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Educational Commons

Democratic Values, Social Justice and Inclusion in Education

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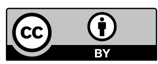

ISSN 2366-7516 ISSN 2366-7524 (electronic)
UNIPA Springer Series
ISBN 978-3-031-51836-2 ISBN 978-3-031-51837-9 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51837-9

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This Springer imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

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Acknowledgements

This book is the result of a three-year project carried out in the period 2021–2024. It is impossible to conduct this type of research without financial and institutional support. As well as the various university departments and partner institutions involved in the project, we would like to acknowledge the European Commission for funding the project through the Horizon 2020 Programme (Grant Agreement no. 101004491). We would also like to thank all the members of the national research teams as well as the teachers, educators, parents, and leaders of the Third Parties who worked with us while implementing our case studies in their educational contexts. For the children and young people involved, we extend a special thanks for showing us, once again, how important it is to carry out research work *with* them and not simply *about* them. Finally, we thank Pierpaolo Riva, publishing editor for UNIPA Springer Series, for his support and assistance throughout the publishing process.

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Contents

Introduction 1
Gianna Cappello, Marianna Siino, Natália Fernandes, and Mittzy Arciniega-Cáceres

Educational Commons in Formal Educational Settings

From Crisis to Commons? Exploring the Potential of the Commons Via Two Secondary Education Case Studies in Flanders 13
Juno Tourne, Rudi Roose, Jochen Devlieghere, and Lieve Bradt

Children and Adults Explore Human Beings' Place in Nature and Culture: A Swedish Case-Study of Early Childhood Commons for More Equal and Inclusive Education 29
Liselott Mariett Olsson, Robert Lecusay, and Monica Nilsson

Educational Commons in Non-formal Educational Settings

Building Youth Civic Engagement through Media Education and Educational Commons 51
Gianna Cappello and Marianna Siino

The Challenges of Children's Participation, Sharing, Collaboration, and Care in Non-formal Education Contexts: Insights from the SMOOTH Project 69
Natália Fernandes, Marlene Barra, Fernanda Martins, Daniela Silva, Joana R. Casanova, Teresa Sarmento, Vivian Agnolo Madalozzo, and Erika Machado do Ó Corrêa

Stunt Scooter and Educational Commons: A German Case Study 87
Sylvia Jäde, Florian Eßer, and Judith von der Heyde

Young People in Vulnerable Contexts: Shaping Collective Views Through Media and Educational Commons 109
Maria-Jose Palacios-Esparza, Mittzy Arciniega-Cáceres, Macarena Vallejos Cox, and Mònica Figueras-Maz

Agüita: Educational Commons, Arts and Well-Being 133
Lucía del Moral-Espín, Cristina Serván-Melero, Beatriz Gallego-Noche, and Ana María Rosendo-Chacón

Educational Commons in Art Museums 151
Niki Nikonanou, Panagiotis A. Kanellopoulos, Elena Viseri, and Elina Moraitopoulou

Educational Commons in Mixed Educational Settings

Democratic Nowtopias from the Educational Commonsverse in Greece 175
Yannis Pechtelidis, Anna Chronaki, and Naya Tselepi

Children, Citizenship, and Commons: Insights from Three Case Studies in Lisbon on the 3 C's 195
Catarina Tomás, Carolina Gonçalves, Juliana Gazzinelli, and Aline Almeida

Commoning for Social Justice: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation in Two Learning Environments 213
Carlos Moreno-Romero, Stamatia Savvani, Ülly Enn, and Alekos Pantazis

Transformative Commons and Education in Greece. Three Case Studies 235
Alexandros Kioupkiolis and Naya Tselepi

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Introduction

Gianna Cappello, Marianna Siino, Natália Fernandes, and Mittzy Arciniega-Cáceres

Many European countries have been long experiencing a crisis characterised by social exclusion and marginalisation, high levels of unemployment and underemployment, declining trust in democracy, environmental degradation, and a widening gap in educational quality and equity within formal and non-formal institutions. This critical situation has particularly adverse effects on the status of children and young people, especially those at risk, such as those living in poverty, refugees, and migrants. In this context, education holds particular significance as it can act as a catalyst for addressing various forms of inequality stemming from factors such as poverty, gender, nationality, age, disability, and more. It can facilitate social inclusion for everyone by exploring and constructing an alternative, collaborative way of life rooted in the notion of the *commons*.

This approach embodies democratic principles, equality, and creativity, fostering a sense of community that embraces differences and promotes sustainable relationships between humans and the environment. The term "commons," also referred to as "common-pool resources" [13] or "commons-based peer production" [2], encompasses goods and resources that are collectively utilised and generated. Access to these resources is provided on equitable terms, with possibilities ranging from entirely open access to exclusive consumption rights. The common good is managed

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G. Cappello et al. (eds.), *Educational Commons*, UNIPA Springer Series,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51837-9_1

collectively through egalitarian and participatory approaches by the communities that create or own it. In fact, the commons are not simply a set of resources or goods but also and foremost, a governing principle identifiable as *the common* [6, 8]. In their various forms, they typically exhibit a tripartite structure comprising three main components: (a) common resources or goods, (b) institutions (referred to as commoning practices), and (c) the communities (referred to as commoners) involved in the creation and perpetuation of commons [4].

From a socio-political perspective, the commons encompass a wide array of social structures and processes through which the commoners, potentially all community members on equal footing, shape and govern the production and utilisation of resources by collaboratively establishing the rules for such activities. Commoners continuously adapt and revise these rules to address specific socio-ecological conditions and historical contexts. Consequently, an incredible diversity of commoning practices exists across time, geography, resource domains, and cultural traditions, defying simple formulas and predefined classifications. However, what distinguishes them is that they are all driven by the commoners' desire to self-create means and ways of meeting their needs and pursuing their desires, in part independently from the influence of the state and the market [4, 6]. The common, a guiding principle for structuring society and collective endeavours, emphasises that communities should create, govern, and share social goods and activities through equal and participatory means. As such, it aims to ensure the effective inclusion of all individuals in decision-making processes and challenges established boundaries, exclusions, and inequalities.

The concept of the commons (and the common) has also been applied to the realm of digital technologies and the Internet. The digital commons include areas like free or open-source software and are characterised by distinctive modes of governance with flexible hierarchies and structures that facilitate participation [3]. Self-governance is a crucial aspect, involving open input from volunteers and a participatory process for coordinating work [11]. Additionally, these online communities can encompass a "transparent heterarchy", where qualified and elected community members may handle quality control and reject contributions that may threaten the system's integrity [1].

Education plays a vital role in this context, as it can catalyse experimentation, exploration, alternative social construction, and active inclusion processes. In the context of education as commons, the process of learning, the transmission and acquisition of knowledge, and the methods of governing this process are collectively managed and co-constructed by the entire educational community. Like any other kind of commons, educational commons do not arise organically or spontaneously but are the outcomes of a *peer-governance* process [12], in which individuals collaboratively make decisions, establish specific rules to set boundaries, and manage conflicts. Peer governance develops a sort of "relational ontology" whereby the relationships between entities are more important than the entities themselves. Therefore, the focus shifts from individuals to the interactions among them so that they collectively create a new form of "entangled agency" and develop social systems (Bollier and Helfrich 2019). Framed within a commons-based perspective, education is not

just about acknowledging individuals' diverse social and cultural backgrounds; it is also about actively engaging them in initiatives and activities that take into account the interconnected nature of their identities and the world around them.

As outlined by Wright [16], for the educational commons to be effective, they should meet four key criteria:

a. *Desirability*: they should be desirable, meaning they align with democratic ideals such as collective freedom, equal participation, solidarity, togetherness, caring, and sharing.
b. *Viability*: they should represent a viable alternative to the existing structures and functions of educational institutions. They should not only make the institution sustainable but also effectively serve the intended educational goals.
c. *Contribution to civil society*: they should contribute to strengthening civil society. This involves creating conditions that actively engage and include teachers, children, youth, and parents in educational and social life through egalitarian organisation and peer governance within the educational process and daily life of any educational setting.
d. *Achievability*: they should be achievable and applicable to current critical conditions.

Undoubtedly, the educational commons challenge neoliberal models of educational system development. These models are increasingly influenced by a technocratic/managerial logic that promotes a utilitarian view of human capital and reduces education as a form of "social investment". They transform education into an "asset" for the labour market and neglect the broader social, cultural, and civic roles of education, diminishing its value beyond its economic returns [5, 7, 9, 10, 14].

To develop empirically the emerging notion of the educational commons, we present here findings from the case studies developed during the research project *SMOOTH Educational Spaces. Passing through Enclosures and Reversing Inequalities through Educational Commons*, funded by the European Commission under the Horizon 2020 Programme for the period 2021–2024. The project involved a partnership of 12 entities (11 universities and one museum) located in 8 European countries: Belgium, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Sweden. Third Parties (schools, NGOs, local authorities) were also included as components of the research fieldwork which explored the notion of educational commons from an empirical point of view through a variety of teams and partners with different backgrounds, experiences, methodological approaches, and diversity of settings, contexts, and participants.

The overarching goal of the SMOOTH project was to comprehend, foster, and expedite the potential influence of education in addressing and reversing inequalities, especially those experienced by people (young and adults) belonging to vulnerable groups at risk, hence preventing and reducing social isolation, marginalisation, political frustration, fundamentalism and extremism, insecurity, and fear among these groups. This was achieved by introducing the emerging concept of the commons as an alternative framework of values and actions within preschools, schools, and

afterschool programs, focusing on the interactions among children and youth, as well as between children and youth and adults, within an utterly relational context.

Together with Third Parties, the SMOOTH partners implemented about 50 case studies as instances of commoning education where the children and youth participated alongside adults as co-researchers/collaborators and played some part in the decisions about the research process and the assessment of the findings. More than 60% of the case studies were implemented in non-formal educational settings, while the rest occurred in schools and preschools.

All case studies explore whether the educational commons experimented meet the above criteria and successfully address inequalities. Here is a summary of the research questions that guided SMOOTH fieldwork:

a. *Similar patterns*: are there recurring patterns in the diverse educational commons under investigation?
b. *Effectiveness of commons-based education*: can education be successfully organised based on commons patterns, and if so, how?
c. *Impact on inequalities*: what are the consequences of implementing commons' logic for reducing inequalities and promoting social inclusion among children and young people from vulnerable social groups?
d. *Peer education and peer production*: can commons-based peer education contribute to the further development of commons-based peer production?
e. *Children and youth experience*: how do children and youth collectively experience and construct the commons in educational settings?
f. *Gender differences*: are there gender differences in how children and youth engage with educational commons?
g. *Gender patterns*: do gender patterns emerge in the diverse educational commons being studied?
h. *Peer governance*: how do members of educational commons (children, young people, and adults) experience peer governance? How do they manage and resolve conflicts within their communities?
i. *Role of curricular and extra-curricular activities*: how do adults, including teachers and parents, perceive the role of curricular and extra-curricular activities and educational commons in addressing inequalities? What are their expectations in this regard?
j. *Identity shifts*: have there been any shifts in the roles and perspectives of the participants (children, youth, and adults) as they engage in educational commons?

In sum, viewed through the multifaceted perspectives of the different case studies developed during the SMOOTH project, the educational commons paradigm emphasises the cultural and social dimensions of education, challenging current neo-liberist models of educational system development that ultimately exacerbate educational inequalities [15] and "enclose" education within privatised and hierarchised modes of governance, making it harder for citizens and communities to have a say in how education is conceived, delivered and managed. In line with this challenge, findings from the project have been used to develop a series of policy recommendations on

reconfiguring education as a tool for promoting democratic values, social justice and inclusion (https://smooth-ecs.eu/, last accessed October 2023).

1 *Educational Commons. Democratic Values, Social Justice and Inclusion in Education*: A Short View of the Chapters

We have organised chapters according to the educational context (formal, non-formal or mixed) where case studies occurred. Here is a short presentation of them.

In this chapter, *From Crisis to Commons? Exploring the Potential of the Commons* via *Two Secondary Education Case Studies in Flanders*, Juno Tourne, Rudi Roose, Jochen Devlieghere, and Lieve Bradt report on the implementation of two commons-based projects within secondary schools in Flanders, highlighting the challenges faced in adopting commons principles within traditional educational settings. These challenges include resistance from teachers entrenched in the existing educational culture, the tendency to consider the commons as an individual responsibility rather than a collective commitment and the risk of instrumentalising the commons by prioritising outcomes over the participatory process. While commons-based initiatives face substantial hurdles within the current educational landscape, the chapter concludes that the commons provide a valuable and necessary alternative perspective that challenges the status quo and potentially bridges the gap between educational ideals and reality in Flanders and elsewhere.

Chapter 2, *Children and Adults Explore Human Beings' Place in Nature and Culture: A Swedish Case Study of Early Childhood Commons for More Equal and Inclusive Education*, authors Liselott Mariett Olsson, Robert Lecusay, and Monica Nilsson account for a Swedish case study on the potential of educational commons to promote a more equal and inclusive education in the early years. Several conditions decisive for this potential are identified and analysed: the relation between research and practice, the child's image, the role of the teachers, the definition of the educational task, and the educational methods used. These conditions are described in terms of how they were activated within a Playworld/Interactive performance based on a common research question, shared by preschool children and adults, on human beings' place in nature and culture. The chapter highlights that educational commons may function as a catalyst in promoting more equal and inclusive education, but only if necessary conditions are in place for this potential to be activated, conditions that are spelt out in detail in the chapter.

Chapter 3, *Building Youth Civic Engagement through Media Education and Educational Commons* written by Gianna Cappello and Marianna Siino, reports the findings of the implementation of an Italian case study carried out in a youth club in the city of Agrigento, which aims to introduce and study the emergent paradigm of the educational commons as an alternative value and action system to reinforce intercultural and intergenerational dialogue, establishing spaces of democratic citizenship that support local communities' development. The case study adopts this paradigm in

conjunction with insights derived from the field of media education and the notions of digital commons and “participatory culture”. The experimental media education activities implemented during the case study encouraged youths to develop the skills, knowledge, and ethical/critical frameworks needed to express a “civic intentionality” to be fully “engaged citizens” in the digital public sphere. Fieldwork, framed with an ethnographic and action-research approach, was developed by investigating the three dimensions of the notion of educational commons (commoners, commoning practices, and the community).

Chapter 4, *The Challenges of Children’s Participation, Sharing, Collaboration, and Care in Non-formal Education Contexts-Insights from the SMOOTH Project,* discusses how the two action research projects developed an outline of the four dimensions mentioned in the title, putting into practice the principles of Education as a Common Good. Natália Fernandes, Marlene Barra, Fernanda Martins, Daniela Silva, Joana R. Casanova, Teresa Sarmento, Vivian A. Madalozzo and Erika M. Ó Corrêa bring together a theoretical framework on the concept of children as commoners grounded on childhood studies. The authors reflect upon the “pedagogy of listening” and the participatory methodologies implemented in the fieldwork that ultimately led to the analysis of the four dimensions.

In Chap. 5, *Stunt Scooter and Educational Commons—A German Case Study*, Sylvia Jäde, Florian Eßer, and Judith von der Heyde describe the results of a case study dealing with the appropriation of public space through youth cultural practices, that is, how children and young people, move in public spaces with stunt scooters and utilise it for their own purposes. The chapter aims to observe and highlight commoning practices that emerged during the case study, i.e., sharing, caring, cooperation and engaged citizenship. Overall, the German case study shows that children and young people involved in joint political processes as commoners require a high degree of transparency on the part of the adults involved as to what scope they have for shaping these processes. Therefore, an intergenerational dialogue is necessary.

Chapter 6, *Young People in Vulnerable Contexts: Shaping Collective Views through Media and Educational Commons*, authored by María José Palacios-Esparza, Mittzy Arciniega-Cáceres, Macarena Vallejos-Cox and Mònica Figueras-Maz, shares the experience of a case study developed in non-formal education organisation in Barcelona with young people in vulnerable context. It focuses on the process of creation of audiovisual pieces through participatory workshops. These workshops were designed on the basis of participatory audiovisual methodology, a combination of alternative audiovisual approaches and the postulates of educational commons, with a special emphasis on pedagogical documentation, pedagogy of listening and project work. The results show how commoning practices emerge during the process and how the reflection and creation work promotes the emergence of collective discourses and makes it easier for the voices of minority groups to be heard.

Chapter 7, *Agüita: Educational Commons, Arts and Well-being*, written by Lucía Moral-Espín, Cristina Serván-Melero, Beatriz Gallego-Noche and Ana María Rosendo-Chacón, focuses on a specific experience of educational commons: the Agüita creative workshops in Seville and Jerez, two Andalusian cities in the

south of Spain. The two case studies presented are linked to non-formal education programmes implemented with the support of social organisations in precarious neighbourhoods. The chapter shows how collaborative artistic work, understood as the central idea of the workshops, nourishes and reinforces the tripartite structure of the commons and favours practices of caring, sharing and cooperating on which it is based. All of this is in the framework of a feminist methodology approach, such as feminist critical ethnography that not only questions social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender structure but also seeks the keys to action.

Niki Nikonanou, Panagiotis A. Kanellopoulos, Elena Viseri, and Elina Moraitopoulou, authors of Chap. 8, *Educational Commons in Art Museums*, describe four case studies that took place at four museums in Thessaloniki, Greece. Different groups of young people participated in the case studies that sought to bring together educational commons and collaborative artistic experimentation, leading to the co-creation of art projects. The chapter highlights ways in which commoning practices might help a museum function as an open-source institution by: i) introducing new ways through which members of its community might experience the museum as a common space and ii) by enabling the participants to delve into art practices that lead to a creative relationship with museum content and exhibits, recasting them as open-source materials that its community can leverage. It also aims to emphasise the value of delving into forms of creative artistic engagement that induce unlearning traditional roles and questioning hierarchical power distribution.

In Chap. 9, *Democratic Nowtopias from the Educational Commonsverse in Greece,* Yannis Pechtelidis, Anna Chronaki and Naya Tselepi examine the role educational commons play in addressing inequities, advancing democracy, and fostering inclusion by allowing teaching and learning to be shaped by the educational community in terms of equality, freedom, and creative engagement. Through several case studies conducted in formal and non-formal educational settings in Greece, including a self-organised autonomous libertarian educational community, three public preschools, and a primary and secondary school, the discussion concentrates on the possibility of educational commons for the radical democratisation of education and society. The paper makes the case that, under certain circumstances, the logic of the commons can flourish in the educational field by countering inequities and enhancing active participation and inclusion for all. However, the co-production and co-management of the teaching and learning process enacted by all members of the educational community in its everyday life and on a footing of equality, solidarity, autonomy, sharing and caring still have a long way to go. Despite this, the diverse case studies presented here as examples of the Greek "commonsverse" operate as a "crack" in the education status quo, inspiring new conceptualisations, methods, and actions about the educational commons.

In Chap. 10, *Children, Citizenship, and Commons: Insights from Three Case Studies in Lisbon on the 3 Cs*, Catarina Tomás, Carolina Gonçalves, Juliana Gazzinelli and Aline Almeida review the concepts of children's participation and active citizenship, exploring their intersection within the domains of sociology and educational sciences, and how they connect in the perspective of education as a common good. The authors discuss the main findings of the project developed by the team,

highlighting three dimensions of the educational commons: the role of children as commoners, communing practices, and communal aspects of goods and values–the three Cs of children, citizenship and commons–and the relation with children's understanding of citizenship and community. The authors acknowledge the multifaceted nature of children's roles as citizens in different educational settings, assuming that different social and organisational aspects influence children's integration into their communities.

Chapter 11, *Commoning for Social Justice: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation in two Learning Environments*, written by Carlos Moreno-Romero, Stamatia Savvani, Ülly Enn and Alekos Pantazis, delves into the relationship between education for social justice and the concept of educational commons, seeking to elucidate the connections that exist between these two distinct yet complementary components of inclusive and humanistic pedagogy and describe the diverse strategies that are based on or are aligning with commoning principles as enacted in two educational contexts (a formal and a non-formal one) located in Tallinn, Estonia. Through Action Research, which included observations in both a formal and non-formal learning environment and focus group interviews, these strategies were documented and discussed in relation to the principles of social justice. The chapter aims to highlight the capacity of these two pedagogical approaches to catalyse positive change within education systems.

In Chap. 12, *Transformative Commons and Education in Greece. Three case studies*, Alexandros Kioupkiolis and Naya Tselepi draw on the concept of commoning in education. The authors analyse three case studies conducted by the team in the context of the SMOOTH Project to support the argument that the methodology of sociocracy and the educational commons put into practice are possible actions to address inequalities and exclusions, contributing to a more democratic school life. By exploring the notion of educational commons, the authors argue that it not only lowers barriers, combating exclusions and diluting rigid disciplines, but is also more respectful of individual autonomy in terms of solidarity, reciprocity, and equal freedom (beyond fixed hierarchies)–in other words, a free democratic education.

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Educational Commons in Formal Educational Settings

From Crisis to Commons? Exploring the Potential of the Commons Via Two Secondary Education Case Studies in Flanders

Juno Tourne, Rudi Roose, Jochen Devlieghere, and Lieve Bradt

Abstract Education in Flanders—the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium—is currently facing what many describe as a crisis, marked by quality erosion and social inequalities. These issues have brought about a highly politicized and polarized debate that has led to a sole focus on achieving cognitive test outcomes, sidelining the importance of equity and social justice. In response to this, a growing number of academics and practitioners are actively exploring alternative educational frameworks, with the 'commons' framework gaining prominence in this context. This chapter delves into the implementation of two commons-based projects within secondary schools in Flanders, highlighting the challenges faced in implementing commons principles within traditional educational settings. These challenges include resistance from teachers entrenched in the existing educational culture, the tendency to consider the commons as an individual responsibility rather than a collective commitment and the risk of instrumentalizing the commons by prioritizing outcomes over the participatory process. While commons-based initiatives face substantial hurdles within the current educational landscape, they offer a useful alternative horizon that challenges the status quo and may help bridge the gap between educational ideals and reality in Flanders and elsewhere.

Keywords Secondary education · Social inequality · Commons · Neoliberalism · Case studies

1 Flemish Education in a State of Crisis

Education in Flanders—the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium—has found itself at a crossroads, facing what many perceive as a crisis, dubbed "in decay" and "deathly ill" by prominent figures in newspapers, politics, and public discourse. The pride of Flanders—the educational system that propelled Flanders from a modest region

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G. Cappello et al. (eds.), *Educational Commons*, UNIPA Springer Series,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51837-9_2

to a thriving knowledge economy post-World War II—has now become a source of concern [16]. Quality erosion tops the list of problems—with the declining scores in PISA rankings (reading literacy, mathematics, and science) and the TIMSS poll (mathematics and science) being cited constantly [17]. Besides that—although much less unanimously problematized—there is the fact that socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils score significantly worse on these tests—even more so than in other countries [17]. This educational divide is further compounded by high rates of grade retention among vulnerable young people—where those from the poorest decile are five times more likely to fall behind than their wealthier counterparts [16, 19]. Similarly, early school leaving rates disproportionately affect children from socioeconomically vulnerable families, who are almost ten times more likely to exit the educational system without a qualification [19, 20]. Additionally, vulnerable students are often directed toward lower-regarded educational tracks, with only 10% of the poorest young individuals attending general education compared to 88% of the wealthiest [9, 19]. These numbers show us that many vulnerable young people experience social exclusion in relation to education [12, 20, 28]—which encompasses both their physical absence in education, as well as their exclusion from meaning-making processes in education or the lack of a connection with education [25]. This highlights a noticeable 'misfit' between vulnerable youth and the educational system [18]. Education, rather than eradicating inequalities, currently perpetuates and legitimises them.

While Flanders has grappled with these (in) equality issues for years, it is only in the wake of declining academic performance that alarm bells have begun to ring loudly. Amid these pressing challenges in Flemish education, the ongoing debate is highly politicized, polarized, and fraught with imaginary contradictions, such as: equity versus excellence, wellbeing versus knowledge, and so on. The prevailing perspective contends that education has become too soft, the bar is set too low and there is too little of a focus on knowledge—referred to condescendingly as 'fun pedagogy'. Focusing too much on the 'bottom half' has led to too few opportunities for the 'top half', leading to the alleged levelling of Flemish education [4, 6]—or so it is claimed. New, more comprehensive, and tighter attainment targets—alongside stringent monitoring through standardized tests slated for implementation by 2024—should provide relief in the coming years [7]. In this shifting landscape, the value of (so-called) meritocratic excellence has emerged as the winner, supplanting the emphasis on equity and social justice [2]. This is palpable in the current Flemish policy plan on education, which conspicuously avoids addressing the issue of social inequality—in which Flemish education nevertheless stands out. These choices are far from neutral but reflect a distinct neoliberal vision of education in which quality primarily entails achieving generally favourable outcomes on cognitive tests assessing knowledge and skills deemed vital to the knowledge economy [13]—a phenomenon known as the human capitalisation of education. The Flemish education minister does not shy away from this fact, as evidenced by his policy paper that—quite literally—describes students as 'capital' and teachers as 'asset managers' [26].

As such, we tend to agree that Flemish education is in crisis—albeit for different reasons. While we acknowledge the vital role of knowledge transfer and effective

education in empowering the most vulnerable youth, the exclusive emphasis on these aspects increasingly neglects other roles of education and overlooks the contextual challenges faced by vulnerable students. Such a unilateral neoliberal perspective thus risks deepening this existing 'misfit', further alienating (vulnerable) young people, and perpetuating inequality and social injustice within the educational system and beyond. Our concerns are shared by others. Many academics and practitioners are also critical of the narrowing focus in education. They advocate for alternative perspectives and approaches—with the commons recently gaining much traction in this regard—that can steer education towards achieving equality and social justice. Our case studies reflect this resistance, as both third parties' school leaders actively sought alternative methods to reshape education and address the existing misalignment. Both school leaders proposed initiatives that were already in progress and which they identified as rooted in an alternative educational vision and aligning with a commons perspective. These projects aimed at incorporating commons-related concepts—mainly shared governance and peer-learning [14]—into the school environment. Unlike some proponents of the commons who advocate for the complete abandonment of traditional schooling [10, 15], our approach thus focuses on investigating the potential to reimagine and reconceptualize existing educational institutions as commons-based entities. We embrace the commons as an alternative framework of principles and practices and explore practical steps that attempt to counter the prevailing trend of educational narrowness. Our approach unfolds through monitoring the implementation of these two distinct projects, analysing them through a commons-oriented lens and exploring both challenges and opportunities for such an alternative framework to take shape within the current educational climate in Flanders.

2 Implementing Shared Governance and Peer-Learning: An Overview of the Case Studies

Even prior to the ascent of neoliberalism, Flanders' educational system exhibited market-like characteristics due to its strong reliance on the constitutional principle of educational freedom [2]. This freedom encompasses two types: passive freedom—which guarantees parents the right to choose their children's education and is often blamed for the high segregation in Flemish education—and active freedom—which allows individuals and organizations the freedom to provide education. Consequently, a substantial portion (70%) of Flanders' schools, including the ones in our case studies, fall under the category of 'free education'. This category encompasses government-aided education organised by private entities—of which 99% are Catholic [5]. To secure funding, these schools must adhere to specific educational structures mandated by decree, follow a curriculum with predefined attainment targets and development goals, undergo supervision by the educational inspectorate,

engage in local consultation platforms, embrace principles of participatory decision-making, and enforce a complete smoking ban—meaning they are not necessarily markedly distinct from true ‘public’ schools in practice. Secondary education starts at the age of twelve and comprises four main tracks: general education, technical education, vocational education, and artistic education (which is relatively marginal in terms of the number of students) [23]. The system is highly hierarchical and selective in nature—(in) famously known as the ‘Flemish cascade system’—in which technical and vocational courses become, through their negative prestige, the directions for those who fail in the education system [22]. This track-switching phenomenon—prevalent predominantly among vulnerable students—frequently results in diminished motivation and feelings of inadequacy [24]. The third parties in our research—both Catholic secondary schools situated in the same metropolitan area—are located at the so-called ‘lower end’ of this cascade system, meaning they are often a second or even later stop in the educational path of young people. The first school—hereafter referred to as school A—is a school for technical and vocational education, specialising in subjects related to mechanics and electricity. The school is known as a ‘concentration school’ in which most students have a low SES and belong to an ethnic minority. For context, 84.9% of the students do not speak Dutch at home, 75.3% have a low-educated mother, 69.5% receive a school allowance and only 22.5% are in the expected grade for their age. The second school—school B—is a school for technical education, which specializes in courses related to business and economics. In the past, the school used to be a school of mainly affluent pupils, but in recent years the school has seen its composition change to a more diverse student body. At the time of our research, 49.1% of students do not speak Dutch at home, 42.2% have a low-educated mother, 54.9% receive a school allowance and 52.8% are in the expected grade. These distinct profiles—combined with the school leaders’ aspirations to do things differently—offered intriguing and varied contexts for our research.

In school A the primary focus was on establishing ‘shared governance’ by reviving the dormant student council. The case study ran from 1/10/2022 till 30/06/2023—a full school year—and involved 25 pupils from all tracks and grades in the school (with ages ranging from 12 to 20). The council was mainly run by two teachers, although management was also sporadically involved. The student council convened on four occasions. The first two gatherings featured an extensive discussion—led by the two teachers—in which input was sought on the topics of: school organisation, school regulations, sanction policy, and the physical school environment. The pupils could—and did—raise problems and make proposals regarding these issues. During the third meeting, two tables were set up to showcase all the ideas and suggestions from the previous sessions. Each student had the chance to select the idea they considered most important and present it to the attending vice principal. Subsequent discussions centred on the feasibility of these proposals, exploring what could or could not be implemented and the reasons behind those decisions. The fourth session focused on practical work, in which students got the time to flesh out three proposals that were selected by the teachers: activities during the break, playground improvements, and initiatives for non-native newcomers to the school. Additionally, there were

weekly meetings where the involved teachers gathered to discuss the student council. School B implemented an initiative that focused on both 'peer-learning' and 'shared governance', creating a shared educational process through the implementation of 'the challenge'. This project was set up by an external city-subsidized educational organization and had the goal of providing a steppingstone for students to attain qualifications and enhance their prospects in both their educational journey and future endeavours. In a nutshell, the project worked closely with one third-year class of 22 students (with ages ranging from 13 to 15) for a whole school year (01/09/2022–30/06/2023) around the themes of 'wellbeing & motivation', 'learning & studying' and 'educational career' through both student-level-, class group- and school-level-initiatives. They intentionally chose a class group characterized as challenging, where the students faced difficulties not only in terms of academic performance but also in their interactions with teachers. The project was carried out by 3 workers from the external educational organisation (of which one was the main executor) and led by two teachers—the two class mentors—although all teachers of the class (10+) were involved. The principal was sporadically involved and kept up to date throughout the process. The central goal was to work together with the class group and teachers towards 'a challenge', which could be anything and was determined through mutual agreement. In this instance, the students decided on the organisation of an escape room. The class was split into two groups, with each of the groups making an escape room for one another in which the intention was for the young people to take control of most of this process themselves. Activities were typically organised weekly or biweekly and ranged from class group activities, collaborative exercises, pro-active discussion circles, motivation puzzles, supervised study moments, working together on the 'challenge', and so on. But also, collaborative parent-teacher conferences with the students, mentor talks among the students and the teachers, and so on. The workers from the external organisation and teachers came together every couple of months to discuss progress and follow-up. On the one hand, our research employs the ethnographic fieldnotes and pedagogical documentation gathered during the case studies. On the other, it makes use of interviews and focus groups that were conducted with all groups of actors involved in the case studies separately—the school leaders, the teachers, the external organization, and the students—at both the beginning and the end of the case studies. The evaluation process involved triangulating this data and analysing it through a commons-oriented lens. We identify and illustrate three main dilemmas—centred around the central concepts of the commons: community & the common good, young people as commoners, and commoning practices. Building upon these insights, we delve deeper into the possibilities and challenges facing the application of commons principles in current secondary education within the context of Flanders.

3 Putting Commons Principles into Practice: Insights from the Case Studies

3.1 Community & The Common Good—Isolated Practices vs. School Culture

One initial dilemma that consistently emerged during our exploration of these commons-based projects in education was the feasibility of implementing the commons—or even just commons principles—as isolated practices within schools when they clash head-on with the established school culture and the wider school community. Because—despite the visionary aspirations of both school leaders and the external organization involved—this dissonance between ideals and reality posed challenges that ultimately remained unresolved in both projects. Right from the outset, it was glaringly apparent that the prevailing school culture in both of our case study schools diverged significantly from the foundational principles of a commons-based framework. Most students held a pretty dim view of their school experiences. One student's candid admission encapsulated the collective sentiment: "I hate school. I'm just going to be honest: I hate school. In the morning, in the afternoon, after school… all the time" (Student–School B). They portrayed school life as boring, time-consuming, excessively focused on academics and characterized by passive learning, consistently conveying the feeling that they were expected to behave like robots. On top of that, they felt constrained by rigid rules, harsh disciplinary measures, and the sense that they were expected to conform unquestioningly—often likening the school to a prison. In addition, students felt that their voices were not heard, and their opinions carried little to no weight within the school:

> "No, your opinion means nothing here at school"
>
> "No, they don't care about that"
>
> "No, really not at all"
>
> "No, you try to say something… they don't care"
>
> (Students - School A)

Accordingly, most teachers in the school were in favour of traditional hierarchical structure of the school. Their discourse often using neoliberal language focused on performance, reflecting the deep-rooted ideology within the educational system. When asked about increased participation for students in the school, for example, one teacher argued:

> I think partly yes. When it comes to accommodation of the school or what there is to eat. But when it comes to teaching and the classroom: no. It's not like that in society either. If you start working, you don't tell your boss: 'no, no, no. I want to start working for you, but this and that and that of my job should be different'
>
> (Teacher—School A)

Consequently, the introduction of these commons-based initiatives faced considerable resistance from a cohort of teachers, resulting in significant roadblocks for

these initiatives. In school B, for example, the principal selectively chose teachers for the involved class group. Intentionally excluding those whose views clearly did not align with the project and selecting two of the most enthusiastic teachers whose perspectives did align with the project as class mentors and leaders of the project. Nonetheless, collaboration with the rest of the teachers remained challenging, as hardly any educators attended informational sessions or updates related to the challenge and many of them expressed dissatisfaction with the implementation of various initiatives stemming from the challenge or with the challenge as a whole. Even seemingly small proposals were met with skepticism—"all those unnecessary games" & "students should just sit, shut up and listen" (Teachers–School B)—and eventually abandoned. An illustrative incident occurred during one of the only times a teacher (apart from the mentors) was involved during a session of the challenge. A session was installed with one of the teachers who had several issues with the class group—referring to them as "impossible" and "manipulators"—in an attempt to work on this relationship. The teacher's authoritarian approach—which involved a lot of yelling at the pupils to: "sit in the right seat, put away their gum, put their backs against the backrest of the chairs, be quiet, listen, make no comments, and put away their mobile phone" all in the first two minutes of the class—immediately derailed the entire session as the pupils were not participating at all, but rather actively resisting. It became clear that there is no point in actively engaging reluctant teachers who do not agree or support the project and its vision as this often had counterproductive effects. Ultimately, the tense situation remained unresolved. To alleviate tension, the challenge sessions were split between two groups of students, shifting the project's focus primarily to student-level and class-group initiatives, with school-wide initiatives fading into the background. This shift garnered criticism not only from the mentors and the principal but also from the students themselves, who believed that the project should have involved teachers more in addressing systemic issues:

> "I think it was because we were the worst class and to make our behaviour better."
>
> "I'm going to be honest; I think the problem is often laid on us but not on the teachers. Because we are not paying attention, because we are not doing this or doing that. But teachers also must do their jobs and must explain things well."
>
> "We really should have sat down like this with the teachers themselves and be able to tell them what the problems are and how it can be better"
>
> "Yes, and how they can teach better. Because we just sit there, and they yell at us."
>
> "And also help teachers more to see the good and not always assume the bad with us"
>
> (Students—School B)

Ultimately, both projects had limited reach, confined mainly to class sessions or student council meetings, while remaining at odds with the broader school culture. Prompting us to question the potential impact of such projects when the wider school environment remains oblivious to or resistant to these principles. The students in school B, for example, agree the peer-learning project led to a better connection with the class group—indicating that they "can work better together", "have more friendship" and "are a better class group"—but that their relationship with the schools and the teachers remains unchanged, leading them to conclude that "school is still

as hateful as ever" (Students—School B). A first central challenge thus revolves around the effective engagement of both students and teachers as commoners and the incorporation of a shared commons vision into the school culture and among all members of the community.

3.2 *Young People as Commoners—Individual Responsibility Versus Shared Commitment*

A second dilemma that arose during the case studies was the feasibility of implementing the commons when students either lack the necessary knowledge and skills to participate as 'commoners' or display hesitance to engage with the 'commons'. It became evident that the majority of students in both case studies initially lacked familiarity with concepts like peer learning and shared governance or embodying the role of a 'commoner'. Their engagement with these ideas varied and many expressed reluctances. In light of the prevailing school atmosphere, it was not surprising that students in our case studies did not exhibit immediate enthusiasm for the projects. For instance, in school B, students very much had the idea that they were required to participate because they were such a 'terrible' class. In school A, although most students joined the student council, some did so with suspicion, doubting their ability to effect meaningful change and mainly using it as an excuse to avoid attending regular classes. Notably, in school A, despite this initial scepticism, students demonstrated enthusiasm during the initial sessions where they were encouraged to express their opinions freely. They offered a wide range of ideas, critiques, and proposals related to school organization. This enthusiasm was shared by both students and teachers, with one student stating: "I wish we could do this every week" (Student—School A). However, challenges emerged in the subsequent sessions when students were expected to take practical ownership of their proposals. The students struggled to articulate their proposals to the vice principal in the third session and had difficulty translating their ideas into concrete plans in the fourth session. This experience highlighted a critical issue: the majority of young students lack the necessary skills for peer learning and shared governance, which are not typically emphasized in traditional education settings where passive learning is the norm. The young people in school B, for example, indicated that working on the preparation of the escape room "took too long", "was too difficult" and that they were "not able to do this". Moreover, students held limited views of peer-learning and shared governance, often not aligning with a commons-based approach themselves. In school A, for example, students were reluctant to take an active role and did not view their participation in terms of collaborating with the teachers but rather as a one-sided act. The general expectation and sentiment being:

> "Teachers should just shut up a bit and let us talk. And let us say our opinion."

