more influence over the system as a whole, but there is never a point of reference or centralizing executive function (as in a pyramid) where power is concentrated. The central distinction, Margaret said, is that a hierarchy associates decision-making power with power *over* others, rather than how the scope of the decision affects more or less people, as in a heterarchy. In heterarchies, tasks and how much they influence the company are differentiated (e.g., different people have different levels of responsibility), but these people do not have a higher authority to make decisions that affect the organization as a whole. They do not have more control over decisions about organizational policies, decision-making protocols, etc.

Ferananda said, at UFC, for example, quality assurance is a function that requires a particular skill set and entails a substantial amount of risk. One person who possesses the needed skills assumes the responsibility and risk for determining if UFC's food meets its quality standards. Even though that person

exercises more influence over the company (given how important their function is), they do not exercise any more authority or decision-making power relative to other employees.

Silke added that in heterarchies, general tasks that do not require specialized skills are distributed among everyone in a rotation system that allows people to self-organize according to their needs and interests. People self-organize and self-select task groups and each person can be part of multiple task groups, though people devoted to hyper-specialized tasks like surgeons may be exempt. Within task groups, she explained, people openly discuss and arrive at collective decisions without needing formal procedures for registering decisions, using such methods as voting or consensus-taking that are common within representative democracies, for example.

Silke warned that even though we may have the intention to always organize commons heterarchically, we may be required in some instances to conform to state mandates. She mentioned how, for example, establishing the Commons Institute as a legal body meant that the members *had to* designate a president, so they chose to distribute that legally prescriptive position among five people. Finding ways to disrupt hierarchy even within traditionally hierarchical legal structures is also sometimes possible. It's what some call "legal hacking"; the law may require a hierarchy, but creative real-life workarounds can alter the intended functioning of law.

The final challenge that we discussed concerned issues of scaling. To what degree can radical democracy exist not just within smaller communities and organizations, but within and across regional communities, national governments, and global systems? And how would larger communities and systems empower individuals and smaller communities, rather than exercising power over them? The concept that we coined to address this challenge was "holopticism." Holopticism describes the capacity of every individual to see the whole, to make sense of their inter-relationships to others and the whole, and to make sense of what they need to do as both a unique individual and member of the wider community. Holopticism does not fuse the part and whole, as in Holographic Governance; it treats them as distinct, separable entities that can be effectively integrated.

Collective intelligence is optimized when there is holopticism, but typically, as Silke noted, individuals do not have access to and/or cannot make sense of all the relevant data to account for entire systems, especially when they take day-

to-day responsibility for concrete tasks that limit their focus field. The traditional benefits of centralized hierarchies are that individuals who cannot account for the whole can delegate higher authority to governing bodies with higher capacities for sensemaking and decision-making. Although participatory democracy has been successful at smaller scales, it has often failed to coordinate decision-making at such larger scales. It is exceedingly difficult for individuals to have a complete understanding of complex decision-making processes at global scales. Centralized hierarchies have thus been legitimized, in spite of producing rampant abuses of power, because they delegate authority to select groups and individuals deemed to have (rightly or wrongly) greater capacities for sense-making and decision-making.

For the first time in history, we can potentially have holopticism at any scale

Based on Feranandaʼs experience working with new technologies like the Holochain, she argued, for the first time in history, we can potentially have holopticism at any scale. By combining communication and sensor technologies with the nonproprietary exchange of data (i.e. everybody owns their data and freely shares it), we can create feedback loops for the free and efficient exchange of information. Digital information technologies that help us process, share, and make meaning of complex and diverse information flows will help us exceed the prior limits of our individual (cognitive) and collective (organizational) capacities for sense-making and decision-making.

With the new information technologies at our disposal, we can integrate decision-making processes heterarchically across different decision domains at any scale

We now increasingly have the capacity to render information flows meaningful for specific agents and organizations who self-select data based on who they are and what they need in real-time. People can receive enough relevant information to make informed decisions about complex issues, and decision-making processes can be efficiently distributed across networks to integrate everyone's input. The flow of information enables individuals to see the whole from each point of decision-making and make

responsible decisions towards the whole. Decision-making can become fully democratic and decentralized at much larger scales than heretofore possible.

This, Margaret said, is the future of Integrative Governance. With the new information technologies at our disposal, we can integrate decision-making processes heterarchically across different decision domains at any scale.

Alexandros explained how several municipal movements around the world developed digital tools to visualize this kind of integration. In Barcelona, for example, the government is using an online platform to allow citizens to make budgetary proposals, integrate and coordinate information about proposals, and decide on them through direct democratic decision-making processes. Similarly, Ferananda said that the MetaCurrency project[3] is building the technological tools and social patterns needed to enable an emerging ecosystem of distributed, equitable, and regenerative economies.