> "Yes, they should just type on the computer. Then discuss our ideas together with the other teachers. And then the next pupil council say to us: we discussed that, this is what is possible, and this is what we are going to do"
>
> (Students—School A)

In the end, while the pupils in both case studies enjoyed the opportunity to voice their opinions and ideas—and, more importantly, be heard—they remained hesitant to assume a more active role. Consequently, the practical implementation of both case studies was predominantly carried out by the adults involved. In school B, it was the external practitioner who spend many hours bringing together the different ideas of the students into a cohesive escape room and in school A, it was the teachers who eventually set out to work on the proposals. With the teachers reflecting on this as follows:

> "I think that is also typical to our students that sometimes, how do you say, taking action is a difficult point. They are passive."
>
> "I think they are not always used to that."
>
> "Taking initiative is often difficult."
>
> "They are afraid of the responsibility. For example, I tried to set up student mini enterprises for a few years in the seventh grade, but they were so distressed by the responsibility they had to bear. So, we got rid of that."
>
> (Teachers—School A)

This delegation of responsibility to adults instead of nurturing students' development as 'commoners'—both in regular education and during the case studies—underscored the need to develop the skills and capacities for peer learning and shared governance collaboratively with students, rather than presuming their readiness. Teachers frequently expected—or rather wanted—students to possess these skills, resulting in project abandonment when these expectations fell short. This underscores the imperative of creating suitable mechanisms and providing guidance for young individuals to engage effectively in peer-learning and shared governance, while also providing sufficient space and time to take such exercises seriously. The absence of this, impeded the success of these projects. Experiences in school B, for example, emphasized the importance of—so to speak—'setting the stage' for effective discussions. Discussions flowed much more smoothly when we arranged chairs in a circle and established a proactive circle for group discussions, as opposed to hastily conducting classroom-style discussions. This was often absent during both case studies, as this took extra time and effort and teachers oftentimes expected students to be able to do it readily. This dynamic illustrated that while students themselves oftentimes lacked the required knowledge and skills and preferred a passive role over embracing active responsibilities, this goes both ways, as teachers quickly took over the projects. Rather than questioning and revising their own approach and working collaboratively with students to foster 'commoner' skills, teachers were swift to dismiss students who could or would not cooperate in the desired matter. Teachers in school A concluded that "nothing really comes from the students, so there is no point in organising another session. So, we are just going to work out some of the things on our own" and "several of these young people should not participate

further because they lack motivation". This introduced a conditional aspect into the project—reinforcing the idea that the commons are exclusively for 'capable' students. In the same vein, teachers in school B were disgruntled that a class displaying disruptive behaviour was being rewarded with participation in 'the challenge.' They rather advocated for class council meetings to suspend or exclude such students—which ultimately led to the permanent exclusion of one student in the class. This also introduced a conditional element into the project—perpetuating the notion that the commons are reserved solely for 'deserving' students. A second central challenge thus revolves around embracing the commons as a collective commitment aimed at transforming each student into a commoner rather than an individual choice and responsibility of pupils.

3.3 Commoning Practices—Goal-Oriented Versus Process-Oriented

The third dilemma central in our case studies was the feasibly of implementing the commons when educational actors are more focused on the commons as an end goal rather than embracing it as a continuous process. Throughout the case studies, even teachers who were initially enthusiastic and committed to the projects tended to narrow down their scope. In school B, the Challenge project was narrowed down not only in terms of shifting its focus from a holistic approach to individual and classroom activities but also through an emphasis on qualification and achieving direct positive outcomes in terms of grades. Throughout the process, working on 'the challenge' was more than once derailed by more important and urgent matters, particularly related to learning and studying, as this dimension took clear precedence over 'wellbeing & motivation' and 'educational career'. For example, a session was organised around the maths kills of the pupils—although set-up in a more game-like way—due to poor test results. In school A, the student council project faced a similar narrowing and instrumentalization. From the outset, it became evident that teachers had specific agendas in mind for the student council—such as 'healthy food at school'—often unrelated to the students' interests. This instrumental approach was quickly discerned by the students, leading to frustration and disillusionment: "They mainly wanted to let their own things go forward and our things… you know… just ignore those" (Student–school A). As the project progressed, students faced challenges in presenting their ideas to school administrators, encountering resistance and dismissal of their proposals. Most of the ideas were promptly dismissed, with the school administration emphasizing the need for improvement in various areas before considering any changes. For instance, when students requested access to their grades on the digital school platform, they were informed that this would only be possible if they got more of their parents to use the platform first. Similarly, when they suggested implementing a five-minute grace period for students arriving late before facing penalties, their proposal was met with the argument that it might lead

to even more widespread tardiness. Additionally, when students inquired about the possibility of leaving school during lunch breaks starting in the third year rather than the fourth, they were informed that it might be feasible if they adhered better to the existing system for leaving the school during breaks. These repeated dismissals and rebuttals profoundly undermined their motivation and faith in the project's value:

> "We were not taken seriously at all. Because we gave a serious offer and they were like: yes, but that's not good..."
>
> "Yes, like: "we already know that, but we can't do anything about it". So okay, I've been sitting here talking for nothing then"
>
> "And that they sometimes make fun of that"
>
> "Like: "OK, never mind, you know the agreements, so stop".
>
> "Yes, they are always defending the school. You try to say something and then: No, that's not allowed, you guys know that. So why do we have a student council?"
>
> (Students—School A)

The student council quickly lost its participatory essence, with teachers driving the process and focusing on tangible results, particularly on improving the school playground. In this instance, the teachers worked on a playground wall artwork. Despite quickly consulting students for theme suggestions—which included cars, friends, sports, money, girls, music, and religion—the teachers found these ideas unsuitable for the school wall. Ultimately, a bird-themed design, symbolizing diversity, and freedom, was chosen for the playground but was later put on hold at the last minute due to the students' critiques and lack of identification with it. In the end, the students collectively expressed their disagreement with the idea that the student council had brought about any meaningful change in the school. One student from school A exclaimed: "RED ma'am, all red! All red! Nothing but red, ma'am. A red card! They let me give my opinion, but they don't do anything with it". They also referenced the historical ineffectiveness of the student council, stating: "Over all these years we have only been able to change the starting hour from school by ten minutes. And they always keep saying that. Constantly. Only that. Nothing else they can say". When confronted with these outcomes, teachers defended their approach, emphasizing the importance of attainable objectives and adherence to certain rules.

> I actually thought it was okay, particularly at the start when the ideas were more general, with the intention of progressing to concrete actions towards the end, but that's where it seemed to go wrong. Nonetheless, the playground refurbishment, which we organized ourselves, seems promising, and I believe it can make a difference.
>
> It's important to note that some issues they raised, such as altering school start times, break policies, or allowing students outside, are challenging to approve. Their primary focus appears to be on these areas, but it's crucial to clarify that not all proposals can be implemented. We need to emphasize this repeatedly, especially concerning issues like smoking bans, limitations on students leaving school until the fourth year, or changes to school hours.
>
> (Teachers—School A)

Teachers—and to a lesser extent also students—were very concerned with the outcomes of the projects, rather than valuing the participatory process. As such, this process was constantly narrowed down and instrumentalized by teachers or the

external organisation. This—combined with insufficient time and space for genuine participation—resulted in tokenistic involvement rather than meaningful engagement where students' voices were truly heard. In school A, the overall sentiment among the students was that it was a "waste of time". While a portion of students accepted the situation and mentioned that they still found enjoyment in it due to the free food, lack of class attendance, and the opportunity to express their opinions, it led some other students to become notably frustrated and intensify their resentment towards the school. One student even expressed strong anger, labelling the participating teachers as 'dishonest' individuals who 'act as they please.' In the end, we thus ran the risk of both students and teachers ending up feeling more demotivated than before. A third central challenge thus revolves around recognising the significance of a continuous communal process, valuing it for its intrinsic worth, and refraining from instrumentalising the commons while prioritising the achievement of specific objectives.

4 Commons-Based Education: Hurdles and Horizons

Our exploration of commons-based projects in secondary education has brought to the fore significant hurdles in translating commons principles into the complex fabric of the existing educational landscape, offering valuable insights for both the education system and the commons framework. First and foremost, there is a clash between commons ideals and the deeply ingrained culture of traditional schooling, with many educators resistant to change and collaborative efforts. Addressing this conflict requires a thoughtful approach to possibly engaging teachers, recognizing the fact that the commons imagine not only students but the entire school community as 'commoners'. This is particularly crucial given the severe shortage of teachers in regions like Flanders, stemming not just from recruitment difficulties but also from high attrition rates, highlighting a disconnect experienced not only by students but also by teachers themselves. This thus necessitates equal attention to the perspectives and experiences of teachers to explore ways to create a conducive working environment and revalue their indispensable role. Additionally, our case studies have revealed a lack of familiarity among students with concepts such as peer learning and shared governance, often leading to teachers taking over projects when students do not immediately exhibit the required skills or attitudes. This highlights the need to provide comprehensive guidance for students and foster an environment conducive to genuine collaboration—with sufficient time and space to take such endeavours seriously—emphasizing the commons as a collective commitment rather than an individual responsibility. The last dilemma highlights how educational stakeholders frequently narrow the focus of commons-based projects, prioritising tangible outcomes over the participatory process. This instrumentalization of the commons rendered the projects tokenistic rather than genuinely participatory. This underscores the importance of recognizing the intrinsic value of the communal process and resisting the temptation to reduce commons-based initiatives to mere tools for specific objectives.

Once more emphasising the necessity for additional time and space in education to genuinely value these processes.

So, where does this leave us? We've illustrated various hurdles, concluding that using the commons instrumentally does not yield the desired results and could, in fact, do more harm than good when they are hijacked for certain predefined objectives. On the flip side, the commons perspective does provide a useful vantage point that challenges the existing norms and encourages us to rethink and reshape education from the ground up. Therefore, although the commons may not (yet) serve as a cure-all solution, they can certainly contribute to the ongoing efforts to bridge the gap between educational ideals and reality by offering a horizon that provides a necessary counterbalance to the status quo. In this vein, our case studies provide us with important feedback, providing several dilemmas to pay attention to and be wary of when working with the commons. Taken together, these dilemmas illustrate that responsibility for transforming education does not (and cannot)—or certainly not only—lie with pupils and teachers but extends to broader school and education policy. In essence, our studies underscore the need for schools and the education system to provide more time and space for both students and teachers, viewing collective endeavours not as a threat but as a complementary—and even necessary—aspect to knowledge transfer. Simultaneously, the case studies provide insights for the framework of the commons, which can fortify itself by taking into account these views of teachers and pupils. Critical acknowledgment and contextual implementation are imperative, recognizing that the commons cannot exist in isolation from the prevailing context. As we conclude this chapter, we advocate for a nuanced and dynamic approach that recognizes the intricate interplay of stakeholders, policies, and transformative frameworks in shaping the future of education. A future that will have to be crafted through various experimentation—an objective to which this chapter sought to add another building block.

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Children and Adults Explore Human Beings' Place in Nature and Culture: A Swedish Case-Study of Early Childhood Commons for More Equal and Inclusive Education

Liselott Mariett Olsson, Robert Lecusay, and Monica Nilsson

Abstract This chapter accounts for a Swedish case-study on the potential of educational commons to promote more equal and inclusive education in the early years. Several conditions decisive for this potential to be activated are identified and analysed: (1) the relation between research and practice, (2) the image of the child, (3) the role of teachers, (4) the definition of the educational task, and (5) the educational methods used. These conditions are described further in terms of how they were activated within a Playworld/Interactive performance based a common research question, shared by preschool children and adults, on human beings' place in nature and culture. The chapter concludes that educational commons may function as a catalyst in promoting more equal and inclusive education if,

- the image of children and teachers is embedded within a shared, intergenerational search for meaning where both children and teachers are conceived as contributing commoners,
- education defines its task not only as compensatory but also as complementary and as a place for children's search for meaning, where imagination, play and the creative co-construction of narratives must be allowed to co-exist with more conventional and "rational" modes of learning and teaching,
- methods and theoretical tools in educational practice and research carry an aesthetic variety that incorporates both sensous-perceptive experiences and an enhancement of individual and collective memories as well as opportunities for children and adults to formulate and gather around a common object of knowledge and interest.

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G. Cappello et al. (eds.), *Educational Commons*, UNIPA Springer Series,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51837-9_3

Keywords Early childhood commons · Equal and inclusive education · Commoning research-practice · Aesthetic theories and methods · Playworld/ Interactive performance

1 Introduction: Small Children—Big Questions

Small children ask big questions. Today, very young children pose questions about, for instance, the environment and the current climate-crisis, about robots and artificial intelligence, but also about how we are to live, and live well, together. Children, including the very youngest, ask questions and have ideas of some of the most fundamental features of our common existence, such as what it means to share, care and cooperate; what it means to include and be included and into what anyone is supposed to be included. However, one big question for adults is how we listen and respond to these questions. Listening to the youngest children's big questions does not seem to be the forte of adults. We, in fact, rarely hear what children say and we underestimate both the seriousness and the size of their questions [41].

In this chapter, we would like to share some stories from a Swedish case-study within the SMOOTH project in which we attempted to really take children's questions seriously through investigating a big and common research question, shared by children and adults alike, concerning *human beings' place in nature and culture.* Considering the current "state of affairs" with an accelerating environmental crisis and rapid development of artificial intelligence, paired with hardening divisions along identity and geographical lines, this question should certainly have been posed and treated by adults in a more sophisticated way a long time ago. But due to an overestimation of human beings (and particularly the human intellect) in relation to other forms of life and more-than-human matter, we have persisted in overexploitation of the Earth's material resources. It is only very late that we pose questions about the consequences, including social and value-based ones, of such neglect, as well as of the consequences of handing over our lives to artificial machines [1, 3, 34]. At the same time, despite these prevailing challenges to both our and the Earth's existence, there is always the possibility for children and adults to engage in a common questioning of our current situation.

We believe that one of the central features of *educational commons* [45]—that the youngest children are considered capable of engaging with such big questions together with adults—requires greater emphasis if the *commons* is to become a genuine resource for education. We are not suggesting that children should be taking on the responsibility of solving current and future global problems, for that is our responsibility. Rather, we want to highlight the fact that very young children today pose questions about common concerns in contemporary society and that these need to be recognized and taken seriously by adults. As we will argue in this chapter, one condition for educational commons to become a resource for education in general, and for a more equal and inclusive education in particular, is for it to emphasize children as fully part of and contributing to the generational search for meaning in

the study and renewal of societies' commons. Such an ontologically informed image of the child, however, is not the only relevant condition for educational commons to become a resource for more equal and inclusive education. We will also argue that certain epistemologically informed ideas play a decisive role in whether and how educational commons may function as a catalyst for more equal and inclusive education[1]: These include the task of education, the role of teachers, educational methods, and researchers' ways of relating to educational practices.

2 A World Full of Commons: Accessing and Activating Existing Educational Commons

"The world is full of commons!" This idea, expressed in an early phase of the case-study, has guided us, the Swedish team, throughout the SMOOTH project. It has led to the insight that it is of utmost importance for any research- and innovation action, such as SMOOTH, to begin by realizing that *it is not a ready-made programme of the commons implemented in educational practices that will do the trick.* Quite contrary, our results show that researchers must begin by listening to the commons that children and teachers *already* are engaged in. The question then becomes, how do we, as researchers, access and activate those commons in ways that may enhance what is already going on and that may function as catalysts for more equal and inclusive education?

Our case-study has been conducted in a network of preschools located in a suburb south of Stockholm marked by a great variation in terms of children's socio-economic and cultural background. Children here grow up under unequal conditions related to structural factors such as childhood poverty, migration, family-situation and functional variation [59]. Teachers and headteachers in the network of preschools are acutely aware of these inequalities. Yet, in line with some of the core concepts and methodologies in the SMOOTH project—e.g., a pedagogy of listening, pedagogical documentation and project-work [7, 48, 56] they have chosen to focus on the scholastic gesture of *creating time and space* for children to study *and* transform culture, knowledge and values [35]. Prior to joining the SMOOTH project, the network of preschools was already largely functioning as a kind of *educational commons* [45]. For instance, the children are taken seriously as meaning-searching beings who make meaning of and contribute to the creation of culture, knowledge and values, i.e., the children are understood as *commoners*. There are existing *commoning practices* such as a mentorship system amongst children, an accessible, aesthetic and inclusive pedagogical environment, as well as meetings with children for collective decision-making. The preschools also harbour rich *common goods* expressed in a

[1] Whether and how educational commons can function as a catalyst for more equal and inclusive education is the main and overarching research question in the SMOOTH project (Grant Agreement 101004491—SMOOTH—H2020-SC6-TRANSFORMATIONS 2020, p.7, Annex B).

shared and living knowledge, values and pedagogical culture. These are continuously and collaboratively renewed by the children, caregivers, teachers and headteachers.

How, then, to enter such an already commons-based practice, taking care to not implement a pre-conceived idea of educational commons, but rather enhancing these existing commons to promote more equal and inclusive education?

In our case-study we found support in philosophical perspectives [11, 22] that pay attention to the importance of *joining* practice rather than *criticizing* or *instructing* it. Research often approaches practice through a transcendent logic and delivers theoretical critique of it for it to practically change; through transcendent critique research takes the position as subject, while the practice and the people in it function as objects: they are objects for the scientific thinking about them. There are, however, other ways of conceiving of this relation between theory and practice. In a conversation about intellectuals and power, French philosophers Michel Foucault (1926–1984) and Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995) state that the relation between intellectuals and so called "practitioners", or between theory and practice, need to be rethought to include an understanding of research and theory as practices themselves. Foucault suggests that the intellectual should not position her/himself "slightly ahead of" practice, nor "speak the silent truth of each and all," but rather recognize and struggle against those powers of which the intellectual is "both instrument and object" ([22]: 207). Deleuze's response is that theory is precisely nothing more than a "toolbox", and that Foucault has taught us a fundamental lesson about "the indignity of speaking for others" ([11]: 208). Research can, then, be about something other than "giving voice" or making people aware of their own ignorance. Rather, researchers and teachers can engage in a *commoning research-practice* that encompasses both practical and theoretical experiences where they *together* can critique and create both practice and theory.

Our collaborative, participatory research orientation is also grounded in the principles of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT; [8, 13]. A core methodological strategy adopted by CHAT scholars is that of co-creating with others the activities that produce the phenomena of interest [8]. These activities represent a kind of third space [23] where the knowledge, values and practices of the collaborating parties intersect and must be negotiated as part of the activity creation process. This is as intended: A researcher arranges to become an integral part of the activity so that she can experience what it is like to become a functional aspect of the system through the active and reflexive co-construction of the activity of interest with others [14]. In other words, it is a process not of participant observation, but rather of observant participation [49].

Supported by these theoretical perspectives, in the Spring 2021 we began to meet regularly with all participants in the Swedish team: three teachers and two headteachers from three preschools as well as two artists from an art/performance group. During these meetings we collectively studied the empirical and theoretical material on the commons made accessible as part of the design of the SMOOTH project (SMOOTH [45–58], see also Fielding and Moss [21], Kioupkiolis [24], Korsgaard [26], Pechtelidis and Kiuopkiolis [45]). We paid careful attention to the richness of the existing diversity of theoretical and methodological perspectives. Yet,

we added to these our own and others' perspectives in order to contribute to the *generation* of method and theory within this "emergent paradigm" and "alternative action and value system" (Grant Agreement 101004491—SMOOTH—H2020-SC6-TRANSFORMATIONS 2020, p. 3 Annex A). An important part of this work involved philosophically informed analyses of Swedish law and policy-documents related to equal and inclusive education in the early years [27]. In these documents equality is defined as a question of all children, regardless of background, having *equal access* to *the same quality* of preschool that nevertheless should have a *compensatory function* in relation to the varying conditions under which children grow up (see for instance, SFS [50] and Skolverket [61]). Yet, research shows that both equal access and quality are decreasing [63, 64] and it has recently been noted that less than 50% of Sweden's municipalities use a resource allocation model that corresponds to the compensatory function in terms of distributing resources according to the diverse contexts within which children grow up ([60]:67). Moreover, there is an ambiguity in these documents as despite the intentions to define equality in relation to the particularity of unique individuals and contexts (and not in terms of the same thing for all) there still seems to be a logic of universality at stake (all individuals and contexts should through the compensatory function end up resembling each other). This is visible not least in the idea of inclusion as a question about a given and universal set of culture, knowledge and values into which individuals are supposed to be included. Here, our analysis revealed an ontologically informed image of *children as lacking* (not contributing to culture, knowledge and values), a *reproductive epistemology* (children should only imitate and reproduce already existing culture, knowledge and values), and a proposed solution to the problem of inclusion through *early acquisition of the Swedish language* (children can be included only when they have adapted to nationally-linguistically coded definitions of culture, knowledge and values). In fact, these policies neglect state-of-the-art research on inclusive education [31, 38, 39],[2] especially research on important questions concerning *who* is supposed to be included by *whom* and into *what,* as well as research on the risk of stigmatization that inevitably arises when individuals are defined in terms of one or another category and "need". The question of equality and inclusion could, then, on a deeper philosophical and metaphysical level be defined as being about the relation between particularity and universality [10], and in education this plays out in the relation between the unique and particular individual or the local context and the common and universal features of the group or of larger global contexts [46]. In educational practice, this often implies the difficult task to create an equilibrium between individual children with all their varying backgrounds and desires and the common educational practices, processes and products [44] while paying careful attention to the transformative aspects of both human subjects and the culture, knowledge and values at stake. Current policies, however, fail miserably in identifying what is at stake in the question of equal and inclusive education in the early years, as the question of the relation between particularity and universality is not even addressed

[2] For an updated overview of state-of-the-art research in the field of inclusive education, see Magnússon [32].

within these documents. These policies also sharply contrast with the pedagogical culture of the commons in the preschool community in the Swedish case-study, a culture that conceived of children as contributing to and renewing existing culture, knowledge and values, not least through extra-linguistic and multimodal means.

Our team carefully considered these constraints and potentials for an educational commons approach to promote a more equal and inclusive education. Collectively, we made the choice to resist current policies, persist with the existing pedagogical culture of the commons, and begin our case-study by exploring the commons that children *already* were engaged in.

3 The Image of the Child and the Role of the Teacher: Contributing Commoners

During the first round of the case-study,[3] we performed analyses of teachers' pedagogical documentations of 34 children aged five. We focused on the children's current interests in three projects (one per preschool) on (1) *Robots*; (2) *Plants, Leaves and Trees*; and (3) *The Sprouting of Root-vegetables.* Before describing these projects, we must consider the important role that the teachers and headteachers played in the Swedish case-study. On a general level, the role of teachers has been of utmost importance for activating educational commons as a resource in education [52]. Observations concerning the role of teachers showed that those who adopted more collaborative, supportive roles, acting as facilitators or companions, were more successful in promoting a commons-based approach to the question of equal and inclusive education (ibid). This often involved engaging in what ostensibly defines the logic of a pedagogy of listening and pedagogical documentation: creating opportunities for children to make their own decisions, express themselves freely, and build relationships based on trust (both with their peers and with the adults). In our case-study, teachers and headteachers were already very experienced in this approach, something which has been of utmost importance for the results concerning the potential of educational commons to promote more equal and inclusive education. Together with the headteachers and the children, these teachers had developed methodological, theoretical and organisational principles that created and sustained a pedagogical culture of the commons without being explicitly defined as such. This was something that they had been doing for years prior to their participation in the SMOOTH project. One might reason that this made the Swedish case-study a "piece of cake" to perform. However, teachers also had to move outside their comfort-zone and to cooperate with researchers and artists in ways that were new to them. At times the

[3] The case-study was conducted in two rounds where the first round consisted of observation and analysis of children's existing commons in each of the three schools separately. In the second round, activities took place at a common atelier at one of the preschools engaged in the case-study (used by all preschools in the community to create encounters between children from different contexts). During both the first and second round the complete Swedish team, including all three teachers, ran the case-study together.

teachers resisted and intervened to transform some of the tasks in the project: they sensed that these were at odds with their pedagogical culture, and in a sense they were here "taking over" the role of the researchers. However, we believe that this is yet another important aspect for how educational commons can become a resource for more equal and inclusive education. Conflict, tension and negotiation as well as the welcoming of new suggestions from the ones who know what they are doing every day, is absolutely necessary and part of avoiding implementing educational commons as a "programme" in educational practices.

Here we echo the project's theoretical underpinnings which we discussed earlier. As noted above, the methodological rationale and motives of our research are rooted in an observant participant orientation that is committed to engaging in research involving collaborative and co-creative relations between researchers and professionals, while at the same time troubling the distinction between the two roles [2]. The process of negotiation described above—with the teachers, artists, children and researchers involved to varying degrees and at varying time scales in the design and performance of the case study activities—is illustrative of the ethos of *mutual appropriation* that underpins CHAT research both as a research logic and ethic [12, 37]. Mutual appropriation, seen first through the lens of its Vygotskian roots, involves participants in an activity or setting not only adapting and appropriating tools, practices, and meanings for their purposes but doing so in a way that reflects the contributions and influences of others. This iterative process of mutual shaping and adjustment highlights the deeply collaborative nature of many human activities. This is one reason why some CHAT scholars have argued for the application of the concept in theorizing not just interpersonal relations, but intergroup and interinstitutional relations, particularly as a way of developing a logic and ethic or research involving collaborations between institutions of higher education and local community stakeholders [12]. In essence, mutual appropriation reflects a participatory and evolving process where stakeholders (in the community, in the university) share and engage with one another's ideas and interests while also actively shaping, transforming, and redefining them based on their perspectives and needs. The process, while unpredictable, results in richer, more diverse, and potentially more impactful practices and theories.

Seen then through this lens of mutual shaping among all the participants involved, not only children, but also teachers must be considered as *contributing commoners*. This deep involvement in the research project by the teachers has also been expressed through the teachers' active collection *and* analysis of the empirical material in collaboration with us. First, our collective analysis revealed a multitude of strategies that children use to express some important commons-related values, such as sharing, caring and cooperating, in innovative and subtle ways: extra-linguistically, for instance, through "humming", using body-language and even invented language (e.g., "pretend-English" when encountering someone that speaks a language other than Swedish), but also through drawings, paintings, constructions, and other aesthetic means of expression. Furthermore, we observed that children had an interesting way of dealing with inclusion. They did this by adapting *to* "the newly arrived" children and not the other way around (i.e. expecting the children to adapt to the

local environment). Finally, children seemed to carry a "holistic" and "ecological" approach to some of the values of the commons. This was expressed, for instance, in their answers to the question of who, outside the preschool classroom, is important for what is done there. The children here answered, for instance, by referring to the kitchen-chef and to bees and insects "because without them we cannot live!" This holistic and ecological thinking was also visible in children's questions and activities in the projects on robots and plants. From analyses performed through a theory of meaning (Deleuze 1998), [65] children's search for and creation of meaning in the projects displayed their *non-dualistic*, *ecological*, *holistic* and *processual* thinking in relation to both nature and culture, to both plants and robots. This was expressed, for instance, by one group of children who worked on the project on *Plants, Leaves and Trees* when they theorized and made drawings of how plants, leaves and trees get food, oxygen and water. These drawings and theories were identical to the more rational and scientific description of photosynthesis, but in this project, children simultaneously displayed less conventional and more creative strategies such as trying to make a seed grow into a plant through, for instance, dancing and singing for it. These children, as well as the children in the project on *Making Root-vegetables Sprout* also emphasized the processual character and collaboration of different elements in the life of trees and plants, and they seemed to have a very close relation to nature, expressed not the least when one of the children stated: "You have to love your plants!".

Another example of this logic was visible in the activities of the children working within the project on *Robots.* These children were focused on the question of how to render the robot "alive" and expressed their theories using different aesthetic means. These children too were occupied with considering the robot as a holistic and processual system, a circuit where different parts such as cords, batteries and cogs inside the robot needed to collaborate for it to come alive. These children, like the children mentioned above who displayed a close and non-dualist relation between humans and nature, seemed to establish a very close and non-dualist relation, but here between human beings and technology, comparing, for instance, the cords inside the robot to human veins, and posing the question "Does the robot have a human heart?". We also observed how children in all groups were fascinated with the "heart" both as a symbol of love and friendship *and* as an important biological and life-sustaining organ. The children drew and wrote extensively about hearts. They reasoned about the heart's biological functions and symbolic power of love and friendship in relation to both plants and robots.

Further analysis of these expressions of children's commons was done with support from French philosopher Henri Bergson's (1859–1941) major work *The Creative Evolution* [3]. Bergson's main thesis is that the evolution of Life on the planet is what generates *and* transgresses the human intellect and understanding [66]. This is a short empirical fact that has far-reaching metaphysical consequences. Throughout this great book Bergson both contested and creatively contributed to the theories of evolution, existing at that time, gathered under two main directions:

"mechanism" (Darwinism) and "finalism" (Lamarckism).[4] What appears as an alternative here is a view of evolution as creatively and unpredictably evolving over time where the distinction between the human intellect, other forms of life, and even more-than-human matter, becomes much more complex and somewhat blurred. In contemporary times, such a nondualist widening of the human intellect has been confirmed by, for instance, researchers within plant neurobiology who convincingly show how plants too, have a form of intelligence [33].[5] Taken together these perspectives resemble the hypotheses and questions that the children posed within all three projects as well as to their thoughts about how to live, and live well, together. Often, when children "give life" to inanimate and more-than-human things, this is interpreted as children's "immature animistic" thinking, but from the perspectives here presented, we could argue that had we all adapted to and adopted such a close relationship with nature, we might not have found ourselves in the profound climate-crisis that we do today. And had we all adopted the children's capacity to pose relevant questions about human beings' relation to culture, technical innovations included, we might not have been so late with posing important questions about artificial intelligence. Further, the close and loving relationship children display both to humans and more-than humans would certainly be of value for all in our contemporary times. All in all, it seems not only that children are contributing to these cultural, knowledge- and value-based common features of our contemporary societies, but also that adults may have something to learn from children concerning the question of human beings' place in nature and culture.

4 The Complimentary Task of Education and Aesthetic Methods and Theories: A Playworld/Interactive Performance

Through the above-mentioned analyses, we concluded that we had arrived at a common research question for pursuing our case study, the question of human beings' place in nature and culture. Against the background of our policy analyses, we further understood that the second round of the case study required the inclusion of extraverbal and aesthetic opportunities for children to both engage in this common research question and continue questioning some of the core values of the commons: sharing caring and cooperating. This led us into a long period of collectively preparing what we came to call a "Playworld/Interactive performance" (PWIP). We created this activity in an atelier shared by the three preschools in the network. Children were to be invited to engage in the PWIP in six smaller groups of five to six children aged five during early Spring 2023.

[4] British biologist Charles Robert Darwin (1809–1882) and French biologist Jean-Baptiste de Lamarck (1744–1829).

[5] Our thanks here go to one of our partners in the SMOOTH project, Professor Elisabete Gomez, who gave us the important reference to Stefano Mancuso's work.

Playworlds is an approach that is unique for its focus on arrangements that motivate adult–child joint engagement in socio-dramatic play. Although there are versions of the approach that are adapted for work with children in middle childhood, adolescents, and adults, Playworlds tend to be situated in early childhood settings. The approach, which can be traced back to work developed in Sweden by Gunilla Lindqvist [30, 29] can be enacted through a set of general principles, allowing for adaptations to address local needs. Broadly speaking, Playworlds involve the joint creation by adults and children of a shared imaginary world loosely based on a narrative. Selection of the narrative is driven partly by interests related to topics important in the children's lives. The topics can be wide ranging, from emotions and abstract concepts (e.g. fear, friendship), to more immediate, practical concerns (e.g. addressing sustainability related issues), to curricular issues that may be more aligned with subject area learning. Development of a Playworld is an often long-term process in which the children and adults collaborate in the creation of and enactment/use of characters, props, and plots and the basis of a chosen, open narrative. It is the aesthetic and dramatic qualities of these activities that are understood as underpinning the emotional pull that draws children and adults into the play and makes them invested in it (Nilsson, 2009). On this point it is important to delve briefly into the theoretical foundations of the Playworld approach as these highlight important ways in which the PWIP became, or better put, enhanced the existing educational commons of the preschool network.

In developing the playworld approach Lindqvist drew heavily on Vygotsky's theories of play, culture, aesthetics and development. Lindqvist [29] highlights Vygotsky's focus on the productive aspect of play, that is, the imaginative and creative activity involved in the process of play itself. She looked particularly at Vygotsky's work on the interdependence of emotion, cognition, and meaning making. Vygotsky showed that for children, thought and emotion are integrated in knowledge construction, that the process of making meaning was infused with emotions and involved the interpretation and performance of experience. For Lindqvist [30], it was important to highlight the centrality of culture in this integrative process. She reminds us that Vygotsky's theory of play "is an all-embracing cultural theory, which combines emotion and thought, aesthetics and rationality" (p. 16). Lindqvist sought to understand how aesthetic activities influence children's play, with particular focus on social activities like dance, music, narrative, and drama. [6]

This pedagogy was in our case study hybridized with another aesthetic method: The interactive performance. The concept of "Interactive performance" refers to the work done by the art/performance group that formed part of our collaboration in the case study. This work involves performances together with children and youth of

[6] This led her to develop Playworlds, a pedagogy that would throw into relief the aesthetic underpinnings of children's play (see [16, 40]). We also draw on the Playworlds approach given that subsequent Playworlds Projects, inspired by Lindqvist's work, have shown ways in which Playworlds support inclusive intergenerational participation in educational settings [28, 17, 18, 47]. As members (second and third authors) of the International Playworld Network and the Playworld of Creative Research co-laboratories we point the reader to Ferholt et. al [15, 19, 66] for an overview of the Playworlds research that has been conducted over the past two decades.

diverse abilities. Of great importance here is the staging of extra-verbal, aesthetic and performative materials and processes offered to children and youth and considered as one of the most important means to promote more equal and inclusive practices. This in part because it creates a sensous universe where *every* body, regardless of its' abilities, can participate in common explorations of the world. This is further enhanced by the scenography, objects, materials and characters of the performance being designed to respond to participants current interests and questions as well as by the dramaturgical structure that carries an openness towards proposals and solutions beyond right or wrong (see further, Kollaborativet [25] and https://www.kollaborativet.se).

We sought further theoretical and methodological support for the PWIP in philosophical-aesthetical theories on cognition and the importance of giving children opportunities to explore the world both through sensous perception and through individual and collective memories [4, 5, 42, 43, 62]. Such theories identify two different kinds of memories. On the one hand, an embodied habit-memory that leads to automatic movements, such as when we learn to drive a car or ride a bike. On the other hand, a more personal memory that represents unique events in an individual's past. These two memories are often confused for one another, not least in education. For example, the more personal memory is often treated as habit-memory, which consequently leads to an approach to teaching and learning that is encyclopaedic in orientation, focused on simple repetition and transfer of given knowledge, which, however, rarely lasts. Inspired by these perspectives, we not only offered children rich opportunities to explore the common research question through sensous-perceptive experiences in the PWIP, but we also sought to enhance more personal individual and collective memories through the use of activities like a "letter-correspondence" between researchers, teachers and children before, during and after the events in the PWIP. This gesture was part of the performance, but it also belongs to the logic of pedagogical documentation [7]. It also links to an important feature of the SMOOTH project: asking children about their experiences of the commons. This letter-correspondence also served as an alternative to "child-interviews", that turned out to not function with this group of children as they explicitly resisted all our attempts to "interview" them. The letter-correspondence, however, was a much more successful research method, better adapted to children, and it was one essential part of throwing into relief the perspectives of the children. As the children had time to sit down, read our letters with their teachers, and think through how they wanted to respond, the letters became trustworthy sources of information about children's experiences and views of the commons. When we analysed the letter responses from the children, we were stunned by their advanced ideas of some of the core values of the commons and how attentive children were to each other and to us, including and welcoming us as "new coming" researchers. What's more, the letters also revealed the depth and detail of how much the children remembered of the events in the PWIP (for a developed account of these letters, see SMOOTH 2022 Reports D5.1, D6.1, D6.2 and D6.3). This further strengthens the idea that one's memory of things is improved when one has an experience at the intersection of sensous-perceptive explorations and

more personal individual and collective memories, than the encyclopaedic knowledge you are often forced to remember, but that is so easily forgotten [4]. To further enhance the encounter between sensous perception and individual and collective memories we gave back to children documentation of their artefacts in their ongoing projects on plants and robots as well as of the processes they were part of in the PWIP. Each time the children visited the PWIP they were shown filmed sequences from their previous visits and their artefacts were animated into short films that also invited the children to the tasks in the PWIP. Both the letter-correspondence and the pedagogical documentation functioned in our case-study as "memory-enhancing materials" that fostered "re-cognition" ([48]:69) where perception and memory "collaborate" in the production of concepts and ideas [5, 43].

In autumn 2022, the artists presented a first draft of the PWIP, connected to children's interests in robots and plants and actualizing the common research question human beings' place in nature and culture as well as some of the commons' underlying values: sharing, caring and cooperating. Their focus was on rooting the activity on the children's non-dualistic, ecological, holistic and processual thinking, as well as their interest in robots, plants and the heart as vital organ and a symbol for love and friendship. The main idea underpinning the PWIP was to create an environment and a performance in which the children would encounter two characters that needed their help. A robot-like figure called "HeartRob" and a plant-like figure called "HeartRoot"(!) (with actors inside the costumes that would interact with the children) had run out of energy due to a malfunctioning "nerve-central". The children's task was to get the nerve-central functioning again and to help HeartRoot and HeartRob to regain energy and revive.

It was decided that the PWIP should unfold in three phases:

PWIP 1: Children in small groups visit the PWIP installation and interact with the characters.

PWIP 2: Children return to the PWIP installation in the same groups and engage with the props, absent the characters (i.e. no actors or theatre technicians present).

PWIP 3: Two groups of children from two different preschools return to the PWIP installation and meet to discuss their experiences during PWIP 1 and 2, and to create a collective piece of art about these experiences.

This staging of the PWIP revealed yet another issue of importance for educational commons to become a resource for more equal and inclusive education, namely epistemologically informed ideas of the task of education. It seems that educational practices that adhere to the common-related values are also practices that define the task of education more broadly, closer to its' original and scholastic definition of giving free time and space to the new generations to study and transform culture, knowledge and values [52]. These are also practices where the epistemological foundation embraces children and youths' search for meaning and creative inventions of new culture, knowledge and values. Relatedly, yet another distinction of importance is the one defining the task of education as being of a compensatory and/or complementary character. Here, and in relation to the PWIP, we make the case that it is when the task of education is defined in the latter way—without the focus on "lack" entailed in the

compensatory logic—that children can become commoners, engage in commoning practices and contribute to the production of new common goods.

However, there is a need for some caution and precision: it is vain to create a dualist option of two different kinds of epistemologies, one essentialist and reproductive, the other transformative and productive. Education, and also educational commons, need to be able to embrace both [36]. At the same time, it is impossible to do away with the compensatory function of education or make of it the opposite to its complementary function. For some children, the compensatory aspect of education plays a vital role, even in terms of base needs. We dare to propose, however, that educational initiatives, such as the ones realized in this preschool community and in the PWIP can promote more equal and inclusive education. They do this in part because they define the task of education as complementary and because they create spaces for children to search for meaning where a wide range of extra-verbal and aesthetic tools and expressions are available. Below we further argue for this in relation to the results of the events in the PWIP.

5 Results of the PWIP: More and Multimodal Ways of Engaging in Educational Experiences and Events May Promote More Equal and Inclusive Education

The events in the PWIP clearly made a great impact on the children. Even though several children were initially hesitant and even scared as they encountered the PWIP for the first time, all the children became completely absorbed by the events, and no group wanted to leave by the end of each session. They asked to stay longer and inquired about the possibility of coming back. And anytime someone chose to stay a bit outside the events, often because of being a little bit scared, the other children would try to engage their friend in the common activity: "We think you need to be here as well so that we get enough energy"; "Don't be scared, just do like this!"; "Hold my hand and come here!". Another strategy adopted by the children who in the beginning chose to stay a bit outside the event (often in the lap of a teacher or a researcher) was to start directing their friends: "Try to tickle HeartRoot to make him move!" Eventually, these children also entered and became fully part of the events in the PWIP. And like the other children, these children would not want to leave the room, asking to come back soon. It was also striking how children in all the groups shared their previous experiences with friends that were not present the first time in the PWIP (something which happened in all groups). Children took care of their "new coming" peers. They showed and explained what they had done the first time, taught their peers the plant and robot "enlivening" strategies they had used previously, and comforted them when something was a little bit scary. At the same time, it also happened that the "new coming" children invented new strategies and tools and took care of the children that had already been there for the first time. During the events in the PWIP children seemed to enter a very intense search for

meaning, trying to make sense of everything in the PWIP, and there was so much laughter, and so many expressions of joy: “This is the most fun thing I have ever experienced!”; “This is crazy interesting!”; “I love being here!”; “I don’t want to leave!”. Children also thanked us when they were leaving: “Thank you so much for letting us be here!”, and their ways of sharing, caring and cooperating were extremely sophisticated. Children formulated hypothesizes and questions that they shared with each other; they collectively tried out different solutions to give the figures energy and love; they asked each other for help; and they called for their peers to create a common exploration: “Hey guys! What if we try to connect this cord with this one to make HeartRob move?”; “Hey guys! What if we try to give HeartRoot energy by putting potatoes by his roots?”; “Hey guys! What if we hug Heartroot/HeartRob to give it love?”. This last strategy of hugging HeartRob and HeartRoot, giving them love, was used by all groups of children. All groups of children showed great care and concern about helping the figures and giving them energy and love. It was also apparent that it was the interaction with the figures that was the most important for the children. All groups of children sooner or later started communicating directly with the figures, asking them about their condition and how they could help: “How do you feel in your heart HeartRoot?”; “How can we help you?”; What do you want us to do?”.

When analyzing these events, we turned to Bergson’s philosophical perspectives on the freedom to formulate problems and questions rather than repeating ready-made answers and solutions [4] as well as ideas from CHAT concerning the importance, in the creation of joint activity, of shared objects through which participants negotiate and sustain such activity [9]. In our analysis we postulated that all these strategies for sharing, caring and cooperating in the mission to get the nerve-central going and to give back energy and life to HeartRob and HeartRoot, occurred when there was no longer “a right answer” to the questions at stake and when children and adults share a common object and goal. Children’s many tools and strategies for giving back energy and love to HeartRob and HeartRoot were also analysed as being close to some sort of “analogue programming”—children try to give instructions to the figures, and they try to “run” them through “programming” them. The strategies could be considered in terms of yet another important feature of educational commons: open convivial tools and infrastructures [51]. Here, though, these are more of an analogue character and they range from more “rational” solutions, such as putting missing batteries and connecting cords in HeartRob’s circuit board (placed behind a hatch in the stomach of the figure), to more “fantasy-like” and emotionally charged solutions, such as decorating both HeartRob and HeartRoot with beautiful UV yarn; dancing and singing for HeartRoot; hugging both figures, even expressing their love directly to the figures: “I love you HeartRob!”. This expresses what, from a Vygotskian and Playworlds perspective, above was described as an intimate relation between emotion and thought and aesthetics and rationality. It is striking that all groups of children deployed these strategies, balancing on the border between the intellectual and the sensous-perceptive and emotional. There appeared to be no preference or separation between these different ways of navigating the world, and the children again displayed a holistic and non-dualistic thinking.

The third and last time the children visited to the PWIP, they did so in mixed groups of approximately 10 children (4–5 children from two different preschools). This occasion began with the children introducing themselves to one another, with some children discovering that they already knew each other, for instance, from playing in the same football team. Even though there was excitement and a little bit of shyness for some, discussions about what they had experienced in the PWIP quickly developed already during this initial meeting. The children were then asked to go around the room where PWIP had taken place. The room had been prepared so that documentation of all the groups visits to the PWIP were on display. The children were asked to explore the documentation.

This was appreciated by the children. They were highly focused not only on the photos of themselves, but of photos of other children and what they had collectively done in the PWIP. Quickly, though, they ran towards the figures HeartRob and Heart-Root and started interacting with them as they had done the second time in the PWIP (getting inside the costumes and interacting with each other). We saw many examples of children who had not previously known each other, but that immediately started to play together and tell each other about the different strategies they had used to get the figures moving, speaking, dancing and emitting light. This was analyzed as an expression of how strong and intense experiences and emotions, especially aesthetic ones that activate both body and mind, can create bonds and relations between people [6, 30]. This is very much the effect that art can have on us all and it may be to such experiences we have to turn to overcome divisions between people and cultures and to further promote the commons-based values of sharing, caring and cooperating. These aspects were further enhanced in what followed by the end of this last event in the PWIP when children were asked to negotiate how to place the drawings and writings that they had prepared and brought with them and that would constitute a final and common art piece, a collage. Here, some truly interesting events took place. There was, for instance, a moment where two groups had placed all their respective drawings and figures on two distinct sides of the paper. We pointed this out to the children, being careful to also tell them that this final decision needed to be made by them, and we asked them if they thought it should be like this, or if there were other options. The children discussed this, and it turned out that all children, but one, thought this design was good. The child that disagreed had "borrowed" some drawings of batteries from the other group and stated that he needed them, explaining that if not, his drawing of HeartRob would not have enough energy. One child said: "I know, let's vote about it", and proceeded to explain the two different options. All hands but the one from the child with a different opinion were raised. Educators and researchers asked the children what to do now, and the children concluded that it was quite fine to mix the two options, so that the child who was alone in his option could keep the drawings of the batteries from the other group on his group's side of the collage and together with his drawing. This was analyzed as a fine moment of more sophisticated democratic decision-making where everybody comes out content [6], and as both expressing and further exemplifying how these very young children really do have some extraordinary competencies in commons-related values and practices.

To summarize, in contrast to the ambiguous definitions of equality and inclusion articulated in national policies, what we see in the PWIP events is that both equality and inclusion seem to increase not just when each child is allowed to be a contributing commoner in her/his unique ways, but also when there is a shared object of knowledge and interest amongst children and children, and children and adults. This delicate equilibrium between the particularity of each individual and the universality of the group and the common practices and products is further facilitated when extra-verbal and aesthetic means of expression are available—when there are more and multimodal ways of engaging in educational experiences and events, which in turn afford the possibility for more children to be included in a more equal way.

6 Discussion on the Potential of Educational Commons to Promote More Equal and Inclusive Education: "Yes, But…"

When synthesizing our analyses of the PWIP with an eye towards understanding its potential to be a means through which educational commons may promote more equal and inclusive education, what stands out is that we saw no evidence of children being excluded by anyone in the activity. Furthermore, in both the observed events in the PWIP and in the letter-correspondence, what stands out is the fact that the children were eager to join the adults in common explorations. They also showed a strong and sustained capacity for meta-reflection and for understanding what the adults were interested in. This kind of engagement seemed to depend at least in part on the children feeling and recognizing that the adults were *genuinely* interested in their perspectives on the common research question and that they had the *liberty* to express themselves and *contribute* to it in ways that were consequential also for the overarching SMOOTH project. Perhaps the most striking example of this were the diverse and refined ways that the children worked with the central objective of the SMOOTH project, *active social inclusion*. This was true not just when the children engaged with one another, but also in how they welcomed and included the researchers with a lot of humour, candour, interest and warmth. The children were also very proud of themselves and what they had done in the PWIP. This is currently evident, as they are now talking about themselves as "researchers" and that they are "doing research" in their daily activities. This is further confirmed by a text-message sent from the children to us researchers after we had presented the case study at a conference on the SMOOTH project in Greece: "We now think that we are famous when you have told the whole of Europe of our project! Are you going to Japan next?". Children really seem to feel that they contributed with something very important to the SMOOTH project.

To conclude, our answer to the SMOOTH project's main research question on whether and how educational commons may function as a catalyst in the promotion of more equal and inclusive education is right now: "Yes, but…". The but refers

to what seem to be necessary conditions for this potential to be activated. It can be formulated as follows: Educational commons may function as a catalyst in promoting more equal and inclusive education *if,*

- the image of children and teachers is embedded within a shared, intergenerational search for meaning where both children and teachers are conceived as *contributing commoners*,
- education defines its task not only as compensatory but also as *complementary* and as *a place for children's search for meaning*, where *imagination*, *play* and the *creative co-construction of narratives* must be allowed to co-exist with more conventional and "rational" modes of learning and teaching,
- methods and theoretical tools in educational practice and research carry an *aesthetic* variety that incorporates *both sensous-perceptive experiences and an enhancement of individual and collective memories* as well as opportunities for children and adults to formulate and gather around *a common object of knowledge and interest*.

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Educational Commons in Non-formal Educational Settings

Building Youth Civic Engagement through Media Education and Educational Commons

Gianna Cappello and Marianna Siino

Abstract The Italian case study, presented in this chapter, develops the concept of educational commons building on the field of media education and the notions of "participatory culture" and digital commons. The motivation for this study arose from the need to reconsider education as a shared resource and to examine the importance of experimenting with, monitoring, and evaluating (digital) co-creation practices that may engage and empower young people within their communities. Hence, our research questions were: (a) How do young people collectively experience and build the educational commons? (b) How do participants (youth and adults) in educational commons experience peer governance, and how do they handle and resolve conflicts? (c) How does the co-creation of a photo blog as a shared space of action help young people discover and develop a "civic intentionality" in the (digital) public sphere? (d) What are the effects of applying a commons' logic to address inequalities and achieve social inclusion of young people from vulnerable social groups? The analysis of the textual data collected through interviews and focus groups, logbooks, fieldnotes, observation grids, and audiovisual documentation, we have been able to (a) reconstruct the micro-context in which the case study activities took place, (b) comprehensively describe the relational dynamics, the processes, and the products using unobtrusive methods, and (c) assess the impact of the activities concerning the objective of developing "civic intentionality" and reducing educational inequalities through an educational-commons and media-education approach.

Keywords Educational commons · Media education · Youth club · Photo blog · Participatory culture

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G. Cappello et al. (eds.), *Educational Commons*, UNIPA Springer Series,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51837-9_4

1 Introduction[1]

The Italian case studies develop the concept of educational commons building on the field of media education and the notions of "participatory culture" and digital commons, adopting an action-research approach. The choice of this conceptual and methodological framework is motivated by the fact that these notions allow us to imagine and experiment with educational activities based on sharing, dialogue, and co-creation.

This was in line with the general goal of the Smooth project to rethink education as a common good and reflect on the importance of experiencing, monitoring, evaluating and narrating the co-creative practices that underlie the active participation and (in our case) civic engagement of young people.

Our case studies involved the same target group (young people aged 12 and 16) and were implemented in non-formal educational contexts with some similarities and specific characteristics. Both contexts are youth clubs that aim to promote initiatives using a bottom-up approach. One case study took place at the Centro Tau (http://mediatau.it/centrotau/), located in the La Zisa neighbourhood, one of the most at-risk areas of the metropolitan city of Palermo, characterised by high rates of job insecurity and unemployment, early school leaving, child labour, and delinquency. The other case study took place in Agrigento, in a youth club run by MondoAltro Foundation (https://www.caritasagrigento.it/fondazione-mondoaltro/), a Catholic organisation addressing the needs of disadvantaged people in the local community through innovative social and educational initiatives. Its areas of intervention include migration, international cooperation, and support for poverty.

This chapter presents findings from the case study carried out in Agrigento to verify whether and how educational commons may generate transformative processes inspired by an expanded notion of social action and politics (a micro-politics, so to speak) that includes and at the same time transcends the formal political system and its institutions.

2 Media Education for Youth Civic Engagement

Since the 1980s, media education has gradually abandoned the traditional protectionist approach to take a more "interlocutory" vision that, starting from the need to have a greater understanding of the complexity of youth cultures, aims not so much to protect them as to encourage them to have a more critical relationship with the media and their media practices. In this sense, media education

> begins with students' existing experience and knowledge, but it also challenges them to move beyond it. It works with their personal and emotional investments in media, but it also encourages them to reflect upon and analyse them. It provides opportunities for creativity and

[1] Gianna Cappello wrote paragraphs 2 and 5. Marianna Siino wrote paragraphs 3 and 4. Paragraphs 1 and 6 were written jointly.

> self-expression, but it also emphasises the need for critical evaluation. It provides students with new information, unfamiliar theories, and critical tools for analysis, but it seeks to engage them in debate rather than merely trying to command their assent. ([13], p. 75)

Building on fields such as Cultural Studies and audience ethnography, media education has developed three interconnected modes of action: an *interpretive mode* that employs textual and paratextual analysis strategies to look at texts but also at the ritualising and socialising aspects of media consumption; a *social science mode* that looks at the broader context where media operate as social institutions in relationship with social, cultural, economic, and political institutions; and a *creative mode* that integrates textual and contextual analysis with a (self)-expressive dimension that enhances youth agency and subjective experience through their own media productions [14].

Although the thesis of media education as an approach to developing critical thinking has been widely explored in media education research,[2] much less so has been the reflection on how critical thinking should translate into civic engagement in everyday life [1, 28, 29]. Boyte [10] speaks in this regard of a "civic gap" between being aware of a problem (through acquiring critical analysis skills) and then being able, or willing to, take action to address it in everyday life. Due to this gap, media education faces new challenges today to foster a "civic intentionality where interventions are designed to bring people together in support of solving social problems, reinventing spaces for meaningful engagement, creating positive dialogue in communities". ([28], p. 8).

Therefore, media education aims to not only develop the capacity "to access, analyse, evaluate, and create" [18] but also to foster the ability "to take social action by working individually and collaboratively to share knowledge and solve problems in the family, workplace and community, and by participating as a member of a community" ([24], p. viii). Mihailidis [29] argues that critical analysis and creative production (the traditional media education modes of action) should be complemented by some form of *action* in the public sphere, including the digital one. This brings us to the notion of educational commons as an alternative model of social and political action and to the Italian case studies of the Smooth project.

Our starting question was how to operationalise, from an empirical point of view, the concepts of critical analysis and creative production and how they can engage youth in social action. Any (media) educational intervention, in fact, must involve not only strategic planning to achieve particular learning objectives but also a declination of the competencies to be developed to assess empirically their acquisition at the end of the intervention [15]. For such assessment, we have used two models that are widely adopted in media education research, adding a third one, developed by Mihailidis and Thevenin [30], particularly useful for detecting the notion of youth civic engagement as the ability to act in a public context.

In the first model, three groups of skills are identified. At a personal level, the skills to be developed relate to the capacity to use technological devices to access

[2] Some representative references are: Buckingham [11, 13], Hobbs [24], Hobbs and Mihailidis [25], Bennett et al. [6].

the Internet, store information, share content, etc. (*technical skills*). Other skills concern the capacity to understand and evaluate media messages (*cognitive skills*): who created them, for what purpose, what they explicitly or implicitly represent, what values and beliefs they display, what linguistic conventions and codes are used, what audiences they aim at, and how audiences may differently interpret them, what commercial implications they entail. Finally, *communication and participatory skills* enable youth to establish relationships with others and participate in collaborative activities.

Buckingham [12] model makes instead a distinction between a *cognitive-conceptual level* (what one needs to know about the media as a social institution, a symbolic/cultural resource and an economic-industrial apparatus) and an *operational level* (that is, what one needs to know to do "things" with or about the media). The first level includes knowing how media language produces meaning, how ideology and stereotypes concur to (mis)represent reality, how media industries make profit, how audiences are targeted and how they consume/use media as prosumers. The second level includes more practical skills related to *reading* (for example, to deconstruct media texts by applying textual analysis skills) and writing (to create media content and share it responsibly, making it appropriate to purpose, context, and audience).

Building on these models, the innovative effort of Mihailidis' and Thevenin's [30] model is to focus on these skills can be placed within the framework of civic engagement The "engaged citizen" for Mihailidis and Thevenin (see Fig. 1) must be able not only to critically access the web, analyse and create different forms of media content but also generate, from these skills, some kind of action and/or dialogue with the local community. In other words, to bridge the "civic gap" and (re)construct the civic intentionality of media education, the typical skills of critical analysis and creative production must be placed within the more general framework of the civic/public sphere.

Mihailidis' and Thevenin's model is based on the four key competencies developed through media education. The first two, *participatory competency and collaborative competency*, focus on Henry Jenkin's notion of "participatory culture" [30] and are intended to operate at a broader socio-relational level, while the third one, the *expressive competency*, operates at the micro level of personal "conscientisation" [21]. "By focusing on the creation, dissemination, and reception of individual expression, young citizens can reflect on the content of their voice, and also on the power they have to be part of a larger civic dialogue" ([30], p. 1618). Finally, by acquiring *critical competencies*, they learn to take a critical distance from media content, reflecting on their ideological and commercial implications. Of course, attaining these competencies depends to a good extent on the conditions created by the social actors operating in local contexts (schools, families, NGOs, cultural institutions, local authorities, and policymakers, etc.). However, as much as one cannot define a priori what it means to be an engaged citizen and how one gets there, in an increasingly mediated world, the competencies indicated by Mihailidis and Thevenin appear indispensable to help "empower civic voices for the future of sustainable, tolerant, and participatory democracy in the digital age" ([30], p. 1619).

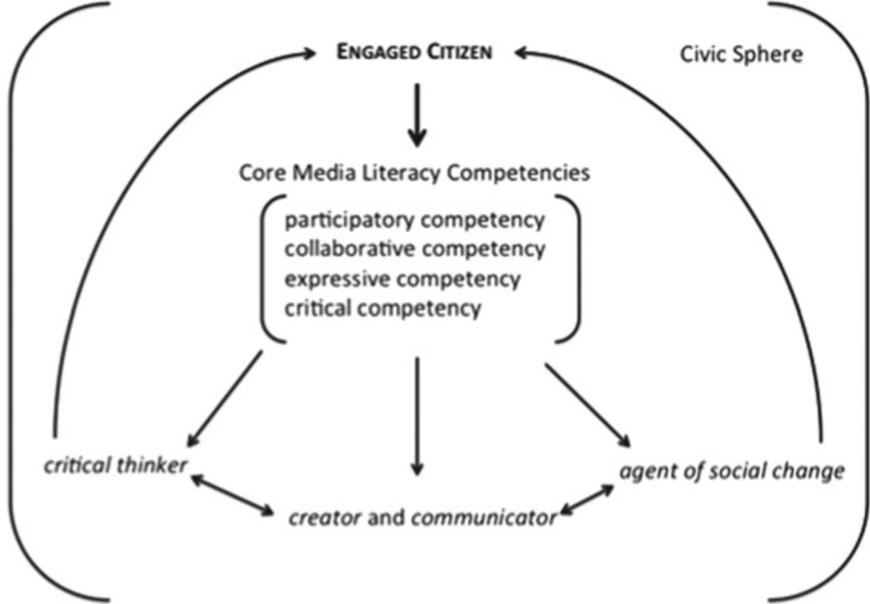

Fig. 1 A model for the core competencies of the "engaged citizen" ([30]: 1617)

3 From the Digital Commons to "Participatory Culture"

The other fundamental notion inspiring the Italian case studies of educational commons is that of digital commons. This notion is in part similar to that of the traditional commons. . Like "natural" commons (urban gardens, forests, or pastures), digital commons are non-excludable goods (i.e., their use/consumption cannot be prevented, except at high cost). Still, unlike traditional commons, they are also non-rival, i.e., there is no risk that excessive use or consumption will harm others. Potentially, everyone can access and enjoy the good, and even if more people do, this does not result in a diminution or decay of the good itself. Moreover, digital commons have a global scale that traditional commons, tied to a circumscribed natural or urban resource, do not.

The free software movement is the most important precedent for the digital commons. Launched in the early 1980s by activist and programmer Richard Stallman, the movement contrasted the nascent proprietary software industry, Microsoft and Apple foremost, with the then-established practice of working with open-source software and its four "freedoms".[3] Over the years, the many projects related to FLOSS

[3] "The freedom to run the program as you wish, for any purpose (freedom 0). The freedom to study how the program works and change it so it does your computing as you wish (freedom 1). Access to the source code is a precondition for this. The freedom to redistribute copies so you can help others (freedom 2). The freedom to distribute copies of your modified versions to others (freedom 3). By doing this you can give the whole community a chance to benefit from your changes. Access to

(Free, Libre and Open Source Software) have demonstrated the concrete possibility that digital resources can be co-managed as commons in the sense studied by Ostrom [31]. With the beginning of the twenty-first century, the traditional focus on the "natural" commons was joined by an interest in commons related to culture, information, and knowledge [2–5, 8, 9, 22], an interest also reinforced as a result of a second wave of enclosures represented more or less overt forms of privatisation, surveillance, and commodification of cultural and scientific production. The advent of Web 2.0 has exponentially amplified the potential of the digital commons by empowering anyone to produce content and fostering new forms of de-institutionalised creativity. Open-source communities, citizen journalism blogs, online fandom and video gaming groups have multiplied, developing some sort of decentralised, self-managed communities of "collective intelligence" (Lévy 1994) where individual freedom is coupled with co-managed, open, horizontal decision-making mechanisms and processes. An interesting key to understanding this more culturalist notion of the digital commons is Jenkins's [26] concept of "participatory culture", i.e., a culture

> with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices. In a participatory culture, members also believe their contributions matter and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least, members care about others' opinions of what they have created). (p. xi)

Four characteristics of "participatory culture" make it assimilable to the digital commons [7]. The first characteristic is the *sense of belonging*, played out, however, not so much on the level of communication (and thus content) but on that of social practices whereby "communication is not simply a mediating factor but becomes an environment of interaction, a place [...] where experiences can be inscribed" ([7], p. 11). A second characteristic is *expression*, that is, the fact that users, especially youth and fans, can produce and share content. The third characteristic is *collaborative problem-solving*, i.e., working in groups to perform tasks, develop projects, and generate shared knowledge. Finally, the fourth characteristic is *flow sharing*, i.e., the "widespread capacity to share and participate in the media flow sharing" through practices such as podcasting, file sharing, and RSS feeds ([7], p. 14).

Despite the enthusiasm with which it has been received, the idea that "participatory culture" is, an expression of creativity and empowerment has been criticised as a form of cyber-populism [19]. Some scholars [17] have emphasised the need to distinguish between mere access to the Internet, a more complex interactive activity in which users exchange content (self-produced or not), and actual participation in which users are involved in projects of collaborative content production (the classic example is Wikipedia). For the latter case to occur, where we can actually talk about models of collaboration and self-governance that recall the basic principles of the commons, namely co-creation, co-management, and social sharing, certain basic conditions must be in place [23]:

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the source code is a precondition for this". https://www.gnu.org/philosophy/free-sw.en.html#four-freedoms, last accessed October 2023.

- *intentionality*: do participants share the goals and stages of the project, or are they mere executors?
- *mode control*: are participants empowered to question the rules of participation, or are they forced to accept them passively, fearing exclusion from the group?
- *ownership*: who owns the products originated by this collaboration?
- *accessibility*: who can participate, how and for how long? Who decides the criteria for accessibility?
- *equality*: do all participants have equal power in decisions, or are there hierarchies and differentiations of roles and functions? If there are, are they the result of a collective decision? Can they be challenged? And how?

Jenkins himself [26] notes that the affirmation of participatory culture cannot be taken for granted. A "political and pedagogical intervention" is needed to address three critical issues that could jeopardise it, especially with regard to younger people: (1) the participation gap, i.e., unequal access to Internet opportunities; (2) the transparency problem, i.e., recognising how media influence (albeit non-deterministically) our perceptions of reality; and (3) the ethical challenge, i.e., making sure that young people "are socialised into the emerging ethical standards that should shape their practices as media makers and participants in online communities" (p. xiii). Jenkins also mentions more structural problems related to the fact that social media evolution of the Internet, while enhancing the possibilities of commoning, also implies new processes of enclosure and an increasing commodification and exploitation of prosumers' creativity due to the rise of the oligopoly of GAFAM (Google/Alphabet, Apple, Facebook/Meta, Amazon, Microsoft) and their Chinese rivals, the BATX (Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent, Xiaomi) [20, 33–35].

In sum, while the beginning of this century has seen the explosion of the most diverse forms of digital commons, it has also witnessed the consolidation of a process of oligopolistic enclosing by large high-tech corporations. In other words, the Internet, especially in its most recent social media version, is part of the problem but also part of the solution. On the Internet, we can find many concrete examples of social action that could serve as a model for experimenting with alternative systems of co-governance, production of knowledge and culture, and economic development. These examples—intertwined with the offline action of the most diverse social movements—could reverse, or at least circumscribe, the negative effects, especially in terms of inequality and social inclusion, that are being generated by a growing and pervasive process of privatisation and commodification of ever more extensive and more diverse spheres of the social system, including the Internet.

4 Experimenting Educational Commons in Agrigento: The Action-Research Plan

One of two Italian case studies took place in Agrigento, at the youth club run by the Mondoaltro Foundation (https://www.caritasagrigento.it/fondazione-mondoaltro/). The Mondoaltro Foundation is a Catholic organisation (linked to Caritas) whose mission is to respond to the needs of disadvantaged people in the local community through innovative social and educational initiatives. Participatory methods and inclusion are the two cornerstones of the Foundation's action, particularly interculturality. Over the years, it has become a key institution supporting individuals with "fragile" living conditions (poverty, cultural and language differences, job placement or housing difficulties, etc.). The Foundation organises a series of distinct activities according to the age group of beneficiaries. For young people, the prevailing activities are those related to school support. However, an attempt is made to have them stay at the club and participate in various workshops (art, music, photography, etc.) and broader educational activities to promote better inclusion in the local community. The relationship between the youth club and the Agrigento community is very complex, filtered at many levels by existing prejudices that contribute, according to the educators working in the club, to construct a distorted representation. Club attendees, for example, are mixed, but the Agrigento community perceives it as the "migrant youth club". This distorted perception contributes to erecting imaginary barriers and creates a kind of "bubble" little community well apart from the larger community.

Our case study involved ten young people, five boys and five girls, aged 12 to 14, all second-generation migrants.[4] Senegal, Morocco and Romania are the countries of origin of their parents. These young people, primarily because of their hybrid identity status, are vulnerable subjects and more exposed to the risk of social exclusion. Therefore, the youth club was particularly suitable for testing commoning practices and verifying their inclusive potential. Fieldwork was articulated into a three-phase action-research plan:

(1) a *training* period for the educators working in the club (February-April 2022) to describe the action-research approach and provide media education competencies (with a focus on digital photography and blogging) and how they can be aligned with the goals of the Smooth project in terms of co-creation, co-governance, and peer-to-peer education;
(2) a *first round* of activities (April–September 2022) during which educators, in turn, trained the children in the critical, creative, and responsible use of photography and online sharing. During the first round, a photo blog was created where the content co-produced by the children was shared until the end of the second round (https://smoothitaly.wordpress.com/, last accessed October 2023);
(3) a *second round* (January-July 2023), during which the youth co-created content for the photo blog, increasingly strengthening ties within the club and the local

[4] For a definition and an empirical study on second-generation youth in Italy, see [27].

> community. The second round in Agrigento was an extension of the first, further developing the shared learning processes. Our goal was to involve parents, formal institutions, and the local community as a whole in the process of "reading and writing" about issues affecting the local community. Meetings were organised to promote discussion primarily with parents (e.g., a multi-ethnic lunch where the youth cooked for the whole Smooth community with the help of some parents) and with the local community on issues chosen by the youth themselves (e.g., youth did some interviews to adults outside the club on the redevelopment of a city area). A longer-term impact of the case study will be detectable in the extent to which it succeeded in reaching a larger community and, more importantly, in triggering social change, both in the vision of the subjects involved and in the relationships that they activate or not, in the bonds they generate or not, and in the interpretation of "community" as it becomes a "narration" in their own words.

To detect and monitor change, the action-research phases were accompanied by a series of data collection and evaluation activities carried out at the very beginning of the first round, during the first and second rounds, and after the second round. From the perspective of action research, all processes were constantly monitored by actively involving the same actors (educators, researchers, and children) with complementary roles. The information thus obtained was further enriched by the material drawn from the constant informal exchanges (online meetings, chats, emails) between researchers and educators. Fieldwork involved using typical ethnographic research tools: participant observation, focus groups, and in-depth interviews. The empirical basis of our analysis consisted of textual data collected through the interviews and focus groups, logbooks with field notes, observation grids, and textual and audiovisual productions resulting from cooperation among the children (photographs, videos, drawings, etc.).

The educators became "fellow travellers" and facilitators during the case study. They helped young people become commoners, that is, creative and self-directed individuals who feed off the shared educational good, the culture and knowledge transmitted by the community, but who also undertake their own innovative explorations, renewing what they inherited and creating new forms of culture and knowledge. It all took place within a community in which each creative subject engaged with other creative subjects, thus participating in the collective reinvention and expansion of culture, values, and knowledge in society as a whole. The adult—the educator—renounces asymmetry and interacts with youth equally. Young people are equally able subjects, bearers of unique and singular potentialities and creative energies. They can become free citizens, belonging to a community but, at the same time, autonomous actors within it [32]. Since the first round, young people in Agrigento have felt increasingly free to propose, create, imagine their own pathways, express their needs and share desires.

Undoubtedly, the bottom-up approach typical of the youth club was a strength in developing our case study. The educators involved in the training were already familiar with participatory methods as they use them daily in their relationship with the children. However, during the activities, they learned how to finalise their use

better and also value the broader framework within which they can be applied: a community of commoners who share a common good, education itself.

Another area of particular interest concerning the dynamics within the community was conflict resolution, which is a vital principle for community resilience and sustainability [32]. A specific conflict resolution model was proposed during the training, namely that of active listening, which is related to a broader approach of listening pedagogy, developed principally by the Reggio Emilia "school", combined fruitfully with the theoretical approaches on the (educational) commons.

Another central area was peer governance and peer education. Commons do not emerge naturally or spontaneously but are the product of the sharing process. Peer governance, through which people co-decide and co-manage within the community, is the basis of all commoning practices. In this context, peers have the same rights and duties and are considered equally capable of contributing to a cooperative project and deciding how it will evolve. A final area of interest was children's rights and well-being, understood as a permanent expansion of their capacities, autonomy and self-determination in the present.

In sum, the action-research process developed during our case study aimed at detecting empirically the three dimensions of the commons concept as identified in the theoretical framework of the Smooth project (see Introduction): the shared good/resource, the commoning practices, and community members. Each dimension was declined into less abstract sub-dimensions and research questions, functional to empirically detect useful information to assess the impact of the intervention and to provide guidelines for a possible redesign of the case study.

The collected data during the fieldwork allowed us to:

- reconstruct the micro-context in which the activities took place,
- describe in depth and with non-invasive methods social dynamics,
- analyse the processes and the products,
- assess the impact of the implemented activities to develop a "civic intentionality" to reduce the "civic gap" and educational inequalities by comparing the results of the two different rounds of implementation of the case study.

The following paragraph will summarise the main findings.

5 Commoners, Commoning Practices and the Community

Concerning the first dimension, we observed that the young people participated in the activities with interest but were not constant either within the same meeting or in general during the meetings of the first round: "It is difficult to maintain attention, but in the end they complete the tasks!" notes in her logbook the researcher present during the activities in Agrigento, emphasising this as an achievement both for the age group, characterised by a certain fickleness of spirit, and for the inherently "vulnerable" condition shared by the second-generation youth attending the club. They showed interest in anything new and preferred group work. They also showed a

good expressive capacity: they always explicitly expressed their approval or displeasure with the activities they were doing, sometimes even walking away. They were also creative and progressively increased their awareness of what they were doing, focusing more on the assigned theme/task and the purpose of the activity.

Intersectionality was a theme strongly addressed in Agrigento for the coexistence of different ethnic groups, natives and young people with migrant backgrounds. The condition of the dual identity of second-generation children, as well as the coexistence of several cultures, was strongly considered in the second round's activities.

Particularly during the activity dedicated to the representation of themselves and the Other as related to the concept of multiple identities, young people showed they had understood the importance of deconstructing the equation nationality = identity and started representing themselves as belonging to more than one reality. A particular focus was devoted to the difference between representation and reality and to the need never to justify prejudice and discriminatory behaviour (in particular, the girls recounted being the target of remarks that affected them as women and as people of migrant origin).

Below is an example of a post young people produced on this theme (Fig. 2). The post establishes a parallelism between two religious festivals: the Grand Magal festival in Touba, organised every year in Ravanusella square, where many people of Senegalese origin live, to mark the anniversary of the death of the prophet Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, who initiated Mouridism, and the Agrigento festival of a native saint, Calogero, celebrated in August. The comparison between the two festivals is intended to highlight what makes two festivals belonging to two different cultures similar.

The co-created post consists of two photos shot and selected by the young people during the celebration of the two festivals in Agrigento. The caption describes the two figures and focuses on what makes the two festivals comparable: both of these men (the prophet Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba and saint Calogero) did good things for the community. The post concludes with a reflection on what is considered a "problem": "we cannot understand why many people who love San Calogero [who had black skin] do not feel the same respect for people with black skin who live in Agrigento".

The children also showed good analytical, critical and reflective skills, taking into account different points of view and establishing a connection between images and text that was useful in conveying their message. In both cases, the pupils worked in sub-groups with different tasks. No particular conflicts arose, just a few disagreements on the photos to be included in the posts, which were quickly resolved. Finally, they started understanding the potential of actively engaging to achieve a common goal, denouncing something that does not work in their daily life context and raising awareness on certain issues. They began to develop an awareness that their small action can have value and that they, too, can contribute to changing the society in which they live.

Throughout the meetings, they learned to observe the reality around them in a new way, with an attention to details they had not noticed before, like when they saw a sudden burst of nature between houses, or the cracks of an abandoned building, or the pothole in the sidewalk and reported them in one of their posts. (see Fig. 3).

San Calò e il Grand Magal

Agrigento, Usi e costumi

San Calogero

San Calogero è il santo più amato di Agrigento. Ogni estate la città lo celebra portando a sua statua in processione, con la partecipazione di tante persone.

Grand Magal

Il Magal Touba è una delle feste più importanti della comunità Senegalese. Ogni anno si celebra la commemorazione della partenza in esilio dello sceicco Ahmadou Bamba. La festa viene celebrata nella città di Touba, in Senegal, ma anche ad Agrigento.

San Calogero e Ahmadou Bamba hanno vissuto la loro vita aiutando chi ne aveva bisogno, con il pane e con il conforto delle parole. San Calogero aveva la pelle nera, come lo sceicco Ahmadou Bamba. Per questo motivo non riusciamo a capire perchè molte persone che amano San Calogero non provino lo stesso rispetto per le persone con la pelle nera che vivono ad Agrigento.

Fig. 2 A post from the photo blog (https://smoothitaly.wordpress.com/2023/06/29/san-calo-e-il-grand-magal/, last accessed October 2023)

La natura e la città

Agrigento, Intorno a noi

Oggi abbiamo fatto un giro in città osservando con attenzione la natura. Ci siamo resi conto che così com'è, non ci piace!

Forse sarebbe meglio senza! Abbiamo visto alberi e piante che sono stati prima piantati e sistemati in varie piazze e strade per poi essere abbandonati. Abbiamo osservato anche la forza della natura che, con le proprie forze, cerca di prendere spazio in luoghi dove non gli è stato concesso. Ci piacerebbe avere più giardinetti curati, ci piacerebbe anche poterci prendere cura del verde che ci circonda, ma abbiamo paura di essere multati. Speriamo allora che scrivere qui i nostri pensieri possa contribuire a rendere la nostra città più bella e più vivibile per le piante!