What's beautiful about these technologies is that they are applicable to almost any domain, allowing us to design commons-based systems in diverse sectors such as education, agriculture, and energy. One caveat, Mark Lawrence of the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies said, is that the potentials we are discussing require several other shifts to be realized as well. They require, for example, the further development of collective awareness and further evolutionary developments of *Homo Technicus*— the symbiotic integration of humans and technology—which could always serve to accelerate exploitation and capitalism, rather than the commons.



Participants of a small working group gather beside the River Jagst to discuss indigenous ontologies and human rights. Photo credit: Thomas Bruhn

3 http://metacurrency.org/about/

Conclusions

Many conventional forms of governance were created centuries ago based on a modern paradigm that is of limited relevance today. Many of today's social and ecological problems reveal the critical limitations of the modern paradigm and call for emerging political forms that can better manage complexity, foster direct democracy, and sustain flourishing ecosystems. The commons movement stands at an intriguing and compelling point of convergence between a passing world built in the image of modernity and a new world. By invoking the language and poetics of the commons, Peter says, we place ourselves at a powerful convergence of conversations and struggles for new forms of radical co-existence. We are invited to consider, for example, the generative inter-linkages between the commons, indigenous life worlds, and undercurrents of process-relational thinking in the West that radically subvert the modern paradigm.

While we aspire toward greater coherence between process-relational ontologies, patterns, and politics, we struggle to fully integrate and internalize them. We all fail in some measure to fully embody and enact healthy forms of relationality. In many cases, we are not able to live them because the structures we live in, which are to some degree beyond our control, don't provide the necessary social support for deep transformation. Developmentally, we also cannot jump from the personal to interpersonal all the way to the political and global precisely because these different dimensions have to organically transform their relationships with each other over time.

Process-relational ontologies, the patterns methodology, and Integrative Governance offer promising ways forward

Process-relational ontology embodies a different theory of change. It does not apply the same spatial metaphors (e.g., micro- / macro-) to reality. Relations are always mediated, not only through inter-personal contact, but through trans-personal, social processes (i.e., language, law, and money) which are themselves internalized, outside our control, and yet always part of us and open to change. One of the purposes of the Deep Dive was to understand how a governance framework based on process-

relational ontology might encourage commons to spread at any scale. Process-relational ontologies, the patterns methodology, and Integrative Governance offer promising ways forward. We arrived at the end of the Deep Dive in working groups that clarified some of the major challenges (e.g., colonialism) and promises (e.g., holopticism) of working with these frameworks to further develop commons thinking and commons activism.

Participants concluded the Deep Dive by offering the following strategic next-steps and reflections:

— Make an analytical comparison of Weberian ideal-typing and Alexander's pattern methodology.

— Combine and complement the ontological perspective on the commons with a counter-hegemonic and strategic political perspective.

— Outline next steps for how to co-create an Integrative Governance framework that explicitly nurtures commoning.

— Integrate a justice and equity lens more fully within commons thinking and movements.

— Compare commons in diverse cultural contexts to see how different understandings and practices of commoning relate to each other.

— Build cultures of practice where process-relational thinking can be more fully embodied and enacted in community.



Participants gather in Neudenau's historic marketplace outside the venue. Photo credit: Jacques Paysan

Appendix A

Participants

Alexandros Kioupkiolis (Greece)	Aristotle University
Andreas Weber (Germany)	Biologist, philosopher, and writer
Brooke Lavelle (USA)	Courage of Care Coalition
David Bollier (USA)	Commons Strategies Group
Ferananda Ibarra (Mexico)	Commons Engine
Lieselotte Viaene (Belgium)	Universidad Carlos III de Madrid
Lucien Demaris (Ecuador)	Relational Uprising
Man Fang (China)	Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies
Margaret Stout (USA)	West Virginia University
Mariteuw Chimère Diaw (Cameroon)	African Model Forest Network
Mark Lawrence (Germany)	Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies
Nicole Dewandre (Belgium)	European Commission
Peter Doran (Northern Ireland)	Queen's University Belfast
Petra Kuenkel (Germany)	Club of Rome
Silke Helfrich (Germany)	Commons Strategies Group
Thomas Bruhn (Germany)	Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies
Yunjeong Han (South Korea)	Ecological Civilization in Korea Project
Zack Walsh (USA)	Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies



Participants gather in the top floor of the historic home where all sessions were held. Photo credit: Jacques Paysan

Appendix B

Brief Explanation of Relational Becoming

The dialectic of a *transcendent* versus *immanent source of existence* is resolved through ***embodiment***, which accommodates a nontheistic potential similar to transcendence because it accepts the nonmaterial as "real," but imagines an embodied creation of the ontic more like immanence. There is no "beyond" that transcends the universe. Within all that exists, there is the capacity to co-create from non-temporal, nonmaterial potentiality. This radical form of immanence includes the material and nonmaterial within an open-ended whole. Thus, it can be understood as a "space *in between* immanence and transcendence" (Tønder 2005, 204). This conception synthesizes ontologies of abundance and lack by assuming a foundational void—but one that is filled with creative potential that can be accessed.