Fig. 3 A post from the photo blog (https://smoothitaly.wordpress.com/2023/06/29/la-natura-e-la-citta/, last accessed October 2023)

The post (Fig. 3) reports three photos of glimpses of the urban context of Agrigento, in which nature becomes the protagonist of the photo composition. The short caption first describes what they do not like (the neglected condition) and the beauty that can be found (the disruptive power of nature). Then, it expresses the desire to have more cured urban green spaces and actively contribute to their maintenance. It ends with a proposal for action that shows how young people are somehow aware that small initiatives can have a more significant impact: "We hope that writing our thoughts here can help make our city more beautiful and liveable for plants".

For commoning practices, we observed that young people, being part of a community where the educators typically employed participatory methods, were already used to working in groups and sharing everything they use within the club. Interestingly, in Agrigento, sub-groups mainly were formed by gender, an element we decided to focus on during the second round.

Another interesting finding is that at the end of the first round, young people showed they had acquired the capacity to shift from competition to valuing individual contributions: diversity was ultimately recognised as a learning opportunity. Leadership was another crucial point. The young people had two leaders: a boy (M., aged 13) and a girl (S., aged 13). These two figures underwent an interesting evolution: both gradually understood that they had a role that could take on positive or negative connotations. They began to distinguish that one can impose one's authority by becoming a disruptive element but can also catalyse the energy to empower the group by suggesting common directions. One case, in particular, aroused our interest. During one of the meetings, one of the boys (M., aged 13) was inattentive and was asked by the educator to pay more attention or leave, as no one was obliged to stay until the end of the meeting. The boy stayed but eventually left feeling "offended" by the educator's behaviour. The dynamics worth attention are the ones that came immediately afterwards: for the following meetings, half of the boys no longer went to the meetings as they had been "forbidden" to do so by the "offended" boy. The whole group was affected by this sudden temporary disruption. Fortunately, and with great effort, the educator managed to reconnect the boys little by little until even the leader, called "pack leader" by the other boys in the group, started attending meetings again.

For participatory methods, we found that young people usually identified the topics together, experiencing the possibility of finding points of convergence between elements of different cultures and creating forms of constructive dialogue while maintaining the freedom to express themselves freely within the group. However, they were not fully aware that what they co-produced belonged to everyone! More simply, they did things together and shared tools and experiences but lacked the awareness that a shared action can have a shared purpose and give rise to a co-created experience with some impact on reality. This awareness emerged during the last meetings, and we enhanced it further during the second round. Young people were aware that they could contribute to group activities actively, but the value of their engagement in the local community was still out of their reach. Their sphere of action was still relegated to the small context of their individual daily lives. We also worked on this front in the second round. In this sense, the photo-blog experience aimed to represent a common public space that goes beyond the boundaries of the club and the local community. Collaboration between young people and educators in Agrigento was excellent, except in rare cases where conflicts were always resolved thanks to the mediation of one educator. The group recognises the usefulness of confronting each other in the presence of the educator, an indicator of the level of trust they place in that figure. Some young people also showed good mediation skills and actively contributed to conflict resolution when solicited by the educator.

Regarding the third dimension, that of community, young people showed a good predisposition to confront and respect others (even those different from them in terms of ethnicity, origin, age, etc.). However, although they recognise the club as a community they feel they belong to, outside the club, different "memberships" are clearly marked! The activities implemented during the case study have strengthened ties within the club's community, timidly triggering a more open vision towards the

other and the outside world, making young people start to realise the possible impact of their actions. The photo-blog precisely represents a space where actions in a micro context (the club) can have some visibility and a spill-over into a macro context, a space that hopefully the Smooth community we co-created during our case study will take care of and further develop.

6 Conclusion

Since the training at the beginning of the first round, a co-creative process involving researchers, educators, and young people was initiated. We adapted the initial training plan to the specific contexts of the youth club in Agrigento. Together with the educators, we designed an implementation plan that was then adapted to the characteristics, needs and desires of the young people involved. Relationships were constantly based on the active listening of all members of the community. And those who could not do so at the beginning of the case study gradually learned to do so.

Constant monitoring of the activities was fundamental for reshaping them according to individual and collective pathways. Thanks to this, we identified some dysfunctional elements that emerged during the first round and addressed them during the second. One of these elements was the typical "emotional instability" at this age. As we know, adolescence represents the time when young people go through a real emotional storm, searching for their psychic and relational identity for prospects for their future. They gradually discover themselves and the world around them, slowly and laboriously constructing their personal worldviews. In this elusive and labile terrain, it is complicated to structure new positions, introduce new values and raise awareness for social issues that, at this stage, are often perceived as "distant and adult-centric".

Another area for improvement was the unpredictability of children's attendance at the activities. Unlike formal education, activities in non-formal educational contexts do not require compulsory attendance. Children's attention and interest can never be taken for granted, and so is attendance. Therefore, it was a rather ambitious and arduous task to form a group and keep its composition constant until the end of the activities. We somehow managed to do so with the valuable support of the educator. Clearly, unstable attendance was a dysfunctional element for activities that aim at progressive skill acquisition and involve active participation, not merely physical presence. The last, but no less critical, dysfunctional element to consider was the sudden (and temporary) breakdown of the group due to the fragility that characterises the relationships with and among adolescents. The Agrigento Smooth community demonstrated that conflicts can be resolved, but there is no set time. The episode of the conflict between the youth leader and the educator highlighted some potentially disruptive elements that we addressed during the second round: the difference between a leader and a "pack leader", the dangers of imitative dynamics, the importance of ensuring that the pursuit of a collective goal takes priority over self-interest, and the need to reiterate the importance of dialogue and confrontation

as an alternative to conflict (or "escape" in that specific episode). All these elements were considered during the data analysis between the two rounds. Interestingly, some of the solutions came from the young people themselves, together with the proposal of the new activities to be implemented during the second round.

Our case study can be seen as an example of a grassroots practice that, arising from below, makes community members protagonists of their living together and co-creators a shared "common space" (the club, the local community, the online environment of the photo-blog). These commoners collaborated in the same context by activating commoning practices that strengthened the sense of belonging to that community and their civic engagement. In line with the Smooth project goals, we wanted to identify and experiment with an educational model that can be adopted and re-adapted to those contexts where traditional approaches struggle to counteract efficiently the issues of social inclusion and educational inequalities. Our ultimate aim was to trigger a process of change based on adopting an educational paradigm that moves along the cognitive dimension but envisages its outcomes in the development of a participatory dimension.

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The Challenges of Children's Participation, Sharing, Collaboration, and Care in Non-formal Education Contexts: Insights from the SMOOTH Project

Natália Fernandes, Marlene Barra, Fernanda Martins, Daniela Silva, Joana R. Casanova, Teresa Sarmento, Vivian Agnolo Madalozzo, and Erika Machado do Ó Corrêa

Abstract The SMOOTH project is grounded in the collaboration between children, youth, children/youth and adults for the establishment of shared spaces that enable the co-production of knowledge and foster alternative modes of thinking among children, youth, and adults as interdependent subjects, considering both intra-generational and intergenerational relationships. Building upon the concept of Education as a Common Good, the project embraces dimensions such as collective freedom and experimentation, equal participation, solidarity, unity, care, and sharing. These dimensions will influence a set of objectives, including challenging dominant discourses regarding the role of education and inclusion, childhood, and youth; fostering a critical perspective on normative frameworks pertaining to childhood and youth; promoting shared governance where children and adults are subjected to less control, opening up new possibilities for a balanced exercise of power; and learning through co-construction (local and emancipatory knowledge). Specifically, at the University of Minho, in collaboration with a non-governmental institution, two projects were developed: the *Children's Club* and the *Children's Advisory Board.* These projects involved children aged 8–12 years, from disadvantaged socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, characterized by a disruptive interaction and a lack of material resources. This text brings up the dynamics and challenges of participation, sharing, collaboration, and care in those non-formal education contexts during the projects' implementation.

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G. Cappello et al. (eds.), *Educational Commons*, UNIPA Springer Series,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51837-9_5

Keywords Children · Education as a common good · Participation · Collaboration · Sharing · Caring

1 Introduction

This chapter delves into the experiences of the Portuguese UMinho team within the SMOOTH project. Within the theoretical realm of the sociology of childhood, there is a growing emphasis on acknowledging the active role of children in the co-production of knowledge. This represents a significant departure from the prevailing approach that primarily views education through the lens of adults, neglecting the child's perspective. The shift in perspective is clearly evident in the study we are about to present.

The team conducted two action research projects in two non-formal education settings: the *Children's Club*, that took place during a block of time designated for Supervised Free Activities (SFA), facilitated by the partnering NGO, during the after-school hours. Participation in the activities offered by the NGO to the children during this time block is not mandatory. And the, based at the headquarters of a non-governmental organization. These projects spanned from March 2022 to February 2023.

In both of these contexts, our work involved children aged 8–12 years who came from disadvantaged socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. These children were characterized by disruptive interactions and faced challenges related to a lack of material resources.

The primary objective was to establish environments conducive to democratic citizenship and the exploration of innovative approaches grounded in principles of equality, collaboration, sharing, and caring. These environments aimed to foster knowledge creation through collaborative efforts among children, youth, children/youth, and adults, with children playing a significant and active role. Additionally, the intention was to put into practice the principles of Education as a Common Good, including collective freedom and experimentation, equal participation, solidarity, unity, care, and sharing.

Through this intervention in both contexts, a fresh perspective emerged regarding the involvement of children in decision-making processes and participation mechanisms that promote shared governance, reducing the level of control exerted over both children and adults. This shift opened up new possibilities for a more equitable distribution of power and facilitated learning through co-construction.

During the implementation of these two interventions, the team utilized qualitative methodology and opted for action research as the primary approach. Action research played a pivotal role in establishing a collaborative space that fostered active listening and dialogue between adults and children. The central themes of these discussions revolved around issues related to their rights and well-being. The overarching objective was to advance social inclusion and cultivate active citizenship among all participants.

In this chapter, we will elucidate four crucial dimensions in the establishment of Education as a common good: participation, sharing, collaboration, and care. We will do so by leveraging a range of research techniques, including informal conversations, peer-to-peer interviews, video recordings, participant observation, field notes, and photographs.

Our objective is to present and contemplate, using the voices of children themselves, their perceptions regarding the possibilities of individual and group participation within the context of research-action. Additionally, we aim to explore how these activities can promote emotional self-regulation behaviors, facilitate interaction with others, and foster the development of new forms of caring for others. These new forms of care encompass empathy, reciprocity, cooperation, and collective creativity.

The chapter is divided into three parts. The first part provides a concise theoretical framework regarding the concept of children as commoners. In the second part, we offer a rationale for the methodological choices made during the intervention. These choices supported the data collection process, which is discussed in the third and concluding section of this chapter.

2 Children as Commoners

The collective construction of the common good, which hinges on active participation, underscores the significance of viewing children as social actors and individuals with inherent rights [1–3]. The evolving civic status of children recognizes them as competent social actors who possess the ability to make choices and express their ideas autonomously, thereby having their own agendas [4–7].

Ideally, the educational process for children should equip them with the skills and capacities necessary to engage in processes of authorship and autonomy effectively [8], p. 53. When children are actively involved in processes that were initially directed toward them, it acknowledges their capacity to think and act not only in relation to themselves but also in regard to others, whether they are children or adults, as well as various situations and ideas [9], p. 162.

From this perspective, institutions dedicated to childhood should be seen as the result of a social construct formed by a community of human agents, emerging from active interactions with others and society at large [9], p. 87.

The field of sociology of childhood plays a significant role in addressing the social concerns surrounding children, especially within a global context characterized by conflicts and contradictions that often place children at the center of various paradoxes [10, 11]. It delves into the societal constructions of childhood across different contexts and explores the structural conditions that define children's place in society. These conditions shape the conceptualizations and interpretations of how children exist and engage with the world.

Contrary to classical approaches to socialization, which tended to perceive children as passive recipients in the educational process, a new perspective on children has emerged—one that we endorse: that of the child as a social actor [12–14], or

the child-citizen. This perspective recognizes children as individuals with rights, particularly the right to democratic participation, which includes involvement in decision-making processes [1–3, 15].

The sociology of childhood plays a crucial role in promoting the recognition of childhood as a social category and acknowledging children as active participants in society. This perspective, as articulated by Corsaro [4], p. 35, underscores that it is not a mere prejudice or a politically motivated notion but rather a comprehensive process of reevaluation. This process resembles those undertaken with marginalized groups such as women, minorities, post-colonial populations, and the LGBTQ + community, all of which have historically been overlooked and underestimated by traditional scientific discourse.

Affirming the child as a social actor places a strong emphasis on examining their actions as active and imaginative agents. These children are capable of transforming and reproducing reality in a multitude of ways, engaging in negotiations with both adults and peers. They also develop new forms of communication, language, discourse, and action that supplement the prevailing adult culture [16].

The examination and exploration of these processes of interpretive reproduction, especially within the context of peer culture, represent a significant challenge within the field of the Sociology of Childhood. Furthermore, the centrality of children's actions and voices as equal partners in research is a hallmark of the Social Studies of Childhood.

Equally important is the examination of how children's rights to participate and express their opinions and actions in the public sphere are framed. As Pechtelidis and Kioupkiolis [17], p. 2 assert, acknowledging children's involvement in collective processes encompasses both political and practical aspects of their agency. This includes their capacity to influence the contexts in which they live. Such recognition necessitates not only respecting their voices but also honoring their choices.

Consequently, we assert that children's participation serves as a cornerstone in educational environments centered on and promoting the common good. However, for the common good to genuinely manifest, it is imperative to exercise epistemological vigilance concerning how it can be channeled into the service of collective endeavors aimed at constructing the common good. These endeavors entail children's active engagement, where they perceive themselves as integral contributors to the development of frameworks emphasizing care, freedom, solidarity, and democracy. This can only be achieved through more inclusive and participatory dynamics, fostering collective and intergenerational collaboration in the co-creation of knowledge and the collective management of shared resources.

3 Methodologies and Fieldwork

Our fieldwork commenced through a collaborative partnership with all the third-party practitioners affiliated with the NGO, a collaboration that proved essential in shaping our research efforts. The core mission of this non-governmental organization is to

safeguard children from being left unsupervised at home or exposed to potentially adverse situations within their neighborhood.

The UMinho team actively engaged in knowledge sharing, acquainting the third-party practitioners with the principles underpinning the Smooth Project. Furthermore, we conducted training sessions focused on pedagogy and conflict management. These sessions were designed to facilitate dialogues regarding the dynamics of relationships between adults and the children involved in the program.

As a result of this collaborative effort, the third-party practitioners, who had direct interactions with these children, began to recognize the importance of involving the children in a more participatory and democratic process. This involvement extended to activities such as defining program activities, selecting materials, organizing and maintaining the spaces where these activities occurred, and even planning outings. The overarching objective was to improve attendance, motivation, satisfaction, and the overall well-being of the children under their care.

The research team implemented the "pedagogy of listening" alongside other participatory methodologies to ensure that children's voices were not only acknowledged but also genuinely considered in the decision-making process. Our primary objective was to give prominence to the ideas and actions proposed by the children. Working with these two groups of children proved to be quite challenging, requiring the adults to provide more structured guidance than initially anticipated. This guidance was essential in helping the children develop self-regulation skills, express their opinions, and make collaborative decisions.

To achieve this, we adopted project-based learning as a means to actively engage the children in the co-creation of a collective that could collaborate with professionals and serve as representatives for their peers in the decision-making processes related to the day-to-day activities within the third-party program.

The research process was underpinned by a qualitative methodology, employing an action-research approach. In terms of research techniques, our team utilized a diverse set of tools, including video recordings, participant observation, field notes, photographs, and peer-to-peer interviews. These techniques were instrumental in capturing the rich and multifaceted experiences of the children involved in the study.

The process of co-creating with children began by identifying the largest group of children (comprising almost 30 children), introducing the Smooth Project and the UMinho team, and proposing the identification of children who would like to participate in both projects, representing their peers in the decision-making process at the third party. Following the identification of the smallest group of children, several sessions were held to gather information on the relational dynamics between peers and interests.

The research-action project was developed between March 2022 and January 2023, with the first phase taking place from March to July 2022, followed by a pause during which the team reflected on the process to prepare for the second phase, which occurred from September 2022 to January 2023.

The analysis was conducted using a qualitative content analysis approach, which involved triangulating data collected through various research techniques employed

by the researchers. The data was organized according to a categorical framework constructed based on the dimensions indicated below.

4 The Challenges

In this section will be presented the main challenges experienced in both research-action projects in terms of (1) *Participation:* empowering voices and agency; (2) *Sharing:* fostering Inclusivity and Collective Ethos; (3) Collaboration*:* fostering Collective Creation and Synergy; and (4) *Care:* cultivating Empathy and Collective Well-being.

4.1 Participation: Empowering Voices and Agency

The SMOOTH Project, rooted in the collaborative ethos between children and adults, seeks to create shared spaces fostering the co-production of knowledge and alternative perspectives. Central to this endeavor is the principle of children's active participation in shaping their educational experiences and co-creating their common spaces.

Drawing insights from the Children's Club case (Case 1), our analysis centers on the children's journey as they navigate the intricacies of participation and decision-making processes. The process of data analysis uncovers a multitude of challenges faced by the children throughout the project, providing valuable insights into their developing sense of agency and ownership.

The children's interests and preferences became apparent, particularly in their interaction with the materials at hand and their opportunities for physical activity. Initial observations highlighted a preference for group participation, yet the path towards individual and collective involvement posed its own set of challenges.

One such challenge arose as the children wrestled with comprehending and adhering to established rules, which sometimes led to encroachments on each other's personal space and disruptions during conversations. In response, adults played a vital role in facilitating negotiations within the group to establish rights and responsibilities. Although this process initially led to some commotion and resistance, it marked a significant turning point in nurturing a collaborative atmosphere conducive to harmonious coexistence.

The process of negotiating rights and responsibilities provided a glimpse into the children's agency and their eagerness to take part in shaping the rules that governed their interactions. Despite initial challenges, the children actively engaged in suggesting consequences for breaches of these rules, demonstrating their evolving sense of ownership within the group. The following excerpt illustrates a collective negotiation process aimed at defining rights and responsibilities within the group:

> B4,9A says that in the previous phase (1st round) 'We participated in all that noise.'
>
> W5 asked him what they should do this year so that the noise wouldn't be so loud.
>
> W1 asks, 'What should we do so that we don't have to shout all the time inside the room?'
>
> W5 proposes, 'Can I suggest something? Let's think of rules to make the Children's Club a calmer and more peaceful place. Everyone thinks and then shares and writes a rule on the board. What do you think?'
>
> The children agree and start recording their proposals.
>
> In this process, there is a lot of commotion, nobody is interested in hearing their peers' suggestions, and some children start crying because they are being assaulted by their peers.
>
> W5 calls the group to discuss this issue and think about how they can, together, do something to change that situation.
>
> Do you have any suggestions, B4,9A, W5 asks B4,9A, one of those responsible for the assaults.
>
> B4,9A doesn't respond.
>
> W5 asks the same question to the group.
>
> Some say "no," but someone also suggests "apologise"; "give a hug."
>
> "What can we do to avoid these situations?"—W5 asks.
>
> A boy proposes, "Don't hurt others."
>
> "Does everyone agree?"—W5 asks.
>
> "Yes," they respond in unison.
>
> W5 proposes to the group to think of a consequence whenever the rule is not followed.
>
> Several suggestions are made: apologise; help those who are hurt. (Field note, 10/11/2022)

Even with the guidance provided by the adults, the children's active involvement in negotiating their rights and responsibilities marked a pivotal moment in nurturing the collaborative aspect of common education.

Another remarkable event was the collective decision-making process employed to democratically choose a name for the space utilized by the children throughout the project. The subsequent section elaborates on the unfolding of this process:

> The monitor suggested dividing the children into small groups to work on an activity related to choosing the name of the space. Although the activity was accompanied by a high level of noise and some reluctance from the children to participate, the proposed small groups were successful in developing a suggestion for the name of the space. The group then shared their proposals in a larger group, which collectively made the final decision on the definitive name. (Field note, 23/06/2022)

Indeed, the children participated in a democratic procedure that encompassed small group discussions, proposal presentations, and collective deliberations. This

process served as a testament to their ability to collectively determine a name—ultimately settling on "Children's Club," a choice that mirrored their shared identity and sense of ownership over the space.

Furthermore, the participatory process of naming the project's space showcased the children's aptitude for collective decision-making. Even when disagreements arose on occasion, certain children demonstrated their willingness to adjust their positions through negotiation, underscoring their dedication to collaboration and their ability to discover common ground.

While challenges were indeed present, the journey of participation within the Children's Club also brought to light significant achievements. As the intervention continued, some children exhibited a growing interest in decision-making processes. They actively engaged in activities that required reflection and decision-making, signifying an evolving sense of agency and ownership. Notably, the children's enthusiasm and effective participation were particularly pronounced during musical activities involving instruments, singing, and movement. These activities brought joy and cooperation to the entire group, serving as a testament to the positive outcomes of their active participation.

The examination of children's participation within the *Children's Club*, unfolds a dynamic narrative that encompasses both challenges and achievements. As the children navigate participation and decision-making processes, they face obstacles that put their agency and collaborative skills to the test. However, in parallel, they demonstrate remarkable growth, actively engaging in the establishment of rules and the decision-making process, which ultimately fosters a sense of ownership within the group. The SMOOTH Project serves as a compelling example of the potential for children's active participation in shaping their educational experiences and in co-creating communal spaces.

The challenges and progress witnessed within Case 2, the establishment of the "Children's Advisory Board," provide valuable insights into the multifaceted dynamics of children's participation in the project. The insights drawn highlight the intricate nature of children's involvement in peer governance practices, the development of shared rules, and the decision-making processes.

The following field note captures some of the initial difficulties encountered in this endeavor:

> During the initial phase, children encountered difficulties when it came to participating in peer governance practices and adhering to shared rules. These challenges necessitated adult intervention to facilitate the development of positive relationships among them. An illustrative field note was recorded during an activity involving the distribution of balloons filled with dreams to the children.
>
> Throughout this activity, multiple instances occurred where children struggled to respect their peers' balloons, resulting in various conflicts characterized by verbal aggression, expressions of sadness (including crying), and even physical altercations. While there were some successful attempts at cooperation, these incidents serve as tangible examples of the hurdles faced in establishing a culture of mutual respect and cooperation among the children. (Field note, 22/07/2022)

Initial observations highlighted that the children faced difficulties in adhering to shared rules and showing respect for their peers' belongings during an activity centered on balloons filled with dreams. Consequently, conflicts frequently erupted, marked by instances of verbal and even physical aggression. These incidents underscored the initial challenges in cultivating a culture of mutual respect and cooperation among the children.

Furthermore, the act of respecting established rules, including waiting for one's turn to speak, proved to be a challenge for certain children, prompting the need for adults to assume a regulatory role. Testimonies provided by the children exemplified their struggle to navigate these shared rules during the project's initial phases:

> I did it like this...there were still activities but the kids decided. If the kids wanted to stay in the [name of the non-governmental institution] or go, you would make that decision, right? But how would you do that? Like...yeah...we would do what you say and I forgot (about the activities)...and...the students were playing and they just started playing now. And I let them keep playing. I would say, 'Do you want to stay here or do you want to come with us?' And then I would tell them about the activity. If they wanted to come, they would come. If they didn't want to come, they would stay. (Field note, 14/09/2022)

Bringing up the discussion on how the *Children's Advisory Board* operates and what should be the role of each individual in it is indicative of promoting shared governance skills, shared rules, and decision-making. Despite diverse strategies employed, children's initiative and protagonism in co-constructing project dynamics were notably limited, hindering their empowerment as active participating social agents in public life.

In the second round of implementation sessions, with the reorganization of the children into a smaller group and dynamics focused on the organization of the *Children's Advisory Board*, children gradually became aware of the coordination structures and the organizational chart, becoming aware of the need for dialogue with these interlocutors for decision-making. As we can see in the field notes of this activity:

> During the meeting, there was a discussion about the role of the coordinators, specifically the coordinators of [name of non-governmental institution] and the studies and projects department. The children demonstrated a clear understanding of the differences between the two roles and when they could approach each of them for decision-making and suggestions. (Field note, 18/01/2023)

Indeed, the children articulated their desire and necessity for the Children's Advisory Board to have a dedicated space of its own. This recognition underscores the fundamental requirement for the board to have its own designated area, which is essential for promoting its visibility and affirming its democratic functioning:

> We entered to see the office that would have been for RSI (Social support subsidy), however, the room was empty, and it was explained that this service had been relocated to a different physical location, but it still belongs to [name of non-governmental institution]
>
> Expressions like, 'Can we then have this room for our advisory council?' were uttered by B17,11A. (Field note, 18/01/2023)

The process of organizing the *Children's Advisory Board*, illuminated the children's active participation. They actively contributed to defining individual roles,

determining meeting schedules, and selecting appropriate meeting spaces. This collective effort aimed to foster active citizenship in public life and establish mechanisms for children's engagement in institutional affairs.

Within the Children's Advisory Board, there is a notable and relevant episode concerning how children's suggestions are acknowledged, listened to, and integrated into decision-making processes. This, in our perspective, represents one of the most significant aspects of empowering children as active social agents participating in public life. During one of the initial phases of the research process with these children, a statement was made by B15,12A:

> ... just one more thing, in the field I would put something to drink water, a water fountain so that people could fill their bottles, people who didn't have bottles could drink. (Field note, 14/09/2022)

As the project unfolded, it witnessed this transformative episode that underscored the importance of considering and mobilizing children's suggestions in decision-making processes. That is, one child's suggestion, made months earlier, was acted upon, resulting in the installation of a water fountain in the NGO.

Children's Advisory Board illuminates the active participation of children in organizing the advisory board, encompassing tasks such as defining individual roles, determining meeting schedules, and selecting appropriate meeting spaces. This process is indicative of a broader effort to foster active citizenship in public life and establish mechanisms for children's engagement in institutional affairs—a crucial element in promoting children's participation in the public sphere and enhancing their involvement in the institutions that occupy a significant portion of their daily lives.

The exploration of children's participation within Case 2 of the SMOOTH Project reveals both challenges and progress. While initial obstacles tested the children's ability to adhere to shared rules and governance practices, the project's evolution showcased their growing capacity for active involvement. As children grapple with issues of mutual respect and cooperation, they take incremental steps toward empowerment as active participating social agents in public life.

4.2 Sharing: Fostering Inclusivity and Collective Ethos

Within the SMOOTH Project, the notion of sharing goes beyond simple resource exchange; it embodies the values of inclusivity and collective responsibility. In Case 1—Children's Club, we had an opportunity to delve into the intricate dynamics of sharing among children. Initial observations revealed challenges in this regard, as children grappled with finding the right balance between their individual desires and the well-being of the group. However, a transformative moment emerged, marking a notable shift in the landscape.

During an illuminating instance, two children emerged as proponents of equitable sharing. This is evidenced by the subsequent field note:

> During a lunch event organized by the team to conclude the activities with the group of children, some additional children who were not part of the group approached the room. One child promptly asserted that he did not belong to the group and, therefore, had no right to enter and partake in the lunch. However, two other children (B6,10A and B7,9A) swiftly countered this notion, expressing that there was enough food for everyone, and it was excessive for just the designated group. As a result, all the children gathered in the room. (Field note, 13/12/2022)

Their voices resonated with an impassioned plea for inclusivity, underpinned by the belief in the sufficiency of available resources for all participants. This pivotal moment bore testimony to the emergence of a collective ethos of sharing, signifying a heartening development within the group.

Moreover, the transition from self-interest to collective sharing extended beyond the immediate context. A poignant incident featuring B6,10A illuminated this dimension further:

> B6,10A takes several cookies in a napkin and looks for the educational assistant to offer her one. The remaining cookies were wrapped in a napkin and stored in the backpack to take home (he has 5 younger siblings, the children recently returned home to their parents after being institutionalized for some time) (Field note, 05/07/2022).

That is, displaying profound thoughtfulness, B6,10A meticulously bundled several cookies within a napkin and offered one to the educational assistant. Yet, this act of sharing transcended the confines of the group, as the remaining cookies were tenderly wrapped and carried home. This gesture, instigated by the recognition of the presence of B6,10A's five younger siblings, epitomized a dimension of sharing that traversed spatial boundaries.

In Case 2 the children's active engagement in shaping the *Children's Advisory Board* was a significant achievement in shared governance. They discussed organizational structures, roles, and decision-making processes, emphasizing their commitment to sharing ideas and responsibilities. However, this collaborative process was not without its challenges. The children grappled with finding a balance between their individual desires and the collective decision-making process, revealing the need for facilitation to strike a harmonious equilibrium.

The *logo* design activity provided an opportunity for the children to express their creativity collectively, once they brainstormed and selected a symbol that embodied the group's identity, showcasing their ability to collaborate creatively. However, it also exposed the intricacies of consensus building, requiring them to share perspectives and negotiate until a unanimous decision was reached, which, at times, presented challenges.

Children expressed their thoughts openly, fostering a sense of belonging and inclusivity. Nevertheless, facilitating meaningful dialogue posed challenges, as children with diverse backgrounds navigated language barriers and varied communication styles, which required careful facilitation. The inclusion of Ukrainian children added a layer of complexity to the sharing dynamic due to language barriers. These barriers challenged their ability to share effectively, necessitating innovative solutions. Despite these challenges, they demonstrated resilience and found alternative

ways to participate, emphasizing the pivotal role of communication in sharing and integration.

As the group size reduced, children became more aware of coordination structures and shared governance. They actively discussed roles, schedules, and meeting spaces, showcasing their evolving understanding of shared Achieving consensus and managing shared responsibilities remained an ongoing process, and the challenges persisted in finding the right balance. However, instances of conflict seem to present opportunities for sharing solutions. For example, when conflicts arose during balloon activities, the children demonstrated a willingness to share and collaborate on resolutions, promoting conflict resolution and cooperation, solutions such as:

> as lending your own balloon to your colleague, support in accepting that balloon burst but that the dreams continued to exist. (Field note, 22/07/2022)

However, these moments of conflict required adult guidance and support to navigate effectively.

The challenges of children's sharing within Case Study 2 unveil the multidimensional nature of sharing in educational contexts. While sharing promotes collaboration, inclusivity, and collective decision-making, it also presents hurdles that require careful facilitation. Recognizing the complexities of sharing is essential for fostering a culture of active participation and nurturing a collective ethos among children. Sharing, in its various forms, emerges as a cornerstone of children's involvement in co-creation processes, emphasizing their capacity to influence and contribute to educational initiatives.

4.3 Collaboration: Fostering Collective Creation and Synergy

At the core of the SMOOTH Project, collaboration blossoms as a guiding principle, fostering collective creation and synergy among children and adults. The present research highlights the importance of collaborative skills in promoting children's active involvement and social inclusion, also revealing the challenges faced and the progress observed in fostering collective creation and synergy through various activities.

Within the Children's Club, the aspect of collaboration gradually surfaced as the project progressed. Initially, children faced challenges in participating in cooperative endeavors. Adult intervention sought to provide opportunities for skill development in collaboration. The creation of the "Children's Club Song" serves as an illustration of this transformative journey. This creative process spanned eight sessions, commencing with the active engagement of the children in musical activities. It became apparent that music served as a potent medium to pique their interest and engagement. The children eagerly shared and deliberated on their ideas, making music a conduit for nurturing creativity and cooperation.

The task of creating the song involved small groups brainstorming and collecting meaningful words. Collaboratively, adults and children assembled the final lyrics

into five stanzas, considering rhyme. Subsequent sessions focused on memorization, melody, and choreography, culminating in the recording and presentation of the song to the larger group. This activity underscored the power of teamwork, both among children and between children and adults, resulting in a collaborative "product". It demonstrated dimensions of cooperation and collective creativity as children actively engaged in musical and choreographic activities, showcasing children's capacity for collaboration and enthusiasm for collective creation.

During the initial phase of the Children's Advisory Board, cooperation among the children was minimal, consistently requiring adult intervention. However, as the group size diminished during the second round, and the children took on the task of organizing the Consultative Council, substantial progress in collaboration began to surface.

Group activities encouraged children to share their opinions and engage in critical reflection individually and collectively. They deliberated on prerequisites for decision-making, such as acquiring relevant information and engaging in discussions. Additionally, they contemplated crucial skills for advisory council members, including active listening and participation. Importantly, many children participating in these dynamics hailed from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds, typically excluded from decision-making processes concerning their lives. So, involving them in such mechanisms represents a powerful strategy for promoting social inclusion, and building competencies in children, like expressing their ideas and having them considered in decision-making, is vital for fostering social inclusion. Furthermore, the engagement of children in documenting significant aspects of their neighbourhood through photovoice and sharing them with the public contributes to social inclusion efforts, particularly for those from disadvantaged social backgrounds.

The project's commitment to nurturing collaborative skills among children has yielded significant insights. Both Case data demonstrate that while collaboration can pose initial challenges, it is a pivotal aspect of children's development. Through music, group activities, and participation in decision-making, children have showcased their capacity for collective creation and synergy. These findings emphasize the importance of fostering collaboration skills in promoting children's active involvement and social inclusion within educational contexts.

4.4 Care: Cultivating Empathy and Collective Well-Being

Within the Children's Club, the group grappled with the challenge of exercising caution and consideration towards one another. The initial round of observations documented several instances that, while not frequent, left a significant impression in terms of sharing.

In the case of Children's Advisory Board (Case 2), while the initial stages were characterized by challenges, they provided invaluable insights into the dimensions of care and concern. The early phases of observation were marked by moments of

tension as children navigated issues related to seating arrangements and individual preferences, as evidenced in the following field note:

> In session 1, with many children present, the space is small, and everyone tries to sit on the sofa and on the floor. Most of the time it is peaceful, however, there are some moments of tension between children who push each other to preserve their place on the sofa, for example (the adult had to intervene). (Field note, 05/07/2022)

However, the research process unveiled a heartening trajectory, where acts of caring and empathy began to weave through the tapestry of interactions. A notable episode centered around B16,10A's expression of appreciation for a particular book. Facilitators engaged in a dialogue that transcended mere discourse, embodying an earnest interest in the contributions of others:

> B16,10A: I liked it. I've also read Diary of a Wimpy Kid.
>
> Facilitator A: Has anyone else read Diary of a Wimpy Kid? I haven't, but they say it's really good.
>
> B16,10A: It's top.
>
> B18,12A: I've seen that book, but I've never read it.
>
> Facilitator A: Where have you seen that book, B16,10A?
>
> B18,12A points to B16,10A.
>
> Facilitator A: Do you have that book? And have you lent it out? (Directed at B16,10A)
>
> B16,10A: No, but I can lend it.
>
> Facilitator A: Hey, that's a good idea.
>
> (Field note, 12/09/2022)

This exchange underscored not only a genuine appreciation of fellow participants' perspectives but also an explicit willingness to share the book. In this act, the spirit of care for peers shone brightly, illuminating the evolving dynamics of the group.

Further evidence of the blossoming dimension of caring emanated from the consultative council's deliberations. Children actively delineated the core elements integral to nurturing healthy relationships within the group, like in the following moment while talking about what would be the most relevant aspects to consider in the relationships within the consultative council:

> They identified some care to be taken in how relationships should happen in the Advisory Board—being kind; respect; love; humility; happiness. (Field note, 16/11/2022)

The virtues of kindness, respect, love, humility, and happiness emerged as guiding principles. These considerations not only underscored an evolving awareness among children but also heralded the centrality of caring behaviors within the group's dynamics.

5 Conclusion

Throughout the two action research projects, our primary aim was to cultivate collaborative practices, embrace participatory governance, and foster co-creation between children and adults. These endeavors were guided by the principles of education as a common good, collective freedom, experimentation, and shared responsibility. It's important to acknowledge that we encountered significant challenges along the way.

The children in both cases were not very familiar, at the beginning, with participatory, caring, and cooperative practices, which presented a significant challenge both at the beginning of the intervention and throughout its development.

As children traverse the intricate terrain of inclusivity and empathy, they emerge as collaborators in building a more compassionate and equitable world, embodying the ideals of education as a common good.

The promotion of children's participation within the *Children's Club* unfolds a dynamic narrative replete with challenges and achievements. They encounter obstacles that test their agency and collaborative abilities. Concurrently, they demonstrate significant growth, actively contributing to the establishment of rules and decision-making processes, ultimately nurturing a sense of ownership within the group. This research project serves as a testament to the potential of children's active involvement in shaping their educational journeys and co-creating communal spaces.

Also, the exploration of children's participation within the *Children's Advisory Board* reveals both challenges and progress. While initial obstacles tested the children's ability to adhere to shared rules and governance practices, the project's evolution showcased their growing capacity for active involvement. As children grapple with issues of mutual respect and cooperation, they take incremental steps toward empowerment as active participating social agents in public life.

This research project also has illuminated the power of sharing, revealing its potential to foster inclusivity and nurture a collective ethos. Through the challenges encountered and the moments of profound transformation witnessed, *Children's Club* dynamic has demonstrated that sharing is not a simple act of resource exchange but a reflection of a group's commitment to collective well-being.

The challenge of sharing with these children embodies a powerful message: that the ethos of inclusivity and collective responsibility can be nurtured, especially among children from diverse backgrounds. This reimagined concept of sharing paves the way for a more compassionate and interconnected world, where the act of sharing extends beyond the immediate context and resonates with the broader principles of collective well-being and mutual care.

The SMOOTH Project stands as a testament to the transformative potential of nurturing collaboration skills among children within educational contexts. The journey in Case Study 1 reveals the gradual emergence of collaboration as the project unfolded. Initially, children grappled with cooperative processes, prompting adult intervention to facilitate skill development.

The creation of the "Children's Club Song" showcases how music became a powerful medium for nurturing creativity and cooperation. The process of crafting

this song highlighted the efficacy of teamwork, both among children and between children and adults. It exemplified cooperation and collective creativity as children engaged wholeheartedly in musical and choreographic activities, unveiling their innate capacity for collaboration.

Despite the initial scarcity of cooperation among children necessitated adult guidance, especially in Case 2, as group sizes reduced and children actively participated in organizing the *Children's Advisory Board*, notable strides in collaboration emerged. Group activities encouraged children to voice their opinions, engage in critical reflection, and consider the prerequisites and skills essential for effective decision-making within an advisory board.

Finally, the SMOOTH Project offers a poignant narrative on caring behaviors, despite initial challenges. Genuine care and compassion emerged as guiding lights within the group and the journey from struggles to heartfelt acts of sharing, empathy, and kindness underscores the profound impact of nurturing a culture of care.

This research project exemplifies the potential to instill compassion and caution among children from diverse backgrounds. It stands as a testament to the capacity of young minds to evolve, embrace caring behaviors, and cultivate a culture of mutual respect and empathy. These endeavors are not only essential for the well-being of the participants but also hold the promise of creating a more compassionate and interconnected world.

In conclusion, as the SMOOTH Project continues to illuminate the path toward shared knowledge production, the lessons drawn from these challenges resonate far beyond its boundaries. They offer profound insights into the potential for collaboration and empathy to shape the future, where children and adults unite as partners in the co-creation of a more harmonious society.

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Stunt Scooter and Educational Commons: A German Case Study

Sylvia Jäde, Florian Eßer, and Judith von der Heyde

Abstract The chapter focuses on the results of the German case studies dealing with the appropriation of public space through youth cultural practices. The focus of the German sub-project is on how children and young people move in public space with stunt scooters and utilize it for their own purposes. As in the SMOOTH project in general the approach of the educational commons serves as a theoretical frame of reference. In this chapter we will describe commoning practices that have emerged during the realized case studies. Besides the aspects of sharing and caring, there were also practices of cooperation and engaged citizenship. All these aspects have a political dimension, which became apparent in different ways in the case studies and in the researched field. Overall, the case studies have shown that the children and young people involved in joint political processes as commoners require a high degree of transparency on the part of the adults involved as to what scope the children and young people involved have for shaping these processes.

Keywords Ethnography · Childhood studies · Childhood culture · Leisure practice · Social work

1 Introduction

The chapter focuses on the case studies 'Occupying Public Urban Space with Stunt Scooters: Collective Learning through Motion in Children's Peer Cultures' realized in Germany, which was carried out as a series of four case studies and in cooperation between the University of Osnabrück and the Youth Department of a German urban municipality. Stunt scooter riding is a relatively new leisure praxis, which is nowadays

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G. Cappello et al. (eds.), *Educational Commons*, UNIPA Springer Series,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51837-9_6

nearly as popular as skateboarding or BMX riding. Stunt scooters are sports devices similar to children's toy kick scooters. They are designed to perform tricks and stunts on all kinds of surfaces. As with BMX riding, beginners often tend to do simpler jumps that can be developed over time to produce increasingly complicated sequences of tricks, for instance including flips. There are various reasons why stunt scooters can withstand more stress than conventional scooters: among other things, they have special wheels and a one-piece handlebar that is not designed to fold. But not only the scooter riding itself is a relatively young sports practice. This also applies to many of the users riding the stunt scooters. As the stunt scooters are comparatively easy to handle at the start, rather like other sports equipment like skateboards, even younger children can gain access to the sport.

One place that scooter riders in the city where the sub-project was carried out like to use is the municipal skate park, which until recently was primarily frequented by users from established scenes (e.g. skaters, BMX riders and inline skaters). Due to the lack of public space that children and young people can freely use, the skate park became increasingly popular during the Covid19 pandemic. As a result of this, conflicts increased at the park, which was already frequently at its capacity limit even before the pandemic. In the end, the municipal administration perceived the only solution to the conflicts to be separating the scenes from each other, which was to be achieved by building a new trend sports area. Against this background, we were offered the opportunity to participate in the planning and construction of this new area.

The sub-project focuses on children and young people who frequent public spaces through engaging in the leisure praxis of stunt scooter riding and thus ties in with the topic of the spatiality of childhood(s), an issue that is currently the subject of wide-ranging discussion in Childhood Studies [1]. The central question is how children and young people appropriate public spaces using this leisure praxis. In line with the main project, the analysis is based on commons theory [2], used with a focus on education and knowledge as commons [3] to create a framework for the sub-project's participatory approach.

In the following, we will present the central results of the case studies (CS). First, the four CS will be described, and particularities will be outlined that stem from the setting of the CS. In addition, the sample will be described as well as some first findings regarding the participation of the children and young people in the CS. Second, we address selected findings based on the key research dimensions, illustrated by excerpts from the data collected. The chapter ends with a conclusion regarding the main findings.

2 The German Case Studies

All four CS carried out in the German sub-project were linked to the planning (start 2022) and the construction (2022–2023) of the new trend sports area.

In the first CS, the participatory workshop, organized by the municipality, the main focus was on the scooter riders' and planning experts' negotiation processes regarding the planning of the new area. The second CS, in contrast, was about the actual praxis of scooter riding as commons. The aim of the case study was to find out more about how scooter riders share knowledge about their sport with one another and generate new knowledge. The third CS covered the dismantling, re-assembling and repairing of stunt scooters. The focus was on the sports device itself, along with hacks such as how to get hold of inexpensive but high-quality spare parts. The final CS concentrated on evaluating the joint participation and planning process involving participants on all levels (e.g. social workers, planning experts, town council representatives and scooter riders). All CS were carried out as unique events in one afternoon each.

Table 1 provides an overview of the participants, the third party members involved in each CS, the type of event and where it was carried out.

As mentioned before, we cooperated with the Youth Department of a German city, which is also our third party. Staff of the Youth Department are responsible for child and youth work (within and outside of youth facilities), educational child and youth protection, work with girls, cultural youth education as well as school and street social work. In this respect, due to the choice of the third party, we were able to work with staff members of different specialized services. The central contact persons were members from the Mobile Youth Work/Street Work Team as well as the staff of a youth and a family center. Through the overarching third party, we were able to establish cooperation with four institutions (street work, a local youth center and a family center as well as the municipality) in the community. We were able to establish contacts and relationships with the scooter riders in the course of a preliminary study lasting several months in summer 2021 during which one of the authors visited the urban skate park on a weekly basis. The field access was supported

Table 1 General description of the case studies

CS	Participants				Third party	Type of event and location
	Children and young people	Third party	Researcher	Other		
1st CS	8[1]	4	2	4	Team mobile youth work/ street work	Public; municipal skate hall
2nd CS	7[2]	1	2	–	Team mobile youth work/ street work	Prior registration; municipal skate park
3rd CS	2[3]	2	2	–	An urban youth center	Prior registration; youth center and the municipal skate park
4th CS	4[4]	2	4	1	An urban youth center	Open for participants of previous CS; you center

[1]Aged 8–13; [2]Aged 9–13; [3]Aged 8–11; [4]Aged 12–17

by the street workers, who visit the park as part of their outreach work with young people.

At the first CS scooter riders and the researchers, two social workers, two representatives of the company operating the facility to be built, an expert planner and one of his staff as well as the operator of the skate hall and one care giver of the children participating were present. It should also be emphasized that both the second and third CS were conducted by an 18-year-old trainer who rides stunt scooters himself and is supported by an official sponsor. He was employed as a freelancer by the third party. At the last CS, in addition to two researchers, two research interns were also present as well as one representative of the planning and construction company responsible for the construction of the scooter park.

During all the case studies, participant observation was carried out and written up in the form of field notes and protocols [4]. The data corpus was expanded with interviews, videos, photos, articles from daily newspapers and official documents (such as building plans and tender texts). In addition, the following methodologies were applied: a pedagogy of listening, pedagogical documentation, project work and in-field interviews. Apart from the researchers, the participating scooter riders, members of the third party and research interns were also involved in the data collection. The latter were also involved in the evaluation of the data. The research has been approved by the University of Osnabrück's ethics committee.

For all our CS, it can be said that the children and young people were very keen to get involved. None of the offers we made to the scooter riders during the CS had an obligatory character. All the offers took place in the free time of the scooter riders. Participation in the activities of the CS was thus always associated with an additional time commitment, which was also linked with an organizational effort. In addition to school (which often lasted until 4 p.m.) and hobbies, participation in the CS also had to be organized. The very fact that we were able to conduct our CS at all against this background testifies to the high motivation and interest of the scooter riders in their leisure time practice. In this respect, the (non-)participation in the offers can also be evaluated as an expression of the interest in the CS. However, it must be pointed out that it is generally not possible to conclude from a (less) active participation to a (lower) greater interest. After all, many factors can contribute to whether children and young people take advantage of additional offers in their free time, for example, the question of whether they even knew that an event was taking place. Especially in the context of voluntarily participation, the accessibility of potential participants and their availability at the times when the activities take place plays a central role for their participation.

3 Commoning Practices

In this part of the chapter, we refer to sharing and caring practices (Sect. 3.1), cooperation (Sect. 3.2), engaged citizenship (Sect. 3.3) and conflict resolution (Sect. 3.4) as basic principles of the commons and key research dimensions of the SMOOTH project.

3.1 Sharing and Caring

With reference to the core dimensions of sharing and caring, we have chosen an extract from the second CS, so there were various situations in the different CS that can be assigned to above mentioned core dimension.

In the CS, we were able to identify a number of interactions, moments and situations in which sharing and caring play an important role in the community of scooter riders. In the following situation, which was observed during the activities that took place in the scooter riding workshop (CS2) on the skate park, caring is of particular importance:

> Then a small group of young scooter riders come along, who do not belong to the group headed by Bryce.[1] They seem to be much younger. They can ride very quickly, and also do some tricks on the ramp. When one of them almost crashes while riding out of the ramp, his friend, who is already standing at the top and has been watching, asks "Hey bro, you OK?" in a tone that sounds truly concerned rather than off handed. The rider recovers, gets hold of his scooter and replies with a brief "Sure, fine". He casually takes his scooter in his right hand […]. He then swings the deck equally casually under one of his feet […]. The other, worried rider tells him, "You almost made it, just that your left foot..." then shows him with his own foot what the left foot supposedly did wrong that ultimately led to the near crash. "Yeah bro" the dismounted rider says, "I already thought it was gonna be weird at the top"; he imitates the movement the other made with his foot. Meanwhile, the other casually gets back on his scooter and rides down the ramp. The rider who almost fell takes the handlebars in both hands, spins the scooter round in the air before him and places it back under his foot, then rides down the ramp too. They are both 8 years old at most and act as part of this skatepark without a second thought. It amuses me as they are so little and call one another 'bro', and at the same time I am impressed at how caringly they look out for one another [5].

In this situation, the scooter rider almost falls down while doing his trick, the other immediately expresses concern and asks him if he is ok. He seems to know how it feels to almost fall and that you can also hurt yourself. He takes care of the other scooter rider. Immediately afterwards, he demonstrates expert knowledge by explaining to him analytically what the mistake was. They share their knowledge with each other. This expert knowledge includes both the physical practice with the scooter, i.e. the tricks, as well as the knowledge of community and caring for each other.

[1] Bryce is the trainer who runs the workshop.

The two boys create a safe space in which it is okay to care for each other beyond the stereotypes of masculinity. The communal practice of riding scooters gives them the opportunity to do this. The boys do not simply casually ignore mistakes and crashes, carrying on as normal: they look out for one another while also confirming one another's skills and gender identity.

With the perspective of educational commons, these peer practices can certainly be identified as commoning practices. The boys are interested in generating and sharing knowledge together. And this field-specific knowledge also includes treating each other with respect and taking care of each other. Since all involved know that it is a physically demanding leisure practice in which the body is also at risk.

3.2 Cooperation

With a view on cooperation, we want to refer to the evaluation workshop (CS4). Due to different commitments, not all scooter riders who wanted to take part in the CS can be on site that day. This circumstance allows us to gain further insight into the cooperation between the scooter riders. At the beginning of the workshop, which was mainly about evaluating the process around the planning and construction of the scooter area, we asked the scooter riders to write down their criticism of the process, but also of the finished result (the pump track). For this purpose, we covered a table with a paper roll so that all participants could write something down. Afterwards, the written things were given points. The more points an aspect had, the more important it was for those people present.

> As with the collection of the individual points, the weighting, which is done with sticky dots, shows that absent people are included. As before, Lennox and Bryce, who are not yet here or cannot be here today, are called up as speakers. Statements like "Bryce said that too" or "write that down for Lennox" are examples of this process. When it is time to distribute the sticky dots, the absent persons are called up again. And so, in the end, there are clearly more sticky dots on some of the aspects mentioned than there are people in the room.

The short excerpt from the observation protocol shows on the one hand that the scooter riders are well connected among themselves and know about the respective points of view of the people called upon. On the other hand, they communicate with others from the situation (participation in the workshop) via messenger service (we could also observe this) and thus bring them into the CS. The scooter riders cooperate with each other and thus manage to include absent persons and by doing so to give more emphasis to their points of criticism. They can communicate and cooperate in this way because they are so well connected with each other and have a common group on a messenger service, for example, through which they can exchange information quickly. This illustrates what we have been able identify as a common feature of the young people's engagement with each other when it comes to riding scooter: Cooperation therefore takes place not only regarding the joint scooter practice (while they are scooter riding), but also regarding participation in the CS in order to manage their shared goals as commoners.

3.3 Engaged Citizenship

About the core dimension of engaged citizenship, we refer to data from the preliminary study we conducted in summer 2021 [6]. The planning and construction of the new pump track was partly a result of a political process in which various political actors emerged, including scooter riders and skaters. One starting point for the planning and construction were the ongoing conflicts at the municipal skate park, which was triggered in part by the addition of the new user group of scooter riders. In the words of one person in a position of responsibility, this has "clearly and ultimately led to processes of use, displacement and the taking over of public space" (Gustav Gerdsen; Head of Youth Service in the Department for Children, Youth and Families of the [City A]). As mentioned before, the skatepark was often already at its limits before the Covid19 pandemic. The pandemic acted as a catalyst, as there was a further rise in the need for public outdoor spaces for children and young people. Due to overcrowding, it became impossible to comply with Covid19 measures. In agreement with the municipal youth work department, the company operating the park initially reacted by introducing a regulatory measure: the young scooter riders were temporarily forbidden from using the park at all.

In view of the pandemic, the municipal youth work department portrayed this decision as the only possible choice, the sole other alternative being to close the park to everyone. Two explanations were given for this choice of action. On one hand, the quantitative argument was used, saying that the group of users was generally becoming too large. On the other hand, the qualitative argument was cited, saying that the different riding styles or lines were incompatible and adding that the park was not built for stunt scooters.

In other words, the pandemic was a catalyst for the problem in two ways: first, more children and young people relied on this already crowded public space, and second, the resulting large numbers of children and young people amassed in a tight space were declared problematic in terms of protecting against infection. After it was enacted, the policy measure of excluding the user group comprising scooter riders took on a rationality that remained even when there were no longer any social contact restrictions outdoors.

Various initiatives arose as a result of the exclusion. Supported by their parents, a group of scooter riders appealed to the local youth council. At the same time, the skaters organized themselves with the support of mobile youth workers and the local skate shop, and stood up for their interests in a manner that drew considerable public attention. Crashes between scooter riders and skaters, including some serious accidents, further aggravated the situation. In the end, those regulations were introduced as a compromise, which are discussed below in the core dimension of conflict resolution. The scooter riders were allowed to use the skate park two afternoons a week. This regulation was enforced by the municipal administration, the operating company of the skate park and the public youth work and without (official) involvement of the users on site.

With regard to the core dimension of engaged citizenship, the following can be shown with reference to the scooter riders: The older practice of skating, with its connotations of adolescence, enables members of that group to see themselves as established and to demand corresponding privileges as a group using the park. However, scooter riders are not powerless either. They certainly use the political means at their disposal: it is a privilege of scooter riders to be able to mobilize their parents and their 'generational' social capital, which young people, unlike children, do not have, because they are required to be independent political actors [7]. It is therefore no coincidence that the scooter riders are represented by their parents in public political negotiations, while the skaters organize themselves—albeit with the support of other institutions. In the end, the scooter riders succeed in obtaining temporary and partial toleration on the skate park, at least in the short term, and in the medium term in getting their 'own' scooter area—even if this of course means that the practice of scooter riding is further zoned [8].

3.4 Conflict Resolution

Regarding the core dimension of conflict resolution, we focus on material gathered in the fourth CS. The focal point is not a conflict that arose in the context of the workshop, but conflicts and attempted solutions that originate from the narrated practice of scooter riding and that sometimes arose due to measures that were used by the municipal youth work and administration on site at the skate park. The following excerpt aims at a particular zoning practice of the field. In this situation, four scooter riders talk to the researchers and those responsible for the city and the planning company about the situation at the skate park. The explicit issue is that they are banned from the park by skaters or encounter other exclusionary practices that are supposed to make it clear to them that they have "no business being there" (Ilja (15) scooter rider). He says:

> That's why I thought the signs were a bit stupid that they put them there, because it made things extremely bad with the scooters, [. . .] because especially during the first three months [...] [then] we all went there on the days when we couldn't, always always [...] it didn't matter because we really didn't like it that it's the way it is now, [...] which would be a solution if, they said, yes two scooter days [. . .] but skaters can go too. And we said—we are not allowed to go on a skater day if they had said yes well only scooters and no skaters, then ok, then I would have understood but that only skaters are allowed to go every day, [...] that was a bit in my opinion a bit discriminatory for the sport of scooter you understand?

In this passage Ilja is referring to signs that are supposed to regulate the times of use for scooter riders on the skate park. While this time allocation should lead to a relaxation of the situation between the different scenes in their dealings with each other, the scooter riders perceive it as a strong restriction or discriminatory. Here, aspects of time are interwoven with leisure practices, so that the scooter riders have to deal with them. Not only because they have to actively deal with the fact that they are now breaking rules or evading temporally structuring attempts at zoning, but also

because they are now marginalized from the outside, at least in terms of time. The fact that there are no explicit scooter days, but that the other users of the park are still allowed to be present, means that the park remains a place for skaters at all times. This in turn provides them with a special legitimization for exclusion practices, in which they ban the scooter riders from the park with reference to the signs or even actively prevent them from riding, for example by standing in the way and thus even provoking accidents. When the researcher then asked how the conflicts could be dealt with differently, Ilya replies,

> Yes, what you can do is simply that that (1) the simplest thing you can do, so that they also get it somehow we've managed [...] that the scene is getting bigger, (..) first of all, scrap the signs because they don't make sense any more anyway because I go there every day if I if I can't go on Wednesday, then I go on Thursday [...] if I can't go on Thursday, then I [...] go on Sunday. Example: Saturday Sunday we are [...] actually there all the time. so. so just take the signs away.

Ilya offers two possible solutions, one is that the scene is getting bigger, so they are convincing in terms of leisure time, so that they must be granted a certain amount of space just in terms of numbers. Secondly, he points out that the signs are nonsensical because they don't follow them anyway. After all, their recreational practice of riding scooters cannot be ordered in terms of time. They are always scooter riders not only on two days a week.

Although the signs themselves are explicitly named as disturbing, what is problematized about them is the zoning or enclosure of one's own leisure time practice in terms of time. In his argumentation, Ilya explicitly states that scooter practice takes place or has to take place in his free time. At the same time, he points out that the politically planned times for scooter riding do not correspond to his times. Time is thus significant in various ways within the examples: on the one hand, it is used by the scooter riders to prove their own affiliation to the scene and the park. On the other hand, it serves to control and order the practices on the skate park.

Ilja also talks about conflict resolutions practices that were negotiated directly between scooter riders and skaters on the park—without the interference of others (e.g. adults). These conflict resolution practices have been developed by both sport scenes together as one community, namely the one that uses the skate park together. In this sense, they are one community, despite all their differences and differences of affiliation of their belonging to different scenes.

> There weren't even these rules with Scooters [...] and then at some point there was a that was cool- that was that was a cool- cool rule for example because there was there was a rule, we have now ((draws the park on the paper while he explains)) we have the whole park yes, so a pa:::rk I just make it like this and here, it was divided like this. here were skaters, and here [...] [yes how should I do that with Scooter ((he notices that Skater and Scooter both start with S and he then abbreviates Scooter with Sc on his drawing where the skate park is divided into two sides))] and here were scooters and that was quite cool, because we scooter riders rode this:: side, the most, [...] and the skaters here and then there's just because our park is a bit [(1) ((he paints another rectangular piece on the rectangle already designated as a park))] built like this and then we have stairs here. [...] and that was for both so for both sides. [...] for example, that was a cool arrangement [...] that was that was that was I found completely okay

What is clear is that the solutions that the users of the park find themselves and in joint negotiation with each other are preferred to the solutions of the municipal youth work and administration. It is the solutions that skaters and scooters find together on site that satisfy both sides, at least until the signs appear, and that both sides can live with. The scarce resource of the skate park is divided up in such a way that everyone gets something out of it and no one is excluded. It must be said here that both scooter riders and skaters refer to the age limit for the use of the space, which is 8 years, and which is made visible on site by the sign regulating the general use of the space. Nevertheless, the reported solution from practice shows that both scenes can come into exchange with each other and find a productive solution to the existing problem (too little space for too many users). What is clear is that the solutions that the users of the park find themselves and in joint negotiation with each other are at least by the scooter riders preferred to the solutions of the municipal youth work and administration (namely the scooter days). From the scooter riders perspective it is the solutions that skaters and scooters find together on site that satisfy both sides, at least until the signs regarding the scooter days appear. The scarce resource of the skate park is divided up in such a way that everyone gets something out of it, and no one is excluded. It must be said here that both scooter riders and skaters refer to the age limit for the use of the space, which is 8 years, and which is made visible on site by the sign regulating the general use of the space. Nevertheless, the reported solution from practice shows that both scenes can come into exchange with each other and find a productive solution to the existing problem (too little space for too many users).

4 Community and the Common Goods

For this part of the chapter, we focus on a total of three key research dimensions: community belongingness and educational commons (Sect. 4.1), collaboration with members of the local community (Sect. 4.2), and intercultural and inter-generational dialogue and social inclusion (Sect. 4.3).

4.1 Community Belongingness and Educational Commons

In the following, we mainly reflect on the role of the researcher in the field. However, further considerations on actors in youth work are also addressed. For our sub-project, we decided, in accordance with the participatory methodology and the commons approach, to choose a research perspective that is deliberately not 'neutral' but "situated" [9] in such a way that it is in common with the practice of scooter riders. We have thus understood the practice of scooter riding as commons. But how is a researcher supposed to commune with a practice that is not one's own, and how does one commune when one knows next to nothing about the practice itself? As in

any research process, we first had to get to grips with our research object and the community associated with it.

The researcher who carried out the preliminary study in the summer of 2021 already had a more specific task than in other projects because of the project's design and the methodological and meta-theoretical frameworks behind it: to become a commoner with the scooter riders. But this also meant deciding on a scene, namely that of the scooter riders, becoming part of this specific community and dedicating herself to the common interest, i.e. scooter practice. At first, it was a matter of an inner commitment, but due to the positioning of herself and others as a 'researcher in the Scooter project', this was present through her own person in contact with the actors involved. To make oneself common with one thing therefore always means to exclude other things. The same was true for some social workers who, due to their own sports biography as (former) skaters, made themselves common with the skate scene and therefore sometimes represented their interests (e.g. with regard to the demand to separate the scenes). In this respect, the commitment to the scooter scene and the common interest aimed at with it was also a reason why the researcher developed a closeness to scooter riders and their practice, whereas a distance to the skate scene emerged.

The fact that closeness had to develop first is shown, for example, by the fact that the first protocols are mainly characterized by orientation in the field.

> There is not much going on at the skate park yet. Arne says: "Yes [name of researcher], you're sitting next to the right guy, he rides both skateboard and scooter. [...] The [name of the researcher] is from the university and she's here because of the scooters. Maybe you can tell her a bit about the situation here with the skaters and the scooter riders. I smile at the boy and say, "Hey." The boy nods at me and Arne adds, "But you don't have to if you don't want to. Everything is voluntary." I nod and the boy with the waistcoat tells me that there are "younger and older scooter riders" and that "the problems" actually "only arise with the younger scooter riders" because "they just don't look, I don't know why." There are no problems with the older ones "fifteen or so". Sometimes there are little kids on bobby cars on the park, which is also be "totally dangerous". In the meantime, he has taken his skateboard, deck down, onto his knees and is playing with the wheels. The skaters on the left in front of me are also listening and the young skater says to Arne: "We've developed the theory that they don't have eyes in their head and only have a guide scooter that looks out." Arne laughs at her and I ask: "Yes, is that a problem?" "Yes, totally [...] the scooters just drop[2] in everywhere without looking" and "at some point you just shout out loud". "Ah okay, because then they're in the way or something," I ask back. She nods: "Mhm." And Arne then explains to me that "the scooters" are more often on the platform to the right of us—he points his finger in that direction—so you can't really get through.

The excerpt traces a scene on the first day of the observations in June 2021. The street worker Arne introduces the researcher to the situation at the skatepark and makes contact with a scooter rider who rides "both": "skateboard and scooter". With the introduction of the researcher ("from the university and she is here because of the scooters"), he also makes her positioning in the field clear and locates her, as it were, in the vicinity of the scooter riders. The excerpt also shows the researcher's

[2] *This means entering the track section from an elevated position*—this footnote can also be found in the original protocol.

questioning attitude, which is countered by the participants with introductions to the situation on site or spatial descriptions. It is necessary to introduce the researcher to the field so that she can orient herself there. At the same time, the conflict at the skate park is addressed directly on the first day of the observations, which shows how virulent it is within the scene(s).

Over time, the researcher's position in the field changes. This can be seen in the language used in the field notes and protocols, as field terms are used as a matter of course, for example. Furthermore, there are also repeating passages in which the researcher's involvement becomes clear.

> There is now a strong smell of weed and the three skaters share a joint in front of the middle ramp. Shortly after they arrive on the park, they play rock-paper-scissors. I don't know what it's about, but the one who lost gets on the skateboard afterwards and rides across the middle of the lane towards the set of stairs. [...] Once there, the skater who was standing on the board sits down on the stone wall to the left of the staircase and the other two stand next to it. The joint makes the rounds again and the stair set is so occupied by the skaters that no one else can use it. The three skaters remain standing for a while before one of them sets off on his skateboard towards the middle ramp. The man from just now also sets off in this direction and the two collide at the middle ramp. "Woah, I didn't see you, are you all right?" asks the skater, who looks surprised and irritated at the same time. "I'm fine, are you?" the man replies. "Yeah yeah, everything's fine," says the skater and grins. [...] I have to think again that scooter riders (are supposed to) pose a danger to other users because of their sport and riding style. The fact that stoned or drunken skaters are not supposed to be a danger is something I can't wrap my head around.

An important argument for the separation of the scenes, which the researcher refers to in the protocol and which already appears in the justification for the exclusion of scooter riders from the park, is the different driving styles of scooter riders and skaters associated with the sports equipment. Scooter riders, according to the narrative of the mostly older skaters, pose a danger because of their lack of overview (see first excerpt) and their driving style qua sports equipment.[3] The researcher not only questions this narrative, but also expresses her displeasure about the unequal treatment of the scooter riders, who are attacked by the skaters because of their sport. In some cases, they are insulted, but they are also attacked or, in extreme cases, physically assaulted. Skaters repeatedly criticize the formation of groups of scooter riders at different points on the roadway during the course of the observations. If skaters do the same, this is usually not a problem. This feeling of unequal treatment is reinforced not least by the fact that over the course of eleven visits to the skate park, the researcher has inwardly made herself common with the scooter riders and their practice. The practice of scooter riding as a commons, as a common interest, is now close to her heart and this despite the fact that she herself does not carry out this practice. The changed perspective on the field is gradual and, in retrospect, can be attributed to different aspects: Talks with the scooter riders and their relatives (e.g. (grand) parents) about the situation on site and the often rude treatment of the scooter riders by the skaters, her own observations

[3] In our analysis, we have interpreted the difference between skate and scooter practice as the result of intergenerational processes in which the 'established' skaters mark the newly arrived scooter riders as 'children' who can at best be tolerated in the youth skate space.

as well as the self-positioning of some social workers as skaters, etc. The research assignment certainly also contributed to the change in perspective, which enabled the researcher, or even required her, to take a biased position. In addition, through her visits on site, observations, and conversations with scooter riders, she has developed a broad knowledge of what is involved in the practice of scooter riding and has thus become a commoner.

This knowledge then fed into workshops that are embedded as CS in the wider project framework. Through the joint work in the CS, the shared experiences and the common interest, our involvement as researchers also increased further. This can be seen, for example, in the fact that the perceived disappointment of the scooter riders about the eventually built pump track also 'spilled over' to us as researchers. At the beginning, the children and young people were promised their own space where they could decide "what should go up there" (Arne, street worker), but in the end they had to make do with a pump track. During the process, we as researchers felt the disappointment of the children and young people in this regard again and again and empathized with them. This also includes feeling responsible when promises cannot be kept and apologizing afterwards or being angry when children and young people who get involved are not noticed. Especially because the scooter riders were highly motivated and always contributed with constructive suggestions, even when the pump track was already built.

In summary, although it is always clear that we as researchers do not belong to the peer group of scooter riders, we have become part of the community by understanding ourselves as commoners together with the scooter riders and focusing on a common interest or commons: the practice of scooter riding. This made a research process on an equal footing possible, even though there were still lines of difference—such as age or gender. The integration and proximity to the scooter scene gave us the opportunity to gain new insights and knowledge, which we could then bring back to other levels, for example, to advance the process in the sense of the commons.

The perspective adopted here is only one example of how belonging to the community can be built. Overall belonging to the community is created for all actors in common practice. Skaters and scooter riders, for example, form a community, even if they differ in their leisure practice—some ride skateboards, others scooters. However, they are connected to each other through the specific location (the skate park), so that processes of community building can take place there. The creation of belonging is thus always to be thought of relationally. The processes that take place do not always have positive connotations and can also be quite conflictual. In this respect, the confrontation of the scenes with and among each other is an important part of the community building processes.

4.2 Collaboration with Members of the Local Community

Since our third party was not a single institution but a municipality, we had contact and exchange with many different actors. In the following, we focus on the different

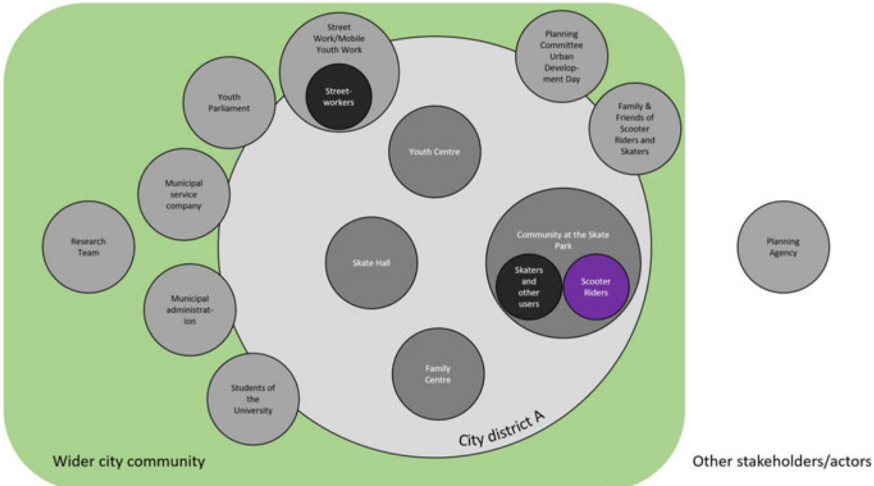

Fig. 1 Community SMOOTH UOS

institutions and actors that came into contact with each other during the project. To structure the description, there is a figure (see Fig. 1) below in which the individual actors are shown.

First, it should be pointed out that the emerging 'problem' at the skate park had a high activation potential in the municipality. The emerging conflicts on the park are significantly related to processes of displacement of children and young people from the public space. These processes become virulent on the skate park not least because different scenes that have been pushed out of the city are zoned in one place, where they now compete for a scarce resource (public space). The already scarce spatial resource of the skate park has to be re-allocated due to the emergence of the new trend sport of scooter riding. This was of great advantage for our project in that the situation to which our research was linked was already given and we could thus participate in the process that would lead to the solution of the problem. Through the CS and contacts with the different actors, we were also able to stimulate further exchange between the actors.

Figure 1 shows the various actors and institutions involved in their respective spatial locations in relation to city district A. Both the skate park and the newly built scooter area (the pump track) are located in this city district. The overlaps illustrate the proximity to the city district, although it should be noted that these are not static positions. The actors move back and forth between the individual institutions and locations, so that although the representation appears static overall, in practice it is to be understood as a dynamic event. For example, not all scooter riders live in city district A, but they still come to the skate park for their practice. Moreover, the Mobile Youth Work/Street work team is not only active in this district, but in the whole city. The CS have contributed to further promote the existing exchange between the actors. In addition, actors were brought together who would otherwise

not necessarily encounter each other. For example, at the evaluation workshop (CS4), the representative of the Youth Service, as a municipal actor, was able to exchange ideas and views directly with the scooter riders and also with the representative of the planning agency. Without the workshop, such an exchange would not have come about due to the almost non-existent points of contact. In this respect, the workshops helped to promote collaboration between the participants.

4.3 Intercultural and Inter-Generational Dialogue and Social Inclusion

The subproject was primarily concerned with children and young people being able to represent their interests in the context of the generational order [10]. This initially happened intra-generationally in the negotiation processes with the youth groups competing for the same space—especially the group of skaters. But it also happened quite substantially in the context of intergenerational relations. The conflicts and negotiations were always about which resources children and young people claim for themselves in public space. In many respects, the interests of children and young people are at odds with those of adults (who, for example, are more interested in the construction of additional parking spaces or green spaces than in the construction of sports facilities for young people). However, in the process we accompanied, adults also acted, at least in part, as commoners for the children and young people involved. We understand participation as a relational process between children and adults [11]: In this sense, it is not about the greatest possible autonomy of children and young people, but about children, young people and adults working together to maximize the interests of children and young people. To do this, however, it was first necessary for the scooter riders to convince the relevant adult political actors that they represent a relevant group whose needs must be taken into account. In the local youth parliament, for example, scooter riders represented their interests and were heard by relevant adults. Representatives of the local authorities then took the opportunity to develop a free public area—which was originally intended for further public parking spaces—with the help of European funding in the interests of the scooter riders and thus use it for them. Even though the subsequent planning process was ambivalent and frustrating for the children and young people involved (see above), it was based on an intergenerational dialogue aimed at the social inclusion of children and young people and their leisure practices in the public space. Differences that arose during this process were dealt with in the final CS—the Evaluation Workshop—in inter-generational dialogue [6].

5 Other Findings

Finally, we would like to take a look at other findings that emerged as relevant in the course of the analysis. We will first look at the dimension of relations and impact on the wider community (Sect. 5.1) before turning to the development of common-friendly policies and states (Sect. 5.2). We conclude the consideration of the results with the dimension of spatiality and the connection between space and experience (Sect. 5.3).

5.1 Relations and Impact on the Wider Community

As already assumed at the beginning of the planning of the CS, the new scooter area is not only a recreational place for scooter riders. Since the pump track is not only used by children and young people who were present during the CS, it has an effect on the scooter scene within the city. In addition, the city's idea of building a place for "everyone" has meant that the area can be used by different groups and people of almost all ages and abilities. For example, (Manuela an employee of the pump track's planning and construction company) says at the opening of the pump track: "the pump track is suitable for everything that rolls. From bobby-car-riding children to 89-year-old wheelchair users". In this respect—as disappointing as this may have been for the scooter riders—clearly a wider range of people is addressed to use the new area. This is also evident from the sign put up at the pump track, as can be seen from the following excerpt from the observation of the opening event in December 2022:

> I take a photo of the sign that explains how to use the park, sets out rules and prohibitions and lists important contact persons [...]. The sign says "Pumptrack [name of street]". Below the title, a mountain bike rider is depicted on a wave track explaining "[t]he pumptrack riding technique, the pumping" in a sequence of pictures. Below this are small pictograms, behind each of which is a red tick. Pictured are a mountain or BMX bike, a stunt scooter, a running bike, inline skates, a wheelchair rider and a skateboard.

The pump track, which was financed from public funds and subsidized with funds from a pot for social urban development, is thus a place for everyone who enjoys using it. The location of the area within the city and in the direct vicinity of a large playground and the city's skate hall invites different people to use it, and the rather low level of difficulty of the pump track invites younger riders in particular to try out their first rides on the sports equipment of their choice.

5.2 Development of Common-Friendly Policies and States

Due to the experiences that the children and young people had through their participation in the planning and construction of the pump track, they experienced themselves as political actors, which in a certain way lead to political education.

However, the first CS in particular, namely the participation workshop (CS1), represented a major hurdle in this respect, as the following analysis makes clear. In this CS the scooter riders were invited to talk about and be part of the planning of the new trend sport area. After the children and young people had had a free ride in the skate hall where the CS took place, we called them together, played a game to get to know each other and then the planner presented his ideas and also discussed them with the children. In the analysis of the discussion, we were able to identify three central subjects. The whole participation process has been centered as *different agendas, homogenization* and *self-efficacy*. All three of these are mutually dependent.

Different agendas: Although the common goal was to build a scooter park, the agendas of the different actors varied quite a bit. The scooter riders attended this workshop to ride scooters and to get involved in the construction process of the park designed for them. In doing so, they assumed they were free to decide on elements for the area and that their opinion on this would count. But many negotiations about the area took place much earlier on a different stage. For example, the call for submissions for the construction of the area already specified that it should be a pump track. Which is a wave park that enables even beginners to gain momentum with body weight shifts. Most of the scooter riders at the participation workshop were no longer beginners but wanted ramps with which you can also do tricks ("But you could also make it so that on one half there is a pump track and on the other half there are ramps like we decide."; Frederick (13) scooter rider). Therefore, the moments in the material that are really exciting are exactly the parts where the different agendas are negotiated between the actors. The planner said there was still a bit of space where other elements could be set up, but the scooter riders themselves were quite disappointed. They went to the workshop with other ideas in mind. The planner argued that, in addition to the mandate he received from the city to build a pump track, this place should also be inclusive and should give other children the opportunity to use the park, even when they are just started riding scooters ("You are I would say ambitious scooter riders who also want to do tricks and jumps but there are also I'll call them everyday scooter riders who just ride around the skate park. […] That means that the guidelines for the pump track is that, that it should allow beginners to ride over it as well."; Georg (~ 40) expert planner). On the one hand we see the children and young people who want to ride scooters and want to plan a park that meets their needs and the adults who are representatives of the city who have a broader view and want to include kids and people of all abilities and ages. In order to keep the scooter riders away from the existing skatepark and not to disturb the established scenes there—mostly the skaters ("so the motivation is also there from the city or in general, the basis why it should be built, one also wants to build it in order to rectify the normal skatepark a bit."; Georg).

Homogenization: The adults responsible homogenize the scene of scooter riders into children. They are addressed as part of a group, namely children. This revealed some adultism in the negotiations. The social workers would like to create a place for as many children as possible regarding a certain focus on inclusivity, so that they do not disturb the other scenes, for example the skate scene, and get their own park. The children and young people, on the other hand, wanted to plan a park with their focus of interest that would meet their needs. This led to a certain amount of disappointment by the children and young people who have been involved.

Self-efficacy: In our opinion, it was very important not to let this disappointment remain as it was. After all, the scooter riders did have an influence. The adults have subsequently taken their suggestions seriously, otherwise there wouldn't be a pump track now. Therefore, it was important to reawaken self-efficacy within the scooter riders, which we did by inviting them to the evaluation workshop (CS4). We wanted to show the scooter riders that they had an influence regarding the construction of the park. Nevertheless, we wanted the adults responsible to know that they should have listened better to what the children and young people were saying, that they should have been more open about their decision-making processes to make the new area more inclusive, and that by promising something different than what was eventually realized, they partly contributed to the disappointment on the part of the scooter riders. By focusing on the scooter riders' need for discussion in the evaluation workshop, they had the opportunity to express their needs again and they got the feeling that they were being heard. This was also helped by the fact that the city officials present listened and took the concerns of the scooter riders seriously. This could be seen, for example, in the fact that the scooter riders were often asked how exactly they meant certain things, what their criticisms were based on, and that a possible retrofitting of elements on the pump track was considered together. In this respect, the CS offered the participating scooter riders the opportunity to experience themselves as political actors and to learn what it means to stand up for oneself and one's own interests, even in confrontation with others.

5.3 Spatiality: Space and Experience

Due to the limited resources available in terms of public social spaces, skate parks are places where specific cultural practices are carried out by both young people and children. They are not just meeting points, but also offer a very specific space, with very specific practical resources, to suit specific practices. Practices such as skateboarding, BMX-riding or in-line skating originally came about as a means of reinterpreting and appropriating spaces, materials, boundaries, places and urban spaces through these different youth cultural practices. Skate parks are a means of taking what was once a spatially unrestricted practice that blurred urban boundaries, and tying it down to, or "zoning" it in a single place [8]. This makes skateparks politically defined places for youth practices.

Skate parks are no longer only visited by young people on skateboards, BMX bikes or in-line skates, however; for some years now, “stunt scooter riders” have also increasingly appeared there. They use these enclosed places dedicated to youth subculture practices to carry out their own practices, like the others, but tend to be somewhat younger. From the point of view of Childhood Studies, the conflicts this has caused can be seen as side effects of childhood having increasingly shifted indoors over the last hundred years and more [12], progressively excluding children from public life. From the point of view of Youth Studies, this phenomenon can also be interpreted in the context of public spaces becoming increasingly functional and commercialized, and young people having less and less access to them [13].

In this respect, a policy of zoning, as undertaken in the context of the leisure practices of stunt scooter riding or skateboarding, which is characterized by the enclosure of child and youth cultural practices, is a (temporal) spatial experience that the scooter riders we researched experience in the course of engaging in their practice. Time also plays a role in this. Zoning as part of social pedagogical and social work practice does not only explicitly refer to a place—it does, because social work practice can be localized [8]—in our case the skate or a scooter park, but also to the connection and the relating of different policies to deal with childhood, youth and a practice identified as belonging to them. With our data material we can reconstruct *how* this zoning works. This makes it clear that, on the one hand, it is a relational and political process that is initiated and wanted by policy makers (municipal type) and social workers. On the other hand, the process takes place simultaneously as a field-immanent practice of the children and young people. A policy of zoning is part of the practice of the skate park. These policies of zoning can thus be understood as a central phenomenon of this field, which is produced from the interplay of the most diverse categories. In addition to generational orders, which in addition to age as a relational category also emphasize field competence in the sense of a capable human body as significant for zoning [6], these are also aspects of temporality and time per se that become relevant for the politics of zoning and help to produce it.

6 Conclusion

Our CS have shown how the political participation of children and young people in decisions that affect them can lead to commoning processes. In particular, it became clear that this cannot happen in the mode of maximum autonomy but requires an intergenerational dialogue [11] in which adult policymakers and educators work together with them to advocate for the interests of children and young people. This relationality is consistent with the principles of the commons [2] and presupposes a commoning process between children and adults. To some extent, the educators and other adult actors involved make themselves commoners in the practices of children and youth, as well as in their related interests, without exercising them themselves.

The CS have also shown, however, that the children and young people involved in such joint political processes as commoners require a high degree of transparency on

the part of the adult decision-makers as to what scope the children and young people involved have for shaping these processes. Although the adults have partially made themselves commoners, they are ultimately in larger contexts and must also include different interests of other target groups (such as younger children who want to ride their bikes) in the processes.

In addition to transparent processes that also allow children and young people to express themselves critically and stand up for their interests, the joint evaluation of the process (CS4) has proven to be essential. Especially when it comes to the pedagogical aspect of commons as well as the lived experience of citizenship by children and young people, it is necessary to provide the children and young people with a framework for reflection on the jointly experienced processes.

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Young People in Vulnerable Contexts: Shaping Collective Views Through Media and Educational Commons

Maria-Jose Palacios-Esparza, Mittzy Arciniega-Cáceres, Macarena Vallejos Cox, and Mònica Figueras-Maz

Abstract This book chapter presents the results of a case study conducted by Pompeu Fabra University with young people aged between 16 and 18 years who worked together on the creation of audiovisual pieces at workshops run in accordance with the participatory audiovisual methodology, a combination of alternative audiovisual approaches and the postulates of educational commons. The case study was carried out in two rounds at a non-formal education association in the Raval neighbourhood (Barcelona). The results show how these adolescents deal with the commoners role and how commoning practices emerge in the group. They also revealed how their media skills were improved, showing progress from instrumental to more reflexive use. Finally, we analyse how this reflection and creation process promotes the generation of spaces for action and offers the participants a platform on which to get their opinions heard.

Keywords Educational commons · Media literacy · Audiovisual · Young people

1 Introduction

Democracy and unequal opportunities to be heard appear to be highly contradictory concepts when considering that democratic actions are impossible to perform without the manifestation of the ideas, values, civic attitudes and skills that enable us to engage with others and to live together despite our differences. Hence, and in order to reduce social inequalities through educational commons, in this chapter we emphasise the need to build collective views as a way to politicise the apparently individual problems that, after the active exercise of commoning dialogue, become collective, systemic issues.

We do so by presenting the experience of one of the case studies developed by Pompeu Fabra University with young people aged between 16 and 18 years in vulnerable situations. This study was performed in observance of educational commons

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G. Cappello et al. (eds.), *Educational Commons*, UNIPA Springer Series,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51837-9_7

principles and alternative audiovisual approaches to explore the possibilities and challenges of using media to foster the emergence of commoning practices and to shape collective voices. The case studies were conducted at a non-formal education association in the Raval neighbourhood of Barcelona that works with children and young people at risk of exclusion.

The study was organised in two rounds and involved a total of 42 workshops that combined educational commons principles and alternative audiovisual approaches using a participatory audiovisual methodology. The results show that this approach not only encourages young people to act as commoners and fosters the emergence of commoning practices; but also evidences how the workshops helped the participants to reinforce their media literacy practices and embark upon the exploration of new ones. Finally, the study identifies the connections between the dimensions of educational commons and media literacy.

This chapter is divided into six sections. It begins with a theoretical exploration of the pedagogies of the commons, and of audiovisual and media literacy. It goes on to describe the content and goals of the case study and how it was carried out, and then explains in detail how the methodology was applied and how the data was collected and analysed. Finally, we discuss the results and present the conclusions.

2 Theoretical Approaches

2.1 Educational Commons Pedagogies

Educational commons are learning communities where decisions about educational processes are co-managed and co-constructed by children/young people and educators in conditions of equal power, recognising everybody's knowledge and challenging the hegemonic structures and profit-driven logic of markets [1].

Child-centred alternative pedagogies that facilitate the process of commoning education could be viewed as tools that challenge dominant discourses and empower democracy and children's rights. In the case study presented in this chapter, educational commons pedagogies were implemented in order to foster the emergence of commoning practices using audiovisual media, with special emphasis on the implementation of pedagogical documentation, the pedagogy of listening and project work.

The use of pedagogical documentation such as photos, evidence of work done in the sessions (brainstorming on cards, collective storyboards, etc.), drawings, notes, videos and others, allows educators and researchers to draw on pedagogical practices and reflect on them, in order to gain a deeper understanding of what was done in the sessions. It also presents an opportunity to "listen" to children/young people from a different perspective, namely the way they express themselves through their work.

Pedagogical documentation thus involves 'thoughtful reflection and analysis' [2], p. 6 as the process allows educators to think about their own pedagogical practices, whereby the learning is not only documented, but those documents become a part of the learning [3], p. 15. Pedagogical documentation could perhaps be viewed as "memory-enhancing material" that fosters "re-cognition" [4], p. 69 and mixes subjective and objective thoughts with individual and collective memories, thereby producing new meanings.

We could say that documentation is a kind of listening, what Sisson and Whitington [3] call 'visible listening', as it evidences children's learning in progress, the path they have taken and the process they have used. Pedagogical documentation and the pedagogy of listening are thus interconnected, suggesting that listening to children is an essential means to reevaluate how they approach and understand the world.

However, mainstream educational approaches promote a narrow understanding of listening, one that is centred on the reception and comprehension of codes, and which considers that children need to learn to listen 'better' and promotes the idea that their voices are less of a priority or that they are not competent enough for their voices to be heard [5]. This approach turns children's voices into "sounds" or "noisy distractions" outside of institutional agendas [6].

In contrast, the pedagogy of listening challenges this traditional view of children as incompetent at understanding complex realities and elaborate critical discourses, and instead focuses on their skills in order to build their own understanding of the world and share their feelings, ideas and interpretations through different codes. As Rinaldi [4] remarks, children have "the desire and ability to reach for the meaning of life and their own sense of self as soon as they are born" [4], p. 2 and it is the responsibility of adults to empower this ability in order to promote what Reggio Emilia calls "internal listening", meaning the process by which children represent and recognise themselves while expressing their ideas, and which allows them to develop a more conscious vision of their world. They also get the opportunity to listen and to be listened to, to develop the empathy and capacity to accept other peoples' opinions, to negotiate with others and to build collective worldviews.

Work projects are another core element of the educational commons methodology that share certain features with the pedagogy of listening and pedagogical documentation, and especially its focus on teachers and children as co-researchers. According to Giamminuti [21], project work is a creative co-research approach whose starting point is the observation of children's interests and active listening to their questions. The challenge for adults is to generate other questions that can stimulate the emergence of collective research spaces. Hence, project work could be considered a subversive methodology as it turns the classic "goal-centred approach" into a "process-centred approach" that does not respond to instrumental or pre-established objectives. This does not mean that the goals that guide the learning and research process should not be clear, but that their fulfilment cannot occur at any price and to the detriment of the reflective and collective process of knowledge construction.

Having said that, the promotion of commoning practices through the implementation of child-centred alternative pedagogies breaks from hegemonic approaches,

although this is not always easy or comfortable for adults [7]. This inconvenience is probably due to our adult-centric perspective of education related to age-defined categories and expressed in adult-centric dynamics and forms of social organisation that endow upon adults the ability to control what children do [8]. Such systems have been developed throughout history and were reconfigured from the economic, cultural and political dynamics that make up the capitalist mode of production, settling in social imaginaries and enabling their material and symbolic reproduction [9].

2.2 Audiovisual and Educational Commons

Participatory action research (PAR) is the starting point of the participatory audiovisual methodology (APM) implemented in the case study, since it is designed to ensure that it is the young people themselves who guide and construct the research by identifying the problems that affect them and proposing alternatives linked to change and social justice [10]. PAR thus considers young people to be active subjects within the research process and who have the critical capacity to appreciate reality and therefore produce knowledge and act as co-researchers alongside adults [10].

From the theoretical point of view, the participatory audiovisual methodology was inspired by two techniques: narrative production [11] and photovoice [12]. The former is focused on the co-construction and co-interpretation of written texts and the latter is based on capturing and interpreting realities from photographs taken by the participants themselves. In the case of narrative productions, "…the words of the participant are not recorded, but rather the way in which he/she wishes his/her vision to be read" [11], p. 19. This means that the process goes beyond the discussion of the theme and also involves collective negotiation and resignification. Similarly, from the photovoice perspective [12], it is the participants who use photography to visually frame a problem with the aim of generating horizontal, collective dialogue that will foster the emergence of collectivity, and therefore political views, that will pave the way towards possible actions of resistance.

Having said that and taking into account our goal of developing research practices that contribute to social transformation; during the case study, the participatory audiovisual methodology guided our action research practices, combining the principles of educational commons pedagogies (listening, documentation and project work) with the use of audiovisual material as a tool for the social construction of reality. Thus, alternative audiovisual approaches, which have often been used for the construction of discourses of resistance [13], are a symbolic way to validate alternative visions of being and existing in the world [14].

The incorporation of audiovisual material also encouraged the youngsters to work collaboratively in a format that they use in their daily lives. As they were already familiar with audiovisual logic and language, there was a high level of autonomy among the participants, who could take control of the situation and break traditional adult-adolescent power relations, promoting the emergence of alternative media

approaches and commoning practices with a special emphasis on listening and governance as they shared, exchanged and negotiated ideas and positions in order to build and rebuild collective meanings and discourses.

2.3 Media Literacy and Alternative Media Approaches

Working with participatory audiovisual methodologies intrinsically implies accompanying young people with the process of discovering the role played by media in society, their economic structure and their political interests. This accompaniment places special emphasis on strengthening their ability to interact with media in a broader sense, and making them able to express themselves through a variety of codes and formats. Moreover, there is a focus on the need to highlight the role that beliefs, sub-conscious attitudes and emotional responses play during our interactions with media and to emphasize the importance of taking a critical attitude to one's own knowledge and practices when it comes to media use [15].

We took the transmedia literacy approach [16], which involved a different reading of the teenagers' media realities, focusing on what they do with the media in order to learn from it and exploiting its ability to expand their interest towards other areas and to promote their engagement. Transmedia literacy does not bypass the need to teach young people media skills, it is more a case of expanding this framework to include research into the media activities that young people engage in outside of educational institutions and trying to bring that knowledge into the classroom.

Hence, paying attention to young people's media practices is a way to promote social equality, as their relationship with the media could condition to a large degree their possibilities for participation in civil and political life, which to a large extent silence the individual and collective voices of the most vulnerable groups.

For this reason, part of our results transversely analyse the relationship between adolescents and media by taking Ferrés and Piscitelli's [15] approach to media literacy competences (explained in the methodology section). Even viewed from a "competence" perspective—more focused on the goals than on the process—it has a lot in common with the educational commons approach, especially regarding collectivity and self-governance, offering a global vision of the relationship between the media and its users.

3 The Case Study

The case study was carried out in a non-formal education association (third party) located in the Raval neighbourhood in the centre of Barcelona, which is characterised by the co-existence of tourists, local Catalan or Spanish residents and the more than 50% of the population that is from immigrant backgrounds. The over 40 nationalities

particularly include people from Pakistan, the Philippines, Bangladesh and Morocco [17].

The third party that we worked with runs educational programmes for children in the neighbourhood aged 3–18, although our case study only worked with the oldest group (16–18 years old) who are part of an academic accompaniment programme, having been referred by the social services or their schools.

The case study was conducted in two rounds. The first was from January to June 2022 and the second was from January to March 2023. In both cases, the participatory audiovisual methodology was applied but adapted to the needs and characteristics of each group.

First round (January to June 2022). Two gender-balanced groups participated in the first round. One was made up 12 adolescents who attended the workshops on Wednesdays; while in the other group, 16 young people did likewise on Thursdays.

During the first round, 16 participatory workshops were run with each group (a total of 32) and the main theme was "the future". Each group was presented with the challenge of producing an audiovisual piece, in the format of their choice (video, podcast, photos, etc.) and taking whatever approach to "the future" that they chose. To do this, this round was structured as follows:

First, the participants discussed their ideas of the future. They then reflected on the possibilities of media and explored the ideas of the future among the younger children at the centre. After that, they discussed what they had learned and decided on the format of their final piece, which they subsequently recorded and edited. Finally, an exhibition was held at which they shared the process and results of their work with the community.

The outcome was the creation of two audiovisual pieces (one by each group). The first group decided to create a video podcast criticising the education system entitled "*They ask a lot of us and give us too little. What young people like us think about the education system*". The second group's piece, called "*Untitled Future*", was a video of a series of interviews about the obstacles young people need to overcome in order to be happy and reflections on generational differences.

Second round (January to March 2023). The second round consisted of a single group of 15 teenagers. This group also had an even balance of boys and girls. Ten participatory workshops were held on the main theme of mental health issues, which the children had chosen before the workshops began. In contrast to the previous round in which the audiovisual pieces were only shared on social networks; in this one they were part of two reports produced by the Diari de Barcelona, a newspaper produced by students from Pompeu Fabra University. The 10 workshops were structured as follows:

First, the participants discussed what they understood by mental health and what stigmas they found in society. They then talked about the different journalistic and audiovisual formats they knew and decided which ones would be best for the audiovisual pieces that they wanted to produce. After that, the pieces were produced with the help of intern students who worked for the Diari de Barcelona. Finally, the researchers organised an exhibition focused on the process and the participants' experiences during the case study.

The outcome was the publication of two news reports; the first was entitled "*The Impact of mobile phones on young people*" and included two videos: one that criticises beauty standards and another that reflects on young people's addiction to mobile phones. The second report was called "*Put on my glasses: a look into bullying*" and included a video of an interview with a mental health professional about bullying.

4 Methodology

This section explains how the data was collected and analysed. The subsection on data collection explains how the workshops were constructed, the pedagogies used (including the combination of educational commons and participatory audiovisual approaches) and our observation process. The subsection on data analysis explains the categories and indicators that we used for data analysis.

4.1 Data Collection

A total of 42 participatory workshops were run for data collection, 32 in the first round (16 per group) and 10 in the second round. Participant and non-participant observation were also performed in each of the workshops. These techniques (participatory workshops and observation) are explained below:

Participatory workshops. As mentioned in the theoretical framework section, the participatory audiovisual methodology practices are a combination of educational commons pedagogies and alternative media approaches. Our participatory workshops were structured into 4 phases.

(1) **Discussion of the topic**. In this phase, the objective was to generate a commoning context to provide a space in which the participants could talk and be listened to, as well as freely discuss and exchange ideas about a specific topic and build collective discourses. All of this entailed a special emphasis on the pedagogy of listening and the postulates of pedagogical documentation.

The pedagogy of listening enabled us to focus on the discussions and negotiation of meaning among the participants, the aim being to be sensitive and creative enough to get their own visions to emerge. Likewise, we used materials and activities, such as drawings, collages, photographs, written texts, and so on, framed within the pedagogical documentation approach to encourage the youngsters to think about their own work. Meanwhile, pedagogical documentation allowed the educators and researchers to constantly rethink and reproduce meanings, making them increasingly more in tune with the adolescents' needs (Fig. 1).

(2) **Production of the discourse or narrative**. Once the collective discourse had been agreed upon, the objective was to organise and structure the adolescents'

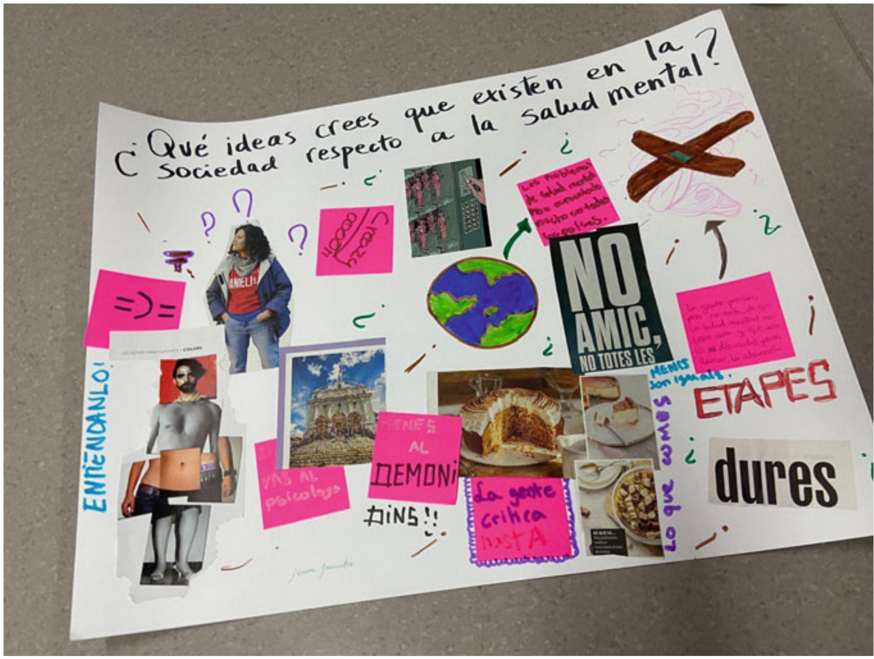

Fig. 1 Collage on what ideas do you think exist in society about mental health? *Source* The authors

meanings and discourses for translation into an audiovisual script or storyboard. Although the pedagogy of project work is transversal throughout the whole process, it is especially important in this phase when the collective creation of the audiovisual piece begins.

The pedagogy of listening is another core element, as the adults must encourage mutual listening, the emergence of different opinions and the capacity to negotiate points of view in order to achieve consensus and make decisions about the final pieces. The pedagogy of documentation also plays an important role, for throughout the whole process the participants were encouraged to reconsider their previous thoughts and attach new meanings to their own ideas (Figs. 2 and 3).

(3) **Audiovisual production and filming**. After determining the narrative structure of their pieces, in an exercise of peer governance, the participants were left to make all the decisions as to how they would turn these narrative structures into images. In this phase, they started doing everything that they had chosen to do, and put teamwork into practice as they decided on and exchanged roles, made decisions on the spot and generated a collective product. It was at this point that the elements of peer-governance, such as collective agreements and conflict resolution, emerged (Figs. 4 and 5).

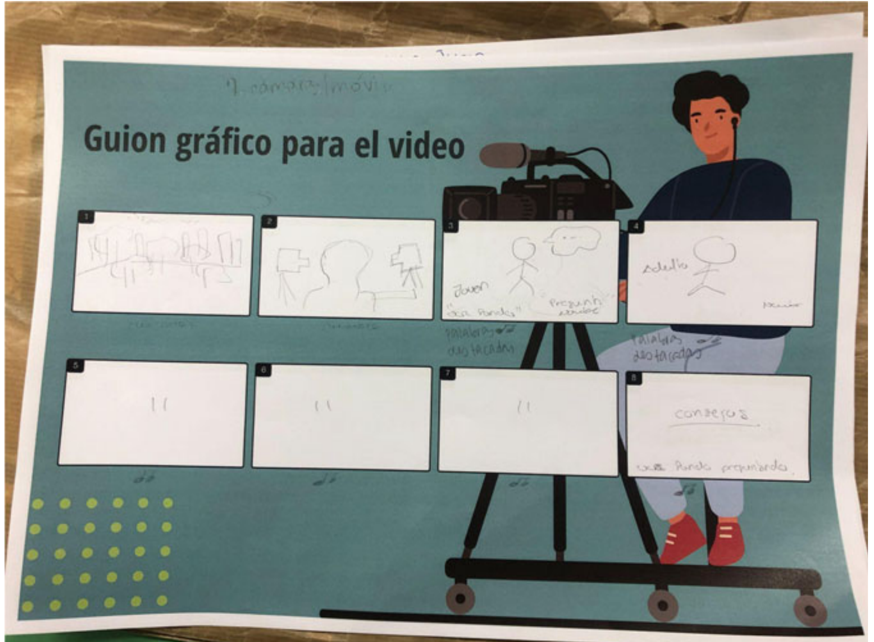

Fig. 2 Storyboarding tool. *Source* The authors

(4) **Community outreach**, in which the participants used an exhibition to present their work to the community, which included members of the association, people from the neighbourhood, educators, and so on. This gave them the chance to get their work seen and thus get their voices heard. The exhibition emphasised the process of their work more than the results, and highlighted how adults should guide these processes of collective reflection. This was a way for the teenagers to be recognised by the community and to be appreciated as creative, reflective and active people (Figs. 6 and 7).

Participant and non-participant observation. Participant observation was carried out by the researchers who ran the workshops, and non-participant observation was done by an external researcher who did not participate in them. For the latter, an observation sheet was designed and organised into 6 categories: (1) space, in which we observed the distribution of the young people in the space; (2) discourse, in which we focused on the questions and discussions that they formulated; (3) attitudes, in which we observed how they reacted to the workshop activities; (4) participation; (5) teamwork; and (6) relationship with the adults, to observe the dynamics between the educators and researchers with the young people.

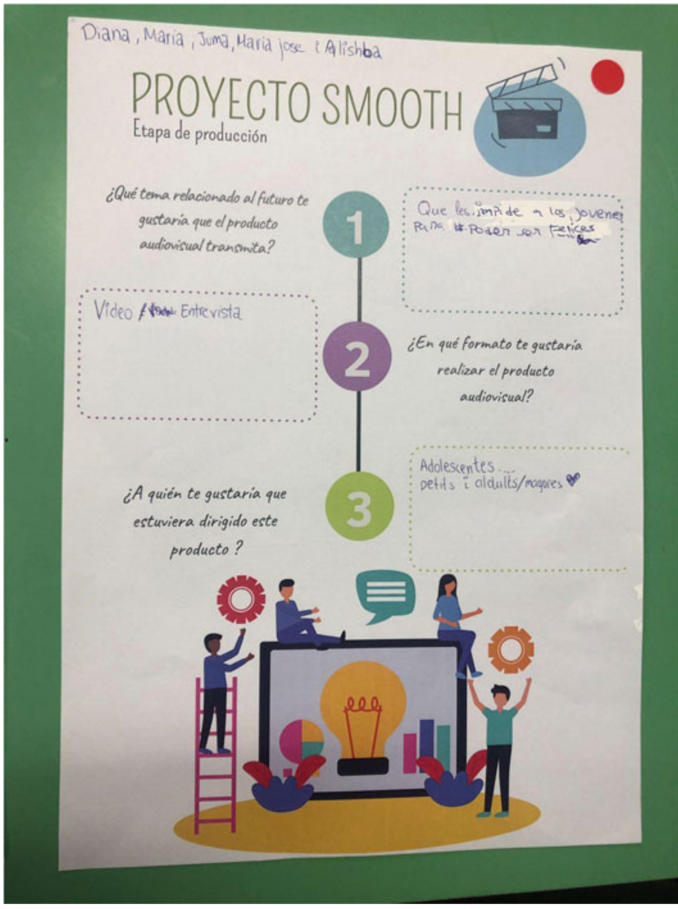

Fig. 3 Tools to help the participants think about the format and topics that they would like to develop. *Source* The authors

4.2 Data Analysis

In total, we analysed 42 observation sheets. Where the circumstances allowed, the workshops were also recorded and subsequently transcribed. So, a total of 22 workshop transcripts were also analysed.

In order to analyse the data, some of the core dimensions of the educational commons and their indicators were taken into account, such as children as commoners and commoning practices. In addition, in order to analyse the transversal findings connected to media literacy, we considered the six dimensions proposed by Ferrés and Piscitelli [15].

From these six dimensions (language, technology, interaction processes, production processes, ideology and values, and aesthetics) we focused on the three that

Fig. 4 Recording during the second round. *Source* The authors

Fig. 5 Recording during the first round. *Source* The authors

Fig. 6 First round exhibition. People watching the audiovisual pieces. *Source* The authors

emerged from the results: technology, which seeks to understand the role played by information and communication technologies in society and their possible effects, production processes to recognise factors that transform corporate productions into messages subject to the socio-economic cultures of these industries and to understand the rules and self-regulatory codes that protect and regulate the various social actors; and ideology and values**,** which seeks to find out how media representations structure our perception of reality and, among other things, to analyse individual and collective virtual identities, and detect stereotypes, especially in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, social class, religion, culture, disabilities, and so on, while also analysing the causes and consequences.

The following table presents the convergence of these two types of dimensions for the analysis of the results (Table 1).

5 Results

Through the process of constructing and running the group projects in both rounds, practices could be identified that were linked to the educational commons. Also, new forms of use and appropriation of the media could be discovered, promoted and explored.

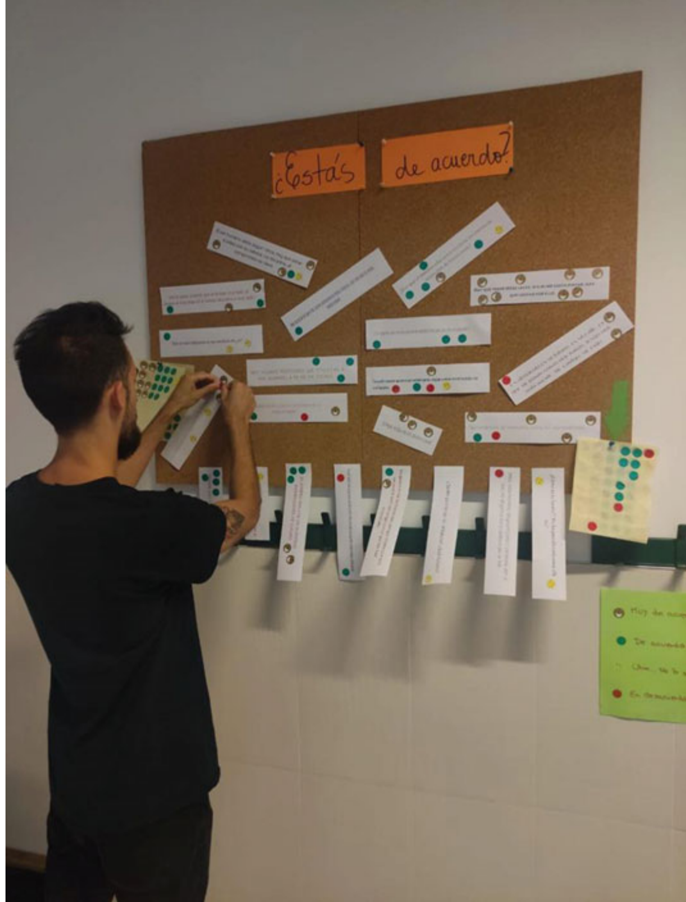

Fig. 7 First round exhibition. One person says whether he/she agrees or disagrees with the participants' statements during the process. *Source* The authors

Even though it was not the original objective of the research, the indicators of media literacy appear transversally in the participants' commoning process as they gave each other feedback and made the collective construction process horizontal and collaborative.

For this reason, the results are organised into subsections according to the core dimensions of the educational commons, and in each of them, we analyse transversally how the practices associated with the media emerge.

Table 1 Dimensions and indicators for data analysis

Core research dimension	Sub dimensions	Indicators/categories
Young people as commoners	Children's responses as creative and self-aware subjects	Expression
		Social awareness
Commoning practices	Cooperation and collective creativity	Classroom interaction
		Promotion of self-management
Practices associated with media literacy competences	Ideological dimension	Ability to find out how media representations structure our perception of reality, often through inadvertent communications
		Ability to take advantage of new communication tools to transmit values and to contribute to the improvement of the environment, from an attitude of social and cultural commitment
		Ability to develop products and modify existing ones in order to question values or stereotypes present in some media productions
	Production dimension	Ability to select meaningful messages and to appropriate and transform them to produce new meanings
		Ability to work collaboratively in the production of multimedia or multimodal products
	Technological dimension	Understanding of the role of information and communication technologies in society and their potential impact
		Ability to interact meaningfully with media in order to expand their mental capacities
		Ability to adapt technological tools to the communicative objectives being pursued
		Ability to elaborate and manipulate images and sounds from an awareness of how representations of reality are constructed

Source Own elaboration

5.1 Media and Young People as Commoners

During the previously described rounds, we could observe how the participants constituted themselves as commoners, constructing practices associated with collectivity and awareness of social reality, based on the audiovisual creation projects.

One of the observed practices was the evolution of the young people's relationship with the media throughout the workshops, as they talked collectively and worked on what they themselves had decided. At first, they focused more on the individual and instrumental use of the media, highlighting those aspects in which the media, and especially social networks, help them in their daily lives.

> R1 asks 'What did you learn about through the audiovisual products?'
>
> —P4: 'About how dresses are made'
>
> —P3: 'Car mechanics'
>
> —P2: 'About natural cosmetics, trade, Ernesto Castro's philosophy' (Round 1, observation of workshop 4, G1).[1]

In addition, they are not interested in the more traditional media, highlighting how they tend to get their information from social media. This goes hand in hand with the fact that many of them do not express any knowledge or interest in certain current issues that are more popular in traditional media, or if they do know about them, it is because this is an obligatory requirement at school.

> It is generally observed that young people do not have a close relationship with television and radio. Likewise, neither do they identify any closeness with the national current affairs commonly addressed by the media described above (Round 2, observation of workshop 4).
>
> P1: 'I found out about Ukraine and Russia because they gave me a history assignment at school, so I watched videos from El País and The Guardian.' (Round 1, observation of workshop 4, G1).

However, when digging deeper into the role of the media in society, the young people seem very aware of the way it is used to raise awareness of certain issues, showing an understanding of the role of information and communication technologies and even their effects. They are also aware of the risks involved, as they do not think that everything that gets shown in the media is true.

> R1: 'Do you agree that audiovisual products can raise awareness?'
>
> —P5: 'Yes, very much. For example, when you talk about taboo subjects, it's not so taboo any more, so it becomes normalised' (Round 1, transcript of workshop 5, G1).

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[1] The names of the people have been coded for anonymisation. Each participant is assigned a letter and a number. The participants are identified with the letter "P" and a number (e.g. P1), while the researchers are identified with the letter "R" and a number (e.g. R1), and educators with the letter "E" and a number (e.g. E1). In addition, in the case of round 1, G1 has been assigned to the Wednesday group and G2 to the Thursday group.

R1: 'Last week we were talking about the function of audiovisual products. What do you think they are for?'

—P1: 'To get to know different versions of realities'.

—P2: 'To make you believe lies, for example, those anti-vaccine videos that said that Covid didn't exist' (Round 1, transcript of workshop 5, G1).

This shows that although these young people have a good understanding of media-related practices and to a certain extent express awareness of other possible uses and even view these alternative approaches to the media as necessary, they do not necessarily have the experience of using them for more reflective and socially-aware purposes.

They also mistrust certain media contents, as reflected in the previous quote. Hence the relationship between adolescents and the media is full of contradictions such as, for example, how when they make instrumental use of media, they are very aware of the different kinds of content they are exposed to in their daily lives and a variety of possible media uses.

This leads us to believe that they are probably not capable enough of making more reflective use of the media, and it is only instrumental use that is normalised and widespread among their peers.

In this context, the participatory audiovisual methodology encouraged the young people to experience making more reflective use of the media. Moreover, with the educational commons component, this reflective use also took place collectively and from a critical perspective, which helped to develop new ways of relating to the media.

From the moment the audiovisual work began, the participants had the space and the tools to discuss issues collectively and make their views more complex. Initially, in both rounds, despite exchanging opinions as a group, the interventions and ideas tended to come from highly individualistic views marked by a very neoliberal vision. This occurred both in the first round on the future, and in the second round on mental health; for example, when they were asked to choose a picture (from a number of photos) that illustrates their perspective on each topic, they expressed ideas like these:

P2: 'My future step by step, I drew a family, study, look for a job in nursing or a company, earn money and have an iPhone. To always be happy' (Round 1, transcript of workshop 1, G2).

P3: 'Only you matter, okay, it doesn't matter what other people say about you, what they say, those criticisms, it's only you'.

P8: 'But you also need the support of other people' (Round 2, transcript of workshop 2).

Although the aim of the proposed activities was to generate a collective dynamic, the participants tended to intervene with individual ideas. It was not possible to generate a conversation based on other people's ideas.

Following the introduction of audiovisual material, they began to express themselves from a collective, community perspective. For example, in the first round, they were able to build a collective critical discourse around the future that focused on the

deficiencies of the education system. Similarly, in the second round, they were able to build a social approach to problems in relation to mental health. In both cases, they discussed issues that they are currently experiencing or know about.

> P4: 'Well, I do, about the education system, when it comes to studying, looking for a job... And about the Raval neighbourhood, why everything is easier here, for studying…'

> P5: 'I think that... once you finish high school you don't know what to do. I think there should be someone to tell you what to do. For example, I'm studying health emergencies and I didn't know it existed and I like it. The thing is, you don't know what to study, because basically you don't know what's out there' (Round 1, transcript of workshop 5, G1).

> P7: 'The issue I like is that of minors; minors who are not accompanied by an adult who migrate and come without papers... What strikes me about that is what they feel when they arrive here'.

> P13: 'It's interesting. It's a great umbrella for mental health' (Round 2, transcript of workshop 4).

This shows that these young people are interested in social issues and are able to express their opinions about them with a special sense of social justice. But they approach them from their own experiences, which is why we can observe their disaffection and lack of interest in current issues defined by the political and media agenda as set according to adult-centric patterns.

On the other hand, creating audiovisual pieces led to the complexification of their views when it came to organising the production, choosing who to interview, or deciding where to record and how, which also implied a deeper reflection process than at first.

This is directly related to the ideological dimension described by Ferrés and Piscitelli [15], as they construct knowledge and practices around the use of communication tools. They question the different perspectives of the problem they are working on, identify and challenge stereotypes and define realities, while also thinking about the audience that was going to consume their audiovisual products in order to generate as much influence as they could and transmit messages that could help to transform society.

In round 1, we observed how the adolescents, when talking about the podcast that criticises the education system, considered putting themselves in the position of a young person who had gone through the experience of paying for their education alone.

> P10 talks about the opportunities in the education system, an adult, a young person and the host, 'the adult could be someone from the UPF itself. Hopefully, someone can speak about their experience of paying for their studies etc.' (Round 1, observation of workshop 13, G1).

In round 2, the approach was made more complex by talking about the different perspectives of bullying, but not only including people who have suffered bullying but also people who have perpetuated it. Emphasis was also placed on the inclusion of an expert to validate what they were doing.

> P7 intervenes by taking P6's words, expanding the explanation of the topic and addressing ideas that had emerged about what to do in the podcast (survey, debate, expert interview,

experience of being a bully and experience of being a victim of bullying). Bullying is raised as a central theme, associated with situations of racism and depression (Round 2, observation of workshop 5).

This shows how collective discussion and teamwork enable young people to explore different perspectives that they did not necessarily consider at the beginning of the process. Audiovisual production, based on their own practices, knowledge and interests, is shown to be a key process that promotes more profound critical reflection, favouring the construction of social awareness. This occurs through the practical exercise of self-organisation, contrasting perspectives and questioning the status quo, making young people commoners through collective work with the media.

5.2 Media and Commoning Practices

Although the previous section showed the process of collective construction of reflections and discourses among young people, the construction processes of other elements could also be observed to be associated with collective practices, such as group interaction and self-management.

In relation to group interaction, we identified a relevant transformation of practices throughout the audiovisual creation process. Initially, we observed how the participants focused on their own activities, generally preferring individual spaces to group ones, showing major difficulties with the development of conversation and collective debate. Likewise, we identified dynamics that tended to be competitive, with associations that were mainly based on previous affinities. One example occurred when playing the game of musical chairs adapted to the commons[2] in which, despite the community sense of the game, competition between genders could be observed:

P1: 'The girls did what they wanted'

P8: 'We were more cooperative than you, okay?'

P1: 'They didn't want to adapt. We boys can't do the same'.

P4: 'Yes, we did a lot of things much better than you because you were fighting for the chair' (Round 2, transcript of workshop 1).

Once the process of audiovisual creation had begun, we identified the young people's knowledge and practices related to the generation of audiovisual content, which is commonly used for entertainment and socialisation. Some of these practices are defined by Ferrés and Piscitelli [15] as competences in the technology dimension (specifically, those related to their ability to adapt technological tools to the communicative objectives set by the project group, broadening and deepening collaborative practices).

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[2] For further explanation of the game of musical chairs adapted to the commons, see: https://www.triple-c.at/index.php/tripleC/article/view/1175.

> P12 explains: 'We are going to start by recording the space, then the introduction, faces of different people, then a voice with the questions, a young person and an adult, they answer only once and then the advice, show the older people and then the young people, like a collage and zoom in on the advice. At the end, there is a question for reflection by those who watched the video'. (Round 1, observation of workshop 13, G2).

> There are discussions about how the podcasts work: for example, whether to invite people or not, and if so, who. They take into consideration the ages of the people to be invited and the possible things they might do (Round 1, observation of workshop 12, G1).

By working from a common language for the construction of the audiovisual piece, we observed the development and/or empowerment of their capacities to interact at a group level, thus promoting cooperation between peers. Linking this to the production dimension [15], we observe the presence of practices such as the selection of significant messages and the search for new meanings, based on collaborative work.

> They are happy, they seem comfortable working in groups and with us. They laugh, make jokes, and at the same time they are very connected with the objective of the activity (Round 1, observation of workshop 11, G2).

> The TikTok group refers to the choice of 'mobile phone addiction' as a theme, seeing the situation as a cross-cutting issue (Round 2, observation of workshop 5).

> The Podcast group has divided the roles between them, between who interviews, who takes photographs and who records (Round 2, observation of workshop 7).

The process of transformation of group dynamics, which considers the capacity for collective and cooperative creation, is encouraged by the construction of the audiovisual project from their interests and motivations. The emergence of individual and group creativity and the capacity for self-management do not suddenly emerge in a generalised manner. Although we identified young people with capacities associated with the construction and expression of ideas or decision-making, a large part of them developed and/or strengthened these progressively throughout the creative process.

> The TikTok group maintains the discussion and organisation of their project, P4 can be seen actively participating in delivering ideas, as can P7. Both maintain active participation, much more than previously seen (Round 2, observation of workshop 8).

This stronger group self-management by the participants is not only related to the creation of the audiovisual piece but also to their relationships with the adult moderators of the space. The participation of adults (R1, R2 and E1) as facilitators of group dynamics and not as direct interveners is fundamental for the promotion of such self-management, as it generates tools that will foster the collective construction of new knowledge. This occurs from a facilitating role, reinforcing ideas, asking questions and clearing up doubts.

> They start to laugh while they speak, R1 and R2 moderate, they remember the ideas to start choosing and why (Round 1, observation of workshop 11, G2).

> Greater participation by the girls is identified. The two boys in the group do not further develop their ideas with regard to what is raised in the conversation. E1 keeps her distance, staying on the sidelines of both groups (Round 2, observation of workshop 5)

This reveals the different components of the participants' experiences during the project. In the workshop, being a relational space, various elements of collective creativity are combined, including their prior knowledge, their practices during the process of audiovisual creation and their capacity to create non-adult centric spaces.

6 Conclusions

As Anyiwo et al. [18] mention, when it comes to action research and media education with young people, our starting point is the idea of them as valuable subjects in the construction of media content and in the discussion of media issues, as well as in the questioning of social structures. In both rounds, we could see how the participants formed a shared vision of the world inspired by their different experiences and, at the same time, we could observe how working together encouraged them to question different aspects of themselves and their context.

This goes hand in hand with the educational commons, which states that children should manage their own learning autonomously and that adults should be facilitators of this [19]. By combining the educational commons with media practices, it is assumed that young people already have some of these practices that emerge during the process of generating the audiovisual piece, which are thus further enhanced and deepened, while new ones are built through discussion and collective work. At the same time, these practices also progressively generate collectivity in the group, with collective work being not only a means but also an end.

Based on the transmedia literacy approach, we took advantage of the media practices that the participants already had in order to use the media in a reflexive and collective way at the same time. This enabled them to enhance and construct, above all, the practices associated with the dimensions of technology, production and ideology mentioned by Ferrés and Piscitelli [15].

The educational commons thus broaden the horizon of media education by making peer-governance a central tool for young people to acquire certain skills and practices when using media. This means that by constructing and proposing media content from a critical perspective they get to experience teamwork, dialogue, exchange of opinions, community building, and so on. At the same time, the educational commons paradigm also feeds on media education by using the media as a tool to apply peer-governance, thus generating a symbiotic relationship between the two concepts.

On the one hand, this symbiotic relationship enables young people to develop in an environment that they know and handle well and that, above all, interests them. Audiovisual media are the everyday environment of the youth of today and it is there that narratives and information about the issues that concern them converge. On the other hand, working as a community makes them build from a collective point of view, identifying themselves as a social group and working as equals.

This process that these young people went through is closely related to civic engagement, which might not have been explicitly generated, but the results show

that the process of constructing the audiovisual piece promoted an initial approach to it. In both the first round, linked to criticising the education system, and in the second round, to the vision of mental health, they went from an individual vision to one linked to social engagement and to questioning the messages that are generally heard in society.

From the whole process across both rounds, the audiovisual realm could be viewed as a space of interest and, therefore, of the confluence of diverse perspectives and experiences. It is a place that facilitates collective practices and the emergence of questions about what is established by a system that is, among many things, adult-centric. As Carpentier [20] mentions, this type of media is closer to young people, and offers spaces where citizenship and the right to communication are built. Therefore, given the lack of space in traditional media, it is important to find a space for young people in alternative media where their voices can be heard as communities that are capable of contributing to the transformation of dominant logics and practices.

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Agüita: Educational Commons, Arts and Well-Being

Lucía del Moral-Espín, Cristina Serván-Melero, Beatriz Gallego-Noche, and Ana María Rosendo-Chacón

Abstract This chapter focuses on a specific experience of educational commons: the Agüita creative workshops in Seville and Jerez de la Frontera, two Andalusian cities in the south of Spain. They are afterschool workshops for young people whose focus is listening to the participants and collaborative work through art. Specifically, this chapter addresses how artistic work nourishes and reinforces the tripartite structure of the commons and favours the practices of caring, cooperating and sharing, which are fundamental in developing the educational commons. To this end, four specific actions developed within the framework of the workshops are presented. In some of them, the sessions are open to specialists and artists who share their knowledge and dialogue about the processes of knowledge generation and artistic production with the young people. In others, it is the young people who go out to investigate and propose actions for intervention in the public space through art. In both cases, actions are guided by the logic of care and the promotion of well-being on different levels.

Keywords Commoning education · Artistic workshops · Care · Pedagogy of listening · Public space intervention · Children and young people

1 Introduction

Today's complex social reality is marked by different problems such as social exclusion, the hollowing out of democracy or environmental degradation [1–3]. Problems which, for Pechtelidis and Kioupkiolis [4], p. 2, have given rise to the search for and emergence of spaces that are based on collaboration and where "democratic, egalitarian, creative ideas, community through different sustainable relationships between human beings and nature" are promoted. Spaces, also educational, where formulas are experimented in order to contribute to equity and social inclusion,

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G. Cappello et al. (eds.), *Educational Commons*, UNIPA Springer Series,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51837-9_8

guided by Human Rights and motivated by the participation and empowerment of the community (human beings and the environment).

One such experimentation is presented in this chapter: research based on case studies. The cases were implemented in non-formal educational contexts, linked to after-school programmes run by social organizations, involving young people aged 10–17, educators from different organizations and researchers.

The collaborating entities (third parties) work in areas classified by the Andalusian Regional Government as Disadvantaged Areas. Save the Children in Seville, Zona-Sur CEAin in Jerez (Cadiz) and the Tekeando Association. The latter organization has been in charge of designing and implementing the workshops in collaboration with the organizations and the research team from the University of Cadiz (UCA). In these workshops, the principals of the educational commons have been experimented with, using art as the central idea that inspires teaching and learning situations based on cooperation, care and sharing. These workshops were designed around the three fundamental dimensions of the commons: the common good (educational), the community (made up of all the participants, young people and adults) and governance (horizontal and democratic).

This chapter shows how collaborative artistic work, understood as the central idea of the workshops, nourishes and reinforces the tripartite structure of the commons and favours practices of caring, sharing and cooperating on which it is based. To this end, two actions from each of the rounds have been selected and are specifically addressed. In the first-round action, the workshops are open to specialists and artists who share their knowledge and dialogue in the processes of generating knowledge and artistic productions with the young people. In the second-round actions, it is the young people who go out into the surrounding environment and, after a process of exploration, cooperatively develop an intervention in the public space.

All of this is discussed in detail in the results section of this chapter. Before that, a theoretical framework is included to frame the concept of educational commons and artistic practices, as well as a section of methodological notes. Finally, the discussion and conclusions section are presented.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Commons and Educational Commons

The rediscovery and recognition of the commons in the contemporary world has much to do with the work of political scientist Elinor Ostrom, specifically on the management of common pool resources, which she developed in great depth and breadth. She focused on the different forms of self-governance of common pool resources, arguing that the best way to manage a resource sustainably is by those involved [5].

Based on Ostrom's idea of self-governance of the commons, different reworkings of the commons have been done from different perspectives. They all tend to share that "they are forms of collective ownership and rational management of material and/or immaterial resources that have been established by different communities to ensure their survival and the prosperity of each of their members" [4], p. 3. In other words, the commons are collectively produced, managed and used. As crucial and intersecting elements of its structure, we can firstly distinguish the resources or common goods themselves, secondly, the institutions understood from the practice of the principle of governance, and thirdly, the community involved in both the production and reproduction of the specific good [6].

The practice of "common" [7], is the practice of doing and managing a community good, from a perspective of openness, equality, co-participation, plurality and sustainability. It is precisely within this conception of the commons that we can situate the educational commons, where there is a community without prior barriers, but rather those resulting from the very process of community production and management of the commons, in this case, education [8]. "Education is perceived not only as a vital resource for people's well- being and self- development but also as a key instrument of political empowerment for both children and adults" [4], p. 4. Thus, the concept of commons becomes an approach that allows control to be taken over education, in order to drive it towards social and political transformation. According to Korsgaard [9], this is because educational processes have the dual potential to continue to reproduce social systems or to revolutionize them.

For this idea of the educational commons to develop, a governance process is necessary in which community members can decide and establish boundaries and norms through collaborative processes based on communication [5, 8]. Children and young adults are understood as full members of the community, becoming visible actors in the processes of knowledge production, distribution and ownership, as well as in participation in decision-making processes. Educational commons advocate for the community to develop open access to knowledge, reinforcing intercultural and intergenerational dialogue and social inclusion. They also foster the development of social and personal skills in community members through spaces characterized by democratic relations [4].

This is possible (and shapes the educational commons) when the dynamics of educational communities are based on three interconnected practices: caring, sharing and cooperating. The boundaries between them are not always clear and they reinforce each other. Feminist approaches have revealed and vindicated the importance of care as a fundamental basis of well-being. Fisher and Tronto [10], p. 34 understand caring from a broad perspective "as *species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue and 'repair' our world so we can live in it as well as possible.* That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environments, all of which we seek to interweave, in a complex life sustaining web" [the original in italics]. This definition accounts for interdependence between people and eco-dependence in relation to the environment. Our lives unfold in vulnerable bodies and psyches that need material and affective care throughout the life cycle. Hence, vulnerability and the

need for care "is simply a human condition and must be met. To reject care is to reject life itself" [11].

Care takes on different interconnected dimensions, which can be observed within the framework of community. From "caring about" which involves becoming aware of and recognizing the needs and wishes of others (or of the community), caring for, taking care of (which involves implementing actions to respond to these needs and wishes), care receiving (which implies that these actions are welcomed, received in the form of good care by the person receiving them) and "caring with" [12]. In the framework of the educational commons, the latter dimension implies the development of solidarity, reciprocity and community care practices. In this way, care is also materialized as a relational good [13], necessary for the practice of the commons [14] and for the provision of well-being.

2.2 Education and Artistic Work

On the other hand, from a pedagogical perspective, the practice of the educational commons is linked to the experiences of Reggio Emilia schools, where listening is at the centre of action and the search for meaning [15]. This listening takes place through the worlds of play, experimentation and creativity [16]. The approach is based on respect and recognition of the potentialities of childhoods [17–20], and on the presence of artistic, critical and ethical dimensions [21]. Vecchi [20] connects physical and mental well-being with the aesthetic experience from which to express values, ideas and emotions that achieve a healthy relationship with the environment.

In these schools, art, embodied in the figure of the *atelierista*, is the possibility of questioning unquestionable academics, of contributing to the educational experience being creative, collaborative, non-routine and respectful of the languages of childhood. The motivation to include art as a "natural" part of the ways that children (and, in our case, adolescents) communicate is also a critical response to the preponderance of reading and writing as central languages in schools and the consequences of this [20]. Among the latter: the reproduction of strategies that generate inequality and exclusion [22]. Different research shows that the economic, cultural and employment opportunities of families influence the academic success of children and adolescents in general [23–25], and the development of language skills in particular [26–29]. Therefore, it is necessary to extend educational experiences to other expressive possibilities, enhancing other communicative competences that are usually silenced [30]. Likewise, focusing educational practice prominently on reading and writing limits the development of human potentialities, which can be used in other languages, such as the artistic one.

Artistic work in educational contexts also increases the possibilities of access to artistic manifestations which are very often found in facilities (museums, theatres, concerts, etc.) that are not part of the everyday lives of certain children and young people. This limits knowledge and collaboration in non-conventional cultural and artistic actions, which are, on many occasions, protest manifestations [22, 31]. The

activist role of the arts is pointed out by Desai [32] as a pedagogy of possibility that allows the visualization of possible alternatives, and can be oriented towards social reconstruction, as Escaño et al. [33] point out. Artistic approaches in the community make it possible to broaden the possibilities for intervening in the public space, situating artistic work as a formula for structuring the territory in order to establish relationships from which to address issues of social interest [34]. There are specific working groups connected to collectives of socially committed education professionals, such as Enter-Arte,[1] which address research and innovation processes around the possibilities of arts education as spaces for expressions, emotion, internalization, creation and public exhibition, establishing creative relationships between the educational community and the social and cultural environments in which they are interwoven [35]. In this sense, the experiences that integrate urban art, public space, education [36, 37] and contextual art practices [38] are also significant, relevant in that art is the bridge to establish dialogues between disciplines, knowledge and wisdom.

3 Methodological Notes

This research adopts a case study approach, specifically developing what Stake [39] calls a collective case study. That is, studying several cases to make a collective interpretation of the issue or question posed [39, 40], thus facilitating the identification of patterns for a better understanding of the phenomenon under study. The case study approach allows us to obtain information about the educational phenomenon and, more specifically, about how and in what contexts it develops. Moreover, considering that in an educational process, social relationships are permeated with power inequalities [41], this perspective is useful for addressing the processes and dynamics of change [40].

The research methodology corresponds to a feminist critical ethnography that not only questions social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender structure, but also seeks the keys to action [42]. In addition, work is carried out from this perspective centred on childhood. Critical ethnography makes it possible to look more deeply at the participation of girls, boys and young adolescents in educational processes. This requires a process of community self-reflection to address three of the primary resistances of childhood studies, such as recognizing the expert knowledge of young people, establishing mechanisms for the disarticulation of generational hierarchies and contributing to the opening of structures in academia [43]. "Childhood" is not a universal and homogeneous experience [22, 44], but, on the contrary, it is an experience constructed through particular dynamics based on gender, race, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, class and geography.

[1] See more information on http://accioneducativa-mrp.org/enterarte/.

The complexity of the object of the study has led to the use of different strategies and instruments to situate the production of data in an attempt to address different voices and scenarios.

A fundamental strategy has been the field diary, which is both ethnographic and collaborative in nature. The records made in the field diary contain all of the sessions carried out in each case study. In total, 57 workshop sessions have been recorded, 25 of which took place in the first round and 32 in the second round. Two of these sessions were joint activities between the two case studies promoting interaction between the two groups of young people. The narrative has been constructed around three open dimensions: descriptive, interpretative and reflective. The main voices of the three researchers present in the sessions and activities have been incorporated into this tool, as well as sporadic contributions to the record from the Tekeando educators, generating a balance between subjectivity and triangulation of the collective memory.

The pedagogical and research strategy also included pedagogical documentation. This was carried out jointly by the researchers, the educators linked to the case study groups and the young participants. Based on Gallego-Noche and Vázque Recio [22] we understand that it is not possible to document individually, it is essential to dialogue about the information selected and reconstructed. In our case, it is the material produced during the sessions through photographs, videos, audios and artefacts (compositions of objects, ceramic pieces, posters, drawings etc.). Observation, documentation and interpretation are integrated into a single process of metacognition and meta-reflection, allowing knowledge to be built. "It is accountability, but this time understood as an ethical commitment to the community, as a democratic and transparent demand of a public service, such as the school" [22], p. 212.

Part of this pedagogical documentation is collected in the narrative blog of the workshops, produced by Tekeando Association. In this blog, the educators narrate the creative artistic process in their own voices in the form of a weblog (https://elmanual.tekeando.net/2022/02/17/capitulo-ii-aguita/ in the first round, https://elmanual.tekeando.net/2022/10/17/capitulo-iii-ysilavidafueraunafiesta/ in the second round). Each activity is narrated with text supported by audio-visual materials that collect and emphasize both the contents and the teaching–learning process.

A total of 18 regular meetings have been held with the participating entities. These meetings provide spaces for communicating needs, expectations and perceptions of the process, which are fundamental for reflection, analysis and the building of knowledge. There are written records and/or collective products resulting from group activities in every single one of these meetings.

Interviews have also been used as a data production strategy in the case studies. On the one hand, interviews were conducted with peers (young people) and, on the other hand, with educators. The purpose of the peer interviews was to find out the young people's perception of the educational commons based on their experience in the sessions. The interview script was based on a proposal from the research team, which was then worked on, in collaboration with the young people, in sessions prior to the interviews. These were carried out in the joint sessions for both case studies, with the young people from one group conducting the interviews with the young people from the other group, rotating the roles (interviewer/interviewee) later.

Twenty-three peer interviews were conducted, in total. As for the interviews with the educators, 7 interviews were conducted with the educators/social workers and atelieristas who participated in the sessions and workshops.

During the information production process [45], the analysis was carried out based on the classic qualitative methodology that proposes a systematic coding and categorization (in continuum) from the beginning of information collection for its organization, hierarchization, systematization, saturation and reduction for analysis [46, 47]. The elaboration and organization of the dimensions of analysis follow the tripartite structure of the theoretical definition of the educational commons (1) the community, (2) the educational commons and (3) governance.

Community (1) is based on the different relationships between the different members of the groups (young people and adults) and shapes a specific experience. In this dimension, categories related to diversities, the intersectional perspective of inequalities and educational inclusion strategies are developed. The educational common good (2), as a dimension, refers to the co-creation actions and the perception of the process experienced in the sessions and workshops by young people and adults. Categories related to play, creativity, participation and freedom, among others, emerge from here. And governance (3), referring to practices related to the democratic management of the educational asset, participation in the development of activities and conflict management. From these dimensions, we derive categories related to caring, sharing and cooperating as fundamental relational qualities in the educational commons.

As for the unavoidable subjectivity of the researcher, this is dealt with, on the one hand, through the foundation and systematization of the creation of dimensions and categories; and, on the other hand, through the multidisciplinarity that the researchers contribute, favouring a critical questioning of the results. Likewise, inter-subjectivity and truthfulness are adopted as methodological principals [45]. Carrying out the two case studies in the same period of time and in two rounds has also made it possible to compare the depth of the elements of differentiation and similarity.

Ethical considerations in the research have incorporated mechanisms to preserve privacy, anonymity and the right of adults and young people to refuse participation.

In order to maintain this anonymity, but at the same time give a more complex, rich and aesthetic meaning to the information produced, the names of the young people were coded using the nomenclature of elements from the periodic table as a narrative resource and as a symbolic formula to represent the diversity of each group. This resource highlights the particular identity of each participant in the research, the reactive potential of the infinite relational possibilities and the humanist will of the researchers to seek alternatives to conventional numerical coding.

On the other hand, the research team established mechanisms to obtain informed and conscious consent from parents/guardians and the young people to participate in the research. Throughout the workshop process, the team tries to clarify to the young people both the meaning and the objective of the research and the voluntary and reversible nature of participation at any time. That is, obtaining consent does not exclude the possibility of modification over the course of the research [48].

Reflecting critically on the methodology adopted in the research is a hallmark of methodological validation that seeks to enhance self-awareness and minimize potential social harm [49] arising from the power asymmetry of intergenerational privilege. This approach becomes highly relevant during the facilitators' group discussions and meetings that have challenged the role of adults in each and every phase of the research, from the initial design to the reformulation and return to the group of participants. The data analysis is based on diverse voices and scenarios that try to reduce the biases that can be expected either from the privileged position of researchers and educators or from the identities closer to the hegemonic profiles, questioning the discourse from the perspective of feminist research.

4 The Agüita Smooth Case Studies

Between March 2022 and March 2023, two case studies linked to non-formal education programmes were implemented with the support of social organizations in Areas in Need of Social Transformation (ZNTS in Spanish), involving young people aged 10–17. The workshops, held in Seville under the auspices of Save the Children and in Jerez with CEAin, were run by Tekeando's educators/atelieristas. At the centre of the activity of Tekeando is the design and accompaniment of collaborative artistic processes and practices based on critical pedagogies, action art and technology as a tool for communication, organization and action, all from a perspective of eco-social transformation.

The case studies were organized in two rounds of three months each, simultaneously with both groups. The development and monitoring of the cases in two rounds allowed for reviewing the design, implementation and result of the workshops between rounds, enabling their adjustment and reformulation. The first round ran from March to June 2022, and the second from October 2022 to March 2023. Both were implemented in weekly sessions, 90-min sessions during the first round, and 120-min sessions during the second round.

The cases present subtle differences and similarities that make it possible to detect singular elements, favouring comparison and a deeper examination of the obtained results, typical of the collective case study approach. In the case of Seville, the Agüita Smooth workshops were carried out within the framework of a school reinforcement programme that Save the Children organizes during the school year (from October to June and from Monday to Thursday afternoons) onsite at a primary school. Specifically, during the time the study was carried out, the sessions were a break in the usual dynamics of Save the Children's programme, which was interrupted on Mondays to host the workshops, and then continued the rest of the week with its usual program. In contrast, in the case of Jerez, the group was specifically constituted to participate in Agüita Smooth workshops, which were held weekly, on Wednesdays, during the indicated period at a Community Centre. This activity was not connected to other programmes and, therefore the group's experience is framed within the workshop programme as a priority.

In terms of similarities, the educators/atelieristas from Association Tekeando worked in both case studies, with both groups and in both rounds. They were in charge of designing, applying, dynamizing and reformulating the proposed activities based on the theory of the educational commons, with the collaboration of the UCA research team. Active listening returned proposals and reactions from the young participants and the educators constantly adjusted the sessions according to these reactions and proposals. The Tekeando educators/atelieristas thus take on the role of promoters, dynamizers and, to a certain extent, also researchers of the actions that they put into practice in each session. The research team from the UCA joins the sessions with an increasingly participative observational role in the dynamization. Similarly, the workers/educators from the educational programmes of the other third parties (mainly in the case of Seville) are progressively acquiring a more participative and committed role in the design, dynamization and philosophy based on the commons, that govern the workshops.

Among the young participants, we find that both groups are made up of young people with different profiles: different ages, nationalities, cultures, genders, physical and cognitive abilities or command of the Spanish language. In terms of nationality, about half of the young participants come from non-EU countries such as Morocco, Algeria, Mali, Honduras, Argentina, Brazil and Venezuela. The number of participants in each workshop session has fluctuated between six and fifteen young people. This requires an exercise of continuous adaptation and readjustment to the number and characteristics of the young participants in each session, reaffirming the importance of listening and building the content on an ongoing basis. In addition, on occasions, there was also a fluctuation in the participation of the adults due to staff turnover with third parties or absences due to the need to attend to other work and/or personal responsibilities. There is confirmation about how the precarious situation of social and cultural workers (staff turnover, employability conditional on projects, low salaries, double shifts, feminization of the sector and therefore greater impact of care tasks in person etc.) does not favour the development of educational commons and is decisive for the sustainability of this type of projects and initiatives. On these occasions, the team responds from a logic of trust, support and what Tronto [12] calls *caring with*, respecting the adult who cannot attend the session and sustaining the activity.

5 Communing Education Through Arts:

5.1 From Outside in and from Inside Out

In both rounds, the actions have been grouped into thematic chapters: "Agüita" during the first round, and "What if life were a party?" on the second one. The workshops propose a community process of teaching and learning in a non-routine way, enhancing the artistic dimension in the productions of young people through a

connection with the figure of the atelierista proposed by Malaguzzi [19]. Tekeando enhances this through an extensive and diverse battery of differently-themed actions on which to continually re-elaborate the possibilities of each session. Educational action is developed through creative provocations [20], which are reflected in the materials created by young people.

In the first round, artistic creation starts by approaching the theme of water ("agua" in Spanish) as a broad concept from which to address issues based on community memory, the right to water access or the environmental protection. The group work developed around clay pots, drawings and designs for creating a board game about water (including the design of game cards and tokens) and audio-visual clips using the stop-motion technique. In the second round, the creations connect to concepts and situations built around the concept of community and individual well-being. They are made by young people as collaborative artistic creations based on the composition of objects, murals or stories told through cartoons or comics, poster designs and brochures for public activities or small gifts designed to "feel better every day".

At all times, observation and deliberate listening become key points to pay attention to the reactions of the young people and those who accompany them. Hence, the process of pedagogical documentation is a fundamental element, in which the collaborative contribution is emphasized. This type of methodology allows for the analysis of written and visual materials that show expressive moments that attest to the community construction of ideas [50].

The proposals based on pedagogical documentation generate a positive reaction in the young people, encouraging their interest and consequently their collaboration in the task being undertaken, whether by taking photographs, activating and directing the recorder or even writing on the continuous paper boards where the group's ideas are recorded. Furthermore, this collaborative activation in the learning process dilutes the conventional roles established between the facilitators and the students. The adult team accompanies the young people in the development of the sessions and in the learning processes based on the moments experienced and subsequently reflected on by researchers and educators. The activities use play deliberately, but also spontaneously. It is the young people who find formulas within the proposals to enhance the fun, placing themselves as protagonists of their own events by deciding the tone in which they take place. This creates a scenario in which the degree of freedom, the equity within the group and the role of young people increases.

Young people as free subjects with the capacity to decide, had the possibility of freely rejecting the proposed activities, allowing them to decide how and when to participate. Although they are comfortable and relaxed with the idea of voting to carry out group decisions, this is not perceived in the same way when situations are controversial and require alternatives to be formulated. In these cases, after the initial refusal of the activity, a certain incredulity emerges with respect to the exercise of their freedom of decision. This generated some difficulty in the elaboration of alternatives, which usually leads to a return to the initial proposal, this time, with the realization that it is not an imposed action, but one that is offered to them as an option.

When asked, young people perceive that they can participate in a democratic model, even when participation is not high in the self-governance process. This can be seen in this excerpt from the peer-to-peer interview between Hydrogen and Lead:

- *Hydrogen: What is democracy?*
- *Lead: For example, um… for him to say: "This is what we are going to do! [tone of imposition]". That's not democratic, democratic would be for him to say: "We're going to do this tomorrow, is that OK with you?" Yes, everybody.*
- *Hydrogen: Ah, right, taking the opinions of others.*
- *Lead: Right, that's right, taking the opinions.*
- *Hydrogen: Right, right.*
- *Lead: Right. So, no, there's never been someone who rules like that, it's been all about… it depends on everybody.*

Within this model of free participation, we find that young people show some resistance to abandoning traditional school models and participating in creative initiatives. In these situations, they are accompanied by the educators using the pedagogy of listening. They then collect the young people's responses and integrate them into the design through permanent reformulation. This listening leads to an in-situ review of each session as well as the thematic direction of the design of the workshops in each round.

5.2 Two rounds: water and party for well-being

Tekeando designed the first round of workshops around water which connects with the traditional commons. "It is a collective approach, from arts and crafts, to a sustainable culture of water. Water means life and interaction between different species and with their/our environment" (Tekeando Blog). To this end, they proposed exploring learning concepts related to its benefits, resource protection and the right of water access, among other issues. Within this chapter, we focus on the analysis of the action "Like a fish in water: interviews and afternoon snacks". The action consisted of designing a script and interviewing experts on water issues (academics, activists, environmental journalists, water company managers.) During each interview, the group shared cakes or fruit as an afternoon snack. It was the young people who decided how the food would be handed out and distributed in an atmosphere of welcoming and exchange. This not only refered to the snack, but also to the tasks of taking pictures, recording audio or asking questions, which makes it possible for the knowledge to be distributed with the same simplicity as the snack is distributed. This action's sessions were developed with a high level of participation and interest in the tasks on the part of the young people, who showed an enthusiasm that is in tune with the Reggio Emilia proposal, for which motivation plays a fundamental role in the construction of knowledge.

This action was connected to the proposal called "Animated Water", developed in two subsequent sessions in which short fragments were selected from the interviews

conducted. These fragments serve as support and inspiration for the young people to make their video creations, collaborating in small groups, using the stop-motion technique. This creation process is carried out under the guidance of film director and audio-visual artist, Rocío Huertas. The resulting videos addressed different dimensions of water, questioning water ownership and management, reflecting on concerns about pollution and climate crisis, and addressing issues related to democratic memory and the power and exploitation of labour in intensive crops with high water consumption. In short, these two actions "Like a Fish in Water" and "Animated Water" reinforce young people's understanding of the vital importance of water and the complexity of water resource management. In addition, the young people themselves create materials that, based on an awareness of social and environmental problems, promote a broad conception of care and a multidimensional notion of well-being.

The second round of sessions revolves around the theme of the well-being of young people and the community, posing the question "What if life were a party?" as the point of departure for exploring the territory and community action to "feel a little better every day". This is an expression used by Tekeando in the workshops' design and reflects the act of listening to the needs of young people during the first round, re-situating the production of knowledge on issues with a greater degree of connection with the participants. The collaborative artistic methodologies used were based on the resignification of public spaces, inserted in the territory where the workshops took place. Elements of the territory are claimed as their own in order to question them and to address the limits to participation and/or individual and collective enjoyment. In general, young people took active roles in carrying out the necessary tasks for developing a neighbourhood/community event. They enjoy the strategies based on the game in the territory from a critical and rebellious point of view. All these elements coalesce in the actions called Poo Party (*Caca fiesta*) in Jerez and Complaint Hill (*Montaña de las quejas*) in Seville. Through these activities, the public space is taken back to create scenarios where the relational priorities of young people can be developed within the framework of a community activity.

Complaint Hill is an activity developed in Seville within the neighbourhood where the workshops are developed and were Save the Children Resource Centre for Children and Adolescents is located. Specifically, the action takes place in an elevated area, a small hill, that does not meet conditions for use as part of the community space. It is full of weeds, neglected and abandoned, and there is a build-up of waste which rules it out for play. Thus, it is presented as a place to be conquered by the young people who, during the exploratory visit to the neighbourhood, were reprimanded for climbing it in order to shout their grievances into the air. This activity aims to make the needs and desires of young people visible in the public space by making posters, containing messages of complaints or desires. These were then placed on top as a form of community vindication and rebellion against the limitations on the use and adequacy of public space. This intervention was used as an tool to demand the improvement of environmental care conditions for public use. In this case, the involvement of the Save the Children organization made the participation of other after-school educational and leisure groups possible. The young people from the case

study, acting as facilitators and transmitters of the action, accompanied these young children, who, likewise, adopted the initiative as their own.

The Poo Party was held in Jerez. The activity was developed in a public park near the site of the Community Centre where the case study workshops and other activities are developed. This activity arose from a previous activity implemented by Tekeando in which the group took a walk through a neighbourhood. The participants were accompanied by violin music (played lived) and said what they could see out loud, occupying the space with a disruptive approach. During the walk, the young people felt uncomfortable about the high concentration of dirt in the neighbourhood, highlighting the dog excrement. This identification of conditions contrary to welfare in public space is picked up by Tekeando, which offers a preliminary idea of the Poo Party. It comes together with the input of the young people in the group. It is proposed as an action where the people from the community could participate and the group would be the promoter, host and, at the same time, participant in the game proposed by the initiative. The Poo Party uses a game as a method, but also as a symbol of the appropriation of space, pointing out the dog excrement on the ground with flares to "illuminate" the dirt. Distributed in small groups, those who managed to place all their flares first won the game and as a prize they got a dog excrement bag dispenser. Just before leaving the park, all the participants put posters with a flare on the trees explaining the game, so that the proposal would go beyond the limits of the activity and other people would understand, through provocation, the importance of taking care of the space.

The actions analysed reflect how care is a fundamental part of the two case studies. Care for the environment, care for the community, care for others and care for oneself are evident through the artistic activities proposed in the sessions. A clear example of this is given in the action (second round) of making objects that can make another person feel good. The materials were developed on the basis of one's own experience and as a tool for coexistence. The purpose was to put them in a box and share them as gifts that could improve the well-being of the other group. The following excerpt from the Tekeando blog describes the process of creating one of these objects:

> One of the girls feels anxious during the session. She asks for something to touch with her hands. [the Tekeando Educator] gives her a ball of yarn. When she feels more relaxed, she is asked if she would like to turn it into an object for the box [51] (Tekeando blog "8. To share a dance, a song, a ball of yarn?").

In the group, there are several levels of care depending on the relationships created. On the one hand, there is the care given to the young people by the educators, the association collaborators and the UCA researchers, which is a function of their role as companions. On the other hand, there is the care between young people which can be observed when they become aware of the needs of another companion (care about), take responsibility and implement actions to respond to these needs (care for, take care of) and thus help another in some activity or in their inclusion in the group, as we can see below:

> When I ask Iodine to read it, she doesn't seem to understand what is written. Carbon tries to explain to her what she has to read in sign language, making the letter signs with her hands.

However, she does not seem to understand. Lead tries to explain by taking off their mask and gesturing for her to read (Field Diary. 18/04/2022).

Likewise, although in a more subtle and sporadic way, the care practices of the young people towards the educators and researchers can be observed. The care relationships of some young people towards younger children are much clearer, reproducing the formulas of non-authoritarian and open facilitation of the workshops. In the Complaint Hill activity, the young people in the group are the ones who accompany the younger children from Save the Children who join the activity. Care is also evident through the caring responsibilities of the young people, mostly girls, who must look after their younger siblings. This means that they sometimes bring their siblings to the sessions or are unable to attend in order to stay at home with them.

6 Discussion and Conclusions. Staying with the Trouble

A few videos denouncing water problems, a box with feel-good objects, a poo party, or a complaint hill, is it possible that someone might ask where the art is here? To this, Tekeando's answer resounds: "Where is the art here? What a boring question" (Tekeando Blog 02/06/2022).

In this chapter, we have presented the multiple case study of the Agüita workshops, as an experience (always imperfect and in process) of educational commons. To speak of educational commons is to speak of relations and practices of creation and recognition of knowledge and culture by and for the community with the aim of activating eco-social justice [52]. Therefore, the incorporation of the philosophy of the commons into education (and the arts) affects not only teaching, learning and creative processes, but also the very building of knowledge and of artistic production and their relevance to the community.

To study all this, to approach such a complex object of study requires a methodological strategy that combines different tools for the production of information and incorporates the diverse voices present in the workshops into the analysis. In our case, this is approached from an ecofeminist sensibility and commitment that connects us with Haraways's [53] call to "staying with the trouble" (continue working around the problem) as the best possible response to these urgent times in which we need to be truly present and intertwined in a multitude of unfinished configurations.

This strategy has allowed us to observe how, through listening, and the artistic doing, the Agüita workshops have promoted a careful, collective approach to two fundamental elements that guarantee well-being: water and being at ease (with ourselves, in our immediate environment). The actions developed have sought to facilitate the construction of relevant knowledge for the community (educational asset), to strengthen intercultural and intergenerational dialogue and inclusion (community), to generate spaces characterized by the search for horizontality and democratic relations (governance), and to promote the development of a culture of tolerance (community).

The proposals studied incorporate these aspirations and these practices without claiming to reach idealized results, assuming that it is not possible (nor fair to the young participants) to expect an immediate construction of values that are contrary to the dominant socio-political discourse. In our research, we have avoided considering that things only really matter if they work. On the contrary, along the way, we learn that our educational commons are always a polyhedral “in process”, characteristic of artistic practices in context [38], as well as a complex process: “*The Agüita process, rich and diverse, is also exhausting and frustrating. Young people who have not been chosen to be accompanied by Tekeando, others who are delighted to be. Many adult voices… with a sincere desire to join in*” ([54], *Bonus Track 1*).

The research reflects that the methodological proposal based on the philosophy of the educational commons, following the same initial design in both case studies, provides different results in each educational scenario. This visualizes the relevance of the singularity of the three pillars for the construction of the educational commons, but also the effects of applying the pedagogy of listening, pedagogical documentation and project work.

The introduction of artistic elements in educational spaces has undoubtedly had an ability to unsettle; has been a provocateur of improbable points of view and has allowed the connection with other places and human beings, in addition to the exclusively intellectual. All this makes it a powerful tool for creative collaboration in community (in line with the research results by Chamizo-Nieto et al. [37]) and the implementation of the educational commons.

The regular meetings with third parties and, in particular, the reflections of the Tekeando team in their blog, reflect how the construction of these educational commons are produced through dialogue (not without tensions) between disciplines and ways of understanding the creative. This leads to a questioning of who, when and how one is read as an artist and when and how one considers oneself an artist. In relation to these questions, the very precariousness of employment (and the precariousness of life) that characterizes the creative sector and also the social sector has an impact on the development of the case studies themselves. Becoming aware of the problem and denouncing it, establishing networks of support and care is part of the commitment to feminist research. As Haraway shows us, it is not possible to continue without relying on each other in ongoing practices. We know that the path is not easy, but we are committed to the more modest possibilities of partial recovery, to entangle ourselves and build relationships through which becoming (with and in) community and *staying with the trouble.*

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Educational Commons in Art Museums

Niki Nikonanou, Panagiotis A. Kanellopoulos, Elena Viseri, and Elina Moraitopoulou

Abstract This chapter reports on four case studies that took place at four museums of the Metropolitan Organisation of Museums of Visual Arts (MOMus) in Thessaloniki, Greece, the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Experimental Center for the Arts, the Museum of Photography and the Museum of Modern Art-Costakis Collection. Different groups of young people participated in case studies that sought to bring together educational commons and collaborative artistic experimentation, leading to the co-creation of artistic projects. The chapter focuses on how commoning processes might contribute to the transformation of the museum towards an open-source institution through the cultivation of commoning practices in museum education. We also highlight the value of delving into forms of creative artistic engagement that induce unlearning traditional roles and questioning hierarchical power distribution.

Keywords Educational commons · Art education · Museum education · Open-source museum · Participation

1 Introduction

The practice and experience of art has always been tormented by the co-existence of irreconcilable trajectories of thought and patterns of action. Engagement with the arts has often been hailed as a means for deep personal fulfillment, for connecting with fundamental aspects of what it means to be human; it has been hailed as a means for cultivating imagination and for the freedom of spirit that inheres in the playfulness

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G. Cappello et al. (eds.), *Educational Commons*, UNIPA Springer Series,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51837-9_9

of aesthetic engagement. This attitude lies at the core of the Schillerian heritage that sees aesthetic activity as "the highest form of play, being primarily the free exercise of the imaginative and intellectual faculties" ([11], p. 67), enabling us to experience "a freedom to develop our imaginative and cognitive capacities, to gain knowledge of ourselves and others, and to imagine new ways of life" ([10], p. 30). This, however, has always co-existed with the erection of boundaries and hierarchies at every corner of the field of art practice, leading to the domination of sharp polarities that, in turn, have induced exclusions and silencing: 'high' versus 'low' arts, 'lay' audience members versus dilettante, (mostly male) artistic geniuses versus art workers, art creators (again, mostly male, of course) versus (passive) receivers [17, 31].

Education in the arts has always lived its life in the midst of this ambivalent situation, developing different educational visions, dispositions and practices as a response to the different answers to the question: "what is art education for?": Educating informed members of the public? Identifying 'future talents'? Destabilizing hierarchies via egalitarian approaches that capitalize on the creative potential of all? Contributing to social cohesion and discipline? Enabling the cultivation of self and social-awareness and critique? It is important to remember that these questions have been largely answered via colonialist educational epistemologies that "define how knowledge is produced and what forms of knowledge are considered legitimate" ([4], p. 410). In principle, art education has been based on the premise that among the most important contributions of the arts in the lives of people has been the cultivation of their imagination. Crucially, "the role of imagination is not to resolve, not to point the way, not to improve. It is to awaken, to disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard, and unexpected" ([9], p. 28). Yet, it may be argued that people's right to cultural and artistic engagement has been often seriously compromised by authoritarian and/or elitist approaches to art and music education as well as to cultural management policies.

It is all too well known that, historically, the entanglements between museums and colonialism are strong and complex [22]. But it is also important to note that there have been important and sustained efforts to decolonise the museum, to rethink and reshape its role and its relations with visitors/audience—prominent in that respect are notions such as that of "collaborative processual museology" ([35], p. 14), as is the increasing emphasis on museum activism [12, 26, 27, 34]. Kaitavuori poignantly states that "the museum is a configuration of interests. It is at the same time a heritage institution—collecting and safeguarding art and culture—and a public cultural institution, inviting the public to visit its premises and to enjoy its possessions" ([13], p. x). In its function as a public cultural institution the museum is increasingly seen as a place that offers leisure time activities and learning opportunities, a place of meeting, of getting together to relax, but also to discuss and debate. This opening has been a response to calls for "democratising culture" [24] and for advancing "cultural democracy" [42] through participatory and inclusive strategies. At the same time, the museum "increasingly, [...] is also a business" ([13], p. x) that operates on the basis of neoliberal dictums that call for marketisation of every aspect of its function.

Museum education is trying to find its way in this complex environment, somewhere between the pressure to produce measurable outcomes and the imperative of

the transformative power of education. Mörsch [28] has proposed a useful conceptual map that may help one situate the different possible functions of museum-based educational work. Mörsch suggests that there exist four different discourses of gallery education: affirmative discourse "ascribes to gallery education the function of effective outward communication of the museum's mission" ([28], p. 9). Reproductive discourse prioritizes educational initiatives that aim to educate the public, to reach out to members of the public that could become its future audience. Deconstructive discourse delineates a vision of educational work at museums as a means for critique: here the purpose "is to critically examine, together with the public, the museum and the art, as well as educational and canonizing processes that take place within this context" (ibid., p. 10). Lastly, transformative discourse emphasizes that "gallery education takes up the task of expanding the exhibiting institution and to politically constitute it as an agent of societal change" (ibid., p. 10). The first two, most dominant in museum-education practice, focus on knowledge transmission and function as tools for supporting the authority of the museum, whereas the latter two are informed by the traditions of institutional critique and critical museology and promote an approach to education as a means for problematization and change.

These four discourses delineate different approaches to the nature of audience participation. Participation in museums includes practices related to the entire spectrum of a museum's operations: collection, exhibition, and communication. The "participatory turn" in the museum world reflects the challenge that museums are facing to strengthen their relationship with different communities in order to fulfill their social role and move towards democratization. Participatory practices attempt to respond to the increasing demand of audiences for a "a social museum experience in which they can relax, chat, interact, explore and, if they so desire, participate, contribute or even collaborate" ([3], p. 307). However, it should also be noted that participatory practices may not necessarily lead to the transformation of hegemonic power relations and knowledge production, as they are often used as an alibi that masks the surrender of the museum to market-oriented logics. As Matarasso has noted, "the growing acceptance of participatory art in centers of power risks making it another arm of institutional control, its purposes, goals and methods dictated from outside rather than negotiated between the people concerned" ([24], p. 25).

Klindt [19] proposes three distinct contexts in which the notion of participation can be situated: a *cultural-educational* context, a *media-based* context and a *market-oriented* context. In the cultural-educational context, participation emerges as "central to democratic theories, discourses and debates on inclusion of citizens in decision making processes" ([19], pp. 37–38) and may contribute to cultural democracy and/or democratizing culture, strengthening the museum's social role. The focus on media-based contexts goes far beyond access and interaction issues, encompassing interpreting, evaluating, sharing and creating content. Finally, using participatory practices only for increasing the numbers of visitors and financial profit amounts to a practice of enhanced commodification and market orientation that conceives participation as the "key to the experience economy" ([19], p. 44). This reflects the anxious need of museums to reach new audiences and respond to the museums' challenges

for public accountability and financial survival. Very often museum education initiatives are required to adhere to marketing-derived patterns that lead to a consumerist approach to education that ultimately reproduces asymmetrical power relations with the participating communities.

At the same time one can detect an increasing awareness on the part of museum educators of their power as educational mediators that could resist the above described trappings. Encouragement of visitors' empowerment which should characterize participatory practices depend on the relationships between mediators and the group members and presupposes a less intervening role for mediators, providing an open space for visitors' decisions and contributions. Cultural mediators can question, discuss or even reverse existing hierarchies and power relations between the institution and the communities taking part. They should renounce their role as knowledge transmitter and conceive of the mediation of art "beyond the social division between the production and reproduction of knowledge" ([40], p. 3). Participatory practices in museum education could have a transformative role as far as museums are willing to question their privileges, to share their authority and to give participants the responsibility of defining the content, process, end product of their collective work, setting themselves the rules of the game [38]. Museums have to trust people as content producers, to invite them to actively participate in museum processes [25], and to recognize community members as "specialists of everyday life" moving away from their authority to a shared power and knowledge production. Participatory projects should then aim at making visitors' voice heard, enabling community groups to contribute to the design and co-creation of exhibitions [6, 21, 30, 32] or to other forms of museum content (interpretative material such as labels, audio guides etc.). This means "not simply listening to other forms of knowledge but also allowing and enabling the existing order of knowledge to be fundamentally questioned, seized and changed" ([39], p. 3).

Theorists such as Mörsch [29] and Sternfeld [39] have emphasized the need for a critical and self-reflexive approach to gallery education, and to museum education in general. This approach problematises the rhetoric of openness and inclusion that fails to grapple with the complexities of power inequalities between museums and members of the community (that include students and young children). To that end, it calls for resisting to accept as given that policies of inclusion necessarily induce equality, shared power, and democracy. Often, the intention to reach out to 'disadvantaged' community members betrays a patternalist stance: "in the tradition of critical and self-reflexive gallery education, patternalist attitudes to so-called 'disadvantaged' and 'hard-to-reach' groups [...] are questioned both for their paternalism and for their disciplinary dimension" ([29], p. 15). Furthermore the widespread calls for participatory approaches to art creation and creative education workshops, often obscures "the fine line between actively co-creating a project on the one hand and instrumentalising the participants as 'material for art projects' on the other" ([29], p. 16).

In the context of the radical democratic Museum, Nora Sternfeld suggests the idea of museums and their collections as commons, introducing the notion of an "open-source-museum, that would be to the benefit of all" ([41], p. 83). To regard

museums as commons goes far beyond notions of the museum as an institution that hosts and treasures important facts of our common heritage. It means that museums and their collections are subjected to commoning practices that provide "tangible alternatives" ([8], p. 84) both to top down approaches to heritage representation and to the neoliberal transformation of museums into profitable recreational institutions. The emerging paradigm of the commons and commoning "consists then in the practice of making and managing a collective good in a manner of openness, equality, co-activity, plurality and sustainability" ([18], p. 122).

In this chapter we briefly report on four inter-artistic museum education projects that were developed as part of 'SMOOTH-Educational Commons and Active Social Inclusion' research program. These case studies were implemented at four museums in Thessaloniki, Greece, that form part of MOMus (Metropolitan Organisation of Museums of Visual Arts of Thessaloniki[1]): the Experimental Centre for the Arts, the Museum of Modern Art-Costakis Collection, the Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Museum of Photography. In each of these case studies we took up the challenge to inquire into how creative museum education programs based on the philosophy of commons could contribute to the transformative potential of museums and museum education. The educational commons offer new possibilities in decision-making processes, knowledge production, co-management of the museum resources (premises and exhibits), co-creating content and introducing a new paradigm for inclusive participatory projects.

A core feature of the design of the case studies presented in this chapter was the creation of a 'safe space' that would allow for uninhibited and sustained experimenting of all participants with collective art-making practices. In these workshops, able and disabled people, and young people that come from hard-to-reach parts of the community were invited to take part in a series of creative art making workshops. We asked: what would it mean for those people and the workshop leaders/museum educators to delve into commoning procedures with the aim to improvise their ways into art/music/photography/dance on the basis of equality understood as an axiom and not an end point [33]. Central in the process has been the need to unlearn habitual patterns of teaching and learning as well as "unlearning one's privileges" ([36], p. 30). Embracing the unexpected, de-centering or refusing control, peer governance and distribution of power among all participants have been challenges that had a deep impact on both educators and participants, despite the difficulties faced.

[1] https://www.momus.gr/en.

2 Museum Education Workshops and Educational Commons: An Outline of the MOMus Case Studies

2.1 Hear, We Go Again—Museum of Contemporary Art

The case study (CS) 'Hear, we go again' was fueled by the curiosity to initiate a creative dialogue between a group of deaf and hard-hearing youth and works of contemporary art. The CS was run by the MOMus Museum of Contemporary Art in Thessaloniki, in collaboration with the Special High School of Deaf and Hard Hearing pupils of Thessaloniki. The CS design was led by two educators taking part in the program, adapted and implemented in collaboration with two external artists/educators working in the program, a choreographer and a visual artist, and assisted by the program's sign-language interpreter who played a key-role in all stages of the implementation. The participants in the study were pupils 13–20 years old—number of participants: 18 at the beginning and 10 by the end of the study. The participants' language profiles varied greatly: there was a young participant who had sign language as their mother tongue, another one who had verbal language as their mother tongue, whilst the language profiles of most students were situated somewhere between those two. The CS was implemented during 12 one-and-a-half to three-hour-long meetings between March and October 2022; five meetings were held in the museum while the rest took place at the school.

The CS developed through a series of experimentations with dancing and drawing, which were gradually used to explore the museum collections and in particular the works which the participants found most interesting. The first three sessions, which took place in the school premises, were primarily dedicated to the building and strengthening of relationships between the educators and the youth group, as well as and the youth's familiarization with dance and visual arts as mediums for personal and collective expression. During the first meeting, the youth identified 'emotions/feelings' as a key theme to be explored further throughout the sessions; their desire was reflected in the content of the first exploratory sessions, however, the attempts to introduce collective decision processes in these first meetings were rather unsuccessful. The fourth meeting of this CS was the first one to take place in the premises of the Museum of Contemporary Art, where the participants were introduced to the museum spaces and explored freely the different art collections with the aim to choose the artwork that impressed them most and discuss this back with their group in an open discussion round. Central in this exploration were the museum's permanent collections, and in particular the Iolas, Xidis, and Apergis collections, as well as some of its temporary exhibitions. In the fifth and sixth meetings, the educators returned to the school and introduced a mind-map to capture and discuss the ideas generated by the youth group at the aftermath of the exhibition visit; an additional 'activity' was introduced by the visual artist/educator whereby the youth were invited to design their own version of one of the museum's exhibits, *Pavlo's Wings* (1970). For the seventh meeting, the youth got back to the museum where they experimented with the use of body movements as a means to explore the museum artwork, and played

an adaptation of hide and seek, which derived from their mind map ideas, whereby they were encouraged by the educators to 'hide *in* the artworks and exhibits'. In the 8th meeting, the educators created a video-timeline of all preceding visits, using it as a reference point moving forward and facilitating collective decision-making; the timeline triggered interesting conversations among the participants. However, the educators' attempt to pilot a 'youth-council' form of decision making eventually led to a dead-end as the educators had difficulty sharing ownership of the process with the youth. However, one of the ideas shared by a young person during this meeting served as the basis for the 'final museum project', namely a hidden treasure game inside the museum which could be made available and played by future visitors as well. This idea was partially realized, with a small group of young people co-designing the hidden treasure clues with one of their school teachers; although the originally planned public event did not take place, the game idea was documented in the form of videos where some of the young interlocutors addressed the museum audience and invited them to try out their game.

2.2 'In-And-Out-Of-Sync': Creative Dialogues Between Russian Avant-Garde Art and Young People's Inter-Artistic Experimentations—Museum of Modern Art-Costakis Collection

The case study titled 'In and Out of Sync' examined the creative exchanges between Russian Avant-garde art and the artistic experimentations of young students within the context of the educational commons in museums. The MOMus Museum of Modern Art-Costakis Collection served as the primary research partner for this case study, which involved four educators (comprising three museum educators and one music educator). The study involved 25 students, aged 15–18, from a nearby vocational high school. Over a period of three months, the case study unfolded through nine weekly sessions, each lasting three hours, all conducted within the museum's premises.

Utilizing a range of visual arts tools and musical instruments and drawing inspiration from the first international exhibition of works by Russian avant-garde artist Ivan Kliun, titled 'Ivan Kliun. Transcendental landscapes. Flying sculptures. Light spheres' the educational project aimed to engage young participants as co-creators within the museum. The project consistently aligned with the values of the commons, such as serendipity, openness, care, experimentation, and creative participation.

The case study adopted an open design approach, where the outcomes of each meeting served as the foundation for subsequent steps. Collective decision-making processes, involving both the youth and educators and employing tools such as pedagogical documentation, self-reflection, and youth councils, played a pivotal role in shaping the content and flow of each session. These nine meetings culminated in the creation of a multimodal installation that employed diverse artistic mediums

to explore the themes of war and (non) peace within the youths' experiences. The young participants chose the name 'Liberation, probably in another language' for their artwork, actively participated in its arrangement and installation, and presented it during International Museum Day in 2022. Importantly, all nine meetings, including the final public event, took place within the museum premises.

The initial two meetings were intentionally dedicated to establishing the foundations of relationships between the youth and educators, as well as reshaping existing dynamics among the youth themselves. These ongoing processes of relationship-building remained central throughout the design and progression of the case study. Key aspects of these first two meetings included documenting the commonalities within the group and familiarizing the participants with museum spaces, particularly the 'dark room'. This ground-floor room, isolated from the museum's main exhibition areas, was exclusively allocated to the young participants, who affectionately referred to it as their 'headquarters'. At the outset, the room was deliberately left vacant, inviting the youth to personalize it by bringing their personal items to decorate it in subsequent meetings. Notably, the 'dark room' continued to host the exhibition of the multimodal artwork created by the youth for several months after the conclusion of the case study. Another significant outcome of the first two meetings was the collaborative development of a 'team contract', a dynamic 'code of conduct' that served as a reference point for all members, guiding their interactions. This included the requirement for consent before any digital recording and the right to address any concerns when educators inadvertently assumed traditional 'teacher-roles' with associated hierarchical dynamics.

During the third meeting, a majority of the youth collectively expressed their interest in exploring the museum's exhibitions on the first and second floors independently. After a general introduction by the educators, the youth decided to explore the exhibitions on their own, seeking guidance only when specific information about an artwork was needed. Following this visit, they attempted to replicate the artworks they found most compelling and began composing poems inspired by the museum's exhibits. The fourth meeting proved to be a turning point, leading to what educators later referred to as a minor internal 'crisis'. It highlighted the challenges of transcending well-established professional roles and expertise, sharing responsibilities with the youth, and striking a balance between the predetermined 'framework' and the serendipity and fluidity inherent in the creative process within the context of the educational commons. Following this meeting, educators introduced examples of artwork combining music with visual arts and introduced the concept of assemblies for collective decision-making to the youth. The youth embraced this idea and conducted their first youth-led assembly, where they expressed their desire to create an artwork to be displayed within the museum. This youth assembly extended to their school hours, where they collectively determined the theme for their collaborative artwork. During their subsequent visits to the museum, the youth began developing their ideas, initially exploring themes and later incorporating music and visual art mediums. Their collective work eventually materialized in a synthesis of artworks, exploring the facets of (non) peace and war through their everyday experiences that held significance to them.

2.3 'Common Ground'—Experimental Center for the Arts

The CS 'Common Ground' was run by the MOMus—Experimental Center for the Arts, in collaboration with a theatre group of 15 people aged 16–30 years old and 4 educators, two theatre, one dance and one composer-educator that are permanent members of the group. The group of participants consisted of 9 people with varied disabilities, such as down syndrome, Asperger syndrome or autism and 6 non-disabled people, both professional and amateur actors/actresses. The CS design and implementation was led by the group's educators in close consultation with the museum's director and the research team. 'Common Ground' was implemented at the Experimental Center for the Arts during 13 three-hour-long meetings over a period of three months. Concurrently, the Experimental Center for the Arts organized the exhibition 'The Event of a Thread' in collaboration with ifa (Institut fűr Auslandbezienhungen) with the support of Goethe—Institut Thessaloniki. The exhibition presented various textile artworks, including large scale dolls, bed sheets, carpets and decorative elements, highlighting issues of tradition and folk knowledge transmission related to the universal practice of knitting through the work of 23 artists. The exhibition offered new interpretations to the 'events of the thread' that are closely related to 'material, spiritual, visual and economic' factors.[2]

The CS 'Common Ground' aimed to initiate a creative dialogue between the group and the museum, strengthening the group's active participation in the artistic and social life of the city, thus contributing to social inclusion. Taking theater, music and dance as a starting point, and seeking to find connections between their creative engagement and the temporary exhibition of the museum, the participants were invited to co-create a safe space where they could express and exchange ideas, feelings, needs and dreams. During the meetings the group experimented with movement scores, music, performance, open improvisations and social dreaming, a method that encourages shared "thinking through exploring dreams, using the methods of free association, amplification, and systemic thinking, so as to make links and find connections in order to discover new thinking and thoughts" ([20], p. 13).

In the early meetings the group experimented in the empty museum's space, as the exhibition was still under construction. The emptiness offered a great sense of freedom to the participants. They used their imagination to 'fill' the museum with exhibits: the entrance and exit signs, the ceiling, chairs and benches and the empty walls, all became exhibits in their eyes and were interpreted and approached through movement, dance and words. In the next meetings as the exhibition was all set up, the group interacted individually and collectively with the exhibits, reproducing bodily the shape or sense of their favorite and walking and dancing in the museum as a moving work of art. The group also spent some time experimenting in outer space, in the port of Thessaloniki, where the museum is situated, in an attempt to 'free' the forms that they created inside and make them larger, more open and also visible to the public. In the meetings that followed, a set of certain elements derived from the exhibition, such as circles, patterns, knots and loops was approached via movement,

[2] https://www.ifa.de/en/tour/the-event-of-a-thread-thessaloniki/

dance and music both through activities led by the educators as well as with open improvisations. In many cases throughout the CS the participants decided to just listen to music, to engage in free dance sessions or to draw individually. Meanwhile circles, patterns, knots and loops functioned as a common vocabulary that led to the creation of personal and collective improvised performances. In the last few meetings, the group collectively decided to publicly perform a set of three improvisations and also to invite the spectators to participate in a social dreaming session. While building up on their final idea, the participants, apart from using experimental artistic tools, they as well developed further their emotional and physical connection with the exhibits; they touched, smelled and moved them, danced with them or even hid behind them.

The performance was titled 'Common Ground', and took place on the 10th of April 2022 at the Experimental Center for the Arts. As decided by the group, three different 20 min long improvisations were performed, followed by an open discussion with the audience. The audience also took part in the social dreaming session, lying down on the floor next to the performers, narrating night-dreams and thoughts and reflecting on their common experience.

2.4 'City as Commons'—Museum of Photography

'City as Commons' took place at the MOMus—Photography Museum and was designed and implemented by two educators, an art educator and a professional photographer. Throughout the CS the participants experimented with a variety of photography techniques as well as with art techniques such as collage and three-dimensional creations. They were also led to develop a fresh look at their neighborhood and finally, they employed collective decision-making processes that led to the production of a booklet containing their own photos, words and (photographed) three-dimensional creations, and to a photo exhibition held in their school. Eleven students aged 12–14 from a multicultural high school situated in a rather degraded area of the city took part in the workshops, along with two of their school teachers who did not just accompany their pupils but assumed the role of full participants. The CS consisted of a total of thirteen two-to-three-hour-long weekly meetings over a period of four months. Most meetings took place at the school, while a small number only, due to bureaucratic reasons, were held at the museum.

The first two meetings took place in the school. In the first, the students were introduced to the project; ice-breaking games were played and collective discussions on the plenary were held. The second meeting was built around the idea of finding a name for the group which gave rise to discussions about nationality, neighborhood issues and common interests among the participants. A photography activity, decided by the students, offered the opportunity to study the internal space and the schoolyard, to wander around the familiar environment observing unnoticed details or spots that bear special memories connected to school life. The two following meetings were organized in the Photography Museum. The fourty minutes walk from the school to the museum functioned as inspiration for taking photographs and led

to informal conversations and deeper observation of the neighborhood—buildings, plants, people, road signs and monuments. By the time of their arrival at the museum, the participants were surprised to see that a big cork board was full of the photographs they had taken on their previous meetings while the educators informed them that the board is to be used freely by the group. A set of rules was also agreed upon, followed by an open reflective conversation about the content of their photographs. During the following meetings in the school the participants experimented with photo-stories, organizing a photo-marathon, a ten minute challenge where they had to take photos of certain elements on which they had decided by themselves on the plenary, sharing equipment, and beginning to collectively document their neighborhood through photographs, drawings, maps and words. The ninth meeting took place at the museum where the participants began composing their photographic and artistic material, creating collages and snapshots of storytelling. During their tenth meeting they experimented further with the creation of mixed media—three dimensional collages using photographs and drawings. The last two meetings were dedicated to building their final ideas, leading to the production of a booklet called 'A city imagined' including selected artworks created by them and also a photography exhibition. In the last meeting, the exhibition was presented to the school community and printouts of the booklet were given to the students and their school teachers.

3 Practicing Commoning: some Reflections

3.1 Creating Art, Creating Links with the Museum

Experimental Center for the Arts: Dancing with the exhibits. The participants ask the educators if they can 'just dance': they delve into a free, unchoreographed, performance (see Fig. 1). The educator chooses an instrumental adagio—the music begins. Two girls and two boys are lying on the floor, others prefer to sit on the ground while a girl finds her place on the lap of the person in the wheelchair. Bodies start moving at a slow pace, stretching, flexing, arching, expanding and shrinking, becoming dots in space or occupying as much space as possible. A change in the tempo of the music leads to a change of mood that is reflected on bodies and facial expressions. Participants explore the space with curiosity, speed and intensity; they cross the room, run around, jump high, crawl, meet other bodies, form groups, become pairs or move individually. Soon they begin establishing a physical relationship with the exhibits, smelling, touching and moving them. They hide behind them or lie down under them and use their shape, color or texture as means of inspiration. A girl says "I like hiding my face in these quilts. Every time I want to relax a bit I hide my face there and I feel like I'm in my own bed". Another participant mentions "I wonder if these quilts can fit in my bed". Space, exhibits, different bodies, sounds; they all act as stimuli in this dance. When the music ends, the participants continue dancing by producing sounds and rhythmic patterns using body percussion.

Gradually water bottles, wooden blocks, plastic cups and bags, jewelry and keys enter the game. By beating the wooden floor, repeating words and rhythms the group creates a soundscape for their dance. The freedom that results from the improvisatory character of the performance seems liberating, as exploration, expressiveness and joy take center stage. After half an hour sounds and movement begin to fade out. The participants gather at the center of the room; they lay down. A girl that rarely has physical contact with other people hugs everyone, while another girl says “let’s do it again. Let’s dance and do nothing else”.

Museum of Modern Art-Costakis Collection: Capturing the sense of liberation. “War and peace”: a student takes the floor to announce the open theme around which the youth artwork will unfold. Last week, the student explains, the whole class took

Fig. 1 Participants of the MOMus experimental center for the arts dancing in the museum’s main exhibition hall, March 2022

time during school hours to brainstorm and vote on the thematic lens through which we wish to voice what matters to us. The dark room is now occupied with a vigorous conversation where one young person after the other shares stories related to the experience of non-peace; most experiences they recount have taken place inside school. “For me, it would be peaceful enough if all young people could go to school without feeling scared. There is racism”, explains one student, pointing to her vest top and commenting how it becomes a subject of sexist commentary in school. The students wish for their art piece to capture the meaning and feeling of ‘peace’ through its absence in the everyday life of a young person. The youth continue their conversations negotiating the aesthetic of their collective artwork, aiming, with the assistance of the educators, to remove the focus from the ‘final product’ towards more experimental forms of expression (see Fig. 2). Through experimentation with different art mediums, the youth wish to bring to the fore their own matters of concern from inside and outside of school (including the acceptance for each other’s differences; their fights for inclusivity against sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, patriarchy and harassment; their relationships with their peers and teachers), to explore them in their own means outside of terms of ‘wrong’ or ‘right’, and to eventually share them with a wider audience beyond their school by making their artwork public.

Museum of Contemporary Art: Feeling the sound, feeling each other. We all look hesitant, slowly hitting different parts of our bodies as we engage for the first time in the body percussion exercise. We count from one to nine, repeating each cycle four times before moving on to the next one. Around me, I can grasp some hits falling momentarily ‘out of rhythm’, whilst impressively realigning to a synched sound. The bodies in our circle seem to coordinate through gazes and bodily vibrations; I wonder how our collective pulse feels to those who cannot hear. I wonder how we achieve this level of coordination without physically ‘listening’ to each other’s sound, which other vibrations pierce our bodies in that moment, connecting us to the ground beneath our feet… What started as a ‘warm-up’ exercise in one of the first meetings, gradually evolves to a central exercise for the group’s coordination, following the young participants’ demand for it (see Fig. 3). Body percussion becomes one of the few instances where the educators, the researcher, and the young participants communicate with each other without the interpreter’s intervention. As an exercise, body percussion moves away from an expectation of an ‘end product’, growing to be an integral step in the group’s coordination; it becomes a ‘happening’ where the communication barrier between the hearing, hard-hearing, and deaf actors is lifted, however momentarily, allowing for the emergence of a commoning experience through freedom of self-expression and creation of a shared musical space that permits active participation and communication beyond the use of speech.

Photography Museum: Familiar spaces in new light. We meet the participants in the classroom after the break. We have previously decided collectively our next move; we are going to wander around the neighborhood and take photos, draw or write comments about what we like and what we don’t, what we need to change and what our dreams about this place are. We break out in three groups, we take bags, papers, color pencils and cameras and we go outside the school premises. We

Fig. 2 Young participants of the MOMus modern case study arranging their artwork towards their final creation *Liberation, probably in another language*

start walking on the lanes around the school building but soon we begin to explore longer routes. The young participants document through photography the daily life of the neighborhood (see Fig. 4); workers, shops and small industries, hidden spots, abandoned buildings, empty roads, nature, things found on the street, full dumpsters, signs. A girl chooses not to take photographs but to write down the comments and observations expressed. She draws recycle bins on a piece of paper and notes that “this is something that is missing”. At some point the group stops in front of a field. A boy observes “it would be nice if these empty fields didn’t have fences, so that we could go in and play” and another one suggests that “these empty fields could have

Fig. 3 Young participants of the MOMus contemporary museum case study performing body percussion at the museum auditorium, March 2022

been a park". "Well, it was a park once, but then the grass grew very tall and nobody took care of it" another participant recalls. "Everything that we see here could be nicer, I think", a boy suggests; a girl adds: "if only there were brighter colors in the neighborhood…". They share the same camera in order to take photos of the field and they all keep quiet and stand still when one of them is trying to take a photo of a little bird. They regularly turn to the professional photographer of the group for advice regarding lenses, the role of light, and more. They keep on narrating stories about the neighborhood all along. We return to the classroom, we take a look at the photographs taken and read outloud the comments noted down. A participant observes "it's like seeing the neighborhood but with new eyes".

3.2 The Many Faces of Participation

Looking at the four MOMus CS through a cultural-educational perspective on participation [19], we observed that participation revolved primarily across two central axes, namely those of decision making and creative artistic engagement, whilst the element of unlearning remained prevalent and relevant throughout. We take a closer look at our key findings around participation below.

Our findings across the four CS show that participation is first and foremost a dynamic process and requires a number of complex skills that need to be learned

Fig. 4 Young participants of the photography museum case study documenting their neighborhood through photography, March 2023

and developed through practice. It seems that young people's highly institutionalized lives allow little space and opportunities for them to learn how to participate. Therefore, taking decisions about matters that concern them is something that has to be learned. Even more so in cases where some disability groups rely normally on their guardians and significant others to make decisions for their lives and care even beyond their youth; what forms could participation take in these cases and how could it be experienced? Many times, in the course of the evolution of our case studies, we were often faced with the discomfort of some young people when they were invited to participate in the shaping of their experience without being provided with the resources and guidance to do so. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that youth participation in the institutional context of museums is a process facilitated by the educators. In a similar vein, we observed that in occasions where the educators were themselves modeling participatory practices (e.g. in their collaboration with each

other), young participants found they had a strong reference point and an example to follow.

Young people's participation relied heavily on the educators' disposition, particularly on the latter's willingness to let go of their role as experts and engage in a process of unlearning. Unless the educators were intentionally taking a step back from their role and were open to being challenged in their thinking, youth participation was only expressed in very contained, often limited and tokenistic ways. Here, it is also important to highlight that some young participants had sometimes different understanding of what participation means to them that was not always recognized by the educators. To give an example, there have been occasions where a young person felt more comfortable to frame their participation by observing an activity instead of actively contributing to it in some other way, a disposition that was, however, not always respected by the educator.

Another key finding concerns the role of time and space in facilitating the young people's participation. Having a sense of ownership over the management of space, as in the case of the 'dark room' in the MOMus Modern museum, or over the flow and content of a day, young people reported feeling encouraged to participate more in the program and showed increased interest in its evolution. Here, it is important to note that some educators argued that young people's participation in the shaping of their learning experience in all its aspects has the potential to address and tackle social inequalities even outside educational environments. And of course, in those case studies where people with disabilities took part, the need for broadening the ways in which participation is framed in ways that go beyond the assumptions of ableism [5] emerged very strongly.

In Table 1, we provide an overview of the key-observations with regard to participation from the MOMus CS.

4 Conclusions: Towards an Open-Source Museum

The above described museum education common-based projects enable us to argue in favor of the power of museum education to re-shape core aspects of the way in which museums might establish a different kind of relationship with young people. These projects highlighted ways in which commoning practices might help a museum function as an open-source by (i) introducing new ways through which the museum might be experienced by members of its community as a common space, and (ii) by enabling the participants to delve into art practices that lead to a creative relationship with museum content and exhibits, recasting them as open source materials that can be leveraged by its community.

Central to the process of recasting the museum as an open source institution is the opening up of possibilities for the young participants to 'leave their mark' in the museum, for example through the creation of artworks that stay for some time in the museum's premises, or through open performances linked to the exhibits and presented publicly. This led to inclusion: participants with very different profiles,

Table 1 An overview of key-observations with regard to participation

No.	Participation	Relevant comments
1	Is a dynamic process and requires a number of complex skills that need to be learned and developed through practice and experience	Participation does not occur automatically. It is a process that is learned. It needs to be experienced and facilitated by human and non-human parameters
2	Can mean something different to the participant than it does to the educator	A young person who chooses to participate in an activity only by observing it should not be discarded for not participating because it does not 'fit' predefined understandings of what participation means
3	Requires educators' deliberate devotion to unlearning	The educators' unlearning as a major prerequisite in order for linear processes to be questioned and for educator-pupil relationships to be re-established on a more equal—and less adultist—basis
4	Needs educators to model participation in their practice	The educators need to see themselves as aspiring commoners alongside the young participants, engaging in participatory practices as part of their pedagogy and establishing relational practices in their team of adults
5	Requires a sense of ownership of one's learning	Having a choice over the structure, flow and content of the meetings in the museum cultivated a sense of ownership and belonging that acted positively to increasing the youth's interest and participation in the projects
6	Is dependent on the uses of time and space	The collective management of time and space as common resources are essential for participation
7	Has the potential to address social inequalities	Some educators reported in their autobiographical reflection notes that young people's active participation in the shaping of their education has the potential to contribute to the tackling of social inequalities outside of educational environments
8	Needs reframing under the light of different disabilities	Notions of participation need to be broadened in ways that go beyond the assumptions of ableism

abilities and background were encouraged to work together, to work creatively, and to develop ownership over the creative process. It should be noted, however, that the notion of inclusiveness may be realized via a variety of strategies that are not necessarily linked to openness and equality, which are considered crucial for a commoning approach to cultural education.

Against the subsumption to the neoliberal rhetoric that dictates the achievement of increased audience numbers and pursue light leisure activities that boost the museum's income, the Smooth research program sought to create a cultural educational context [19] that leads to democratizing the museum and provided an opportunity for museum personnel—*museum directors, museum staff*, *museum educators*—to redefine and reflect on their practices, for a shift in re-imagining inclusive and participatory actions.

Educators were confronted with a variety of practical constraints related to the management of space and time. In two of our CS practical constraints permitted only a few visits to the museum, as most meetings were held at the school. This fragmented contact with the museum space limited the possibilities for familiarization with the institution and the exhibits, and for overturning existing assumptions regarding participation. On the other hand, in the CSs that were almost entirely implemented in museum premises, participants were encouraged to 'hack the museum'—a slogan used at the Museum of Modern Art—and to organize public performances