The relational dialectic of a *singular* (One) versus *plural* (Many) *expression of existence* is resolved through ***relational assemblage***, in which unique entities co-compose an open-ended whole from a combination of potentiality, prior existence, and environmental influences. Each instance of becoming is happening in a relational assemblage that interconnects everything from quantum particles to the expanding universe as a whole. Stuart Hall (1998) describes this as an ontological point between the dialectic of "pure 'autonomy' or total encapsulation" (447).

Finally, the process dialectic of a *static* versus *dynamic state of existence* is resolved by ***creative emergence***, in which the process of becoming is punctuated with moments of full expression. This concept describes "'a world in motion" where "everything is moving, even if some things are (temporarily) at rest" (Holm, Silentman, and Wallace 2003, 32).

Ontologically, all entities at all levels of analysis—beings, things, and places—are relationally assembling entities. This understanding offers "a new creative synthesis" (Christ 2003, 224) that affirms a dynamic balance among classical dualisms like spirit/matter, One/Many, and self/other.

Excerpted from:

Stout, Margaret, and Jeannine M. Love. 2016. *A radically democratic response to global governance: Dystopian utopias*. New York: Routledge.

Stout, Margaret, and Jeannine M. Love. 2019. *Integrative governance: Generating sustainable responses to global crises*. London: Routledge.

Appendix C

Governance Ideal Types

Generic Elements	Hierarchical Governance	Atomistic Governance
Ontological Assumptions	Static state, transcendent source, singular expression (Undifferentiated Individual)	Static state, immanent source, plural expression (Differentiated Individual)
Language Characteristics	Discrete, hierarchical	Discrete, nonhierarchical
Psychosocial Theory	individuality	Individuality
Epistemological Concepts	Rationalism	Empiricism
Belief Systems	Monotheism	Naturalism
Ethical Concepts	Deontological obligation	Consequentialism
Political Theory	Classical conservative liberalism	Modern liberalism
Economic Theory	Welfare state	Market exchange
Administrative Theory	Orthodox administration	New Public Service
Driving Principal	Order	Liberty
Pathology	Bondage	Isolation
Generic Elements	**Holographic Governance**	**Fragmented Governance**
Ontological Assumptions	Dynamic state, transcendent source, singular expression (Undifferentiated Relational)	Dynamic state, immanent source, plural expression (Not in 2012 typology)
Language Characteristics	Gerundial, holistic	Gerundial, discrete
Psychosocial Theory	Particular individuality	Singular Individuality
Epistemological Concepts	Idealism	Epistemological Anarchism
Belief Systems	Pantheism	Anti-essentialism
Ethical Concepts	Moral imperative	Moral skepticism/relativism
Political Theory	Socialism	Individualist anarchism
Economic Theory	Collective Planning	Self-sufficiency and barter
Administrative Theory	New Public Administration	New Public Management
Driving Principal	Unity	Autonomy
Pathology	Absorption	Alienation

Sources: (Stout and Love 2016)

Basic Ontological Explanations

Transcendent ontologies assume that the source of existence is beyond that which exists, while *immanent* ontologies place the source within all actual things, beings, and places.

Singular expression ontologies assume existence is whole (One)—it cannot be broken apart in some way, while *plural expression* ontologies assume existence is an aggregate of parts (Many).

A *static state* ontology assumes that existence simply *is* (being), while a *dynamic state* ontology assumes that existence is continually changing (becoming).

Generic Elements	Integrative Governance
Ontological Assumptions	Relational Becoming (Differentiated Relational)
Psychosocial Theory	Ensembling individuality
Epistemological Concepts	Integral Knowing
Belief Systems	Co-Creationism
Ethical Concepts	Stewardship
Political Theory	Radical Democracy
Economic Theory	Coopetition
Administrative Theory	Facilitative Coordination
Driving Principal	Integrative Process

Source: (Stout and Love, 2019)

Appendix D

Readings

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A Deep Dive co-hosted by the Commons Strategies Group and the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies

September 9-12, 2019

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Acknowledgements: Thanks to David Bollier, Silke Helfrich, and Thomas Bruhn whose critical feedback helped improve this report. Thanks also to all the participants who contributed to this report.

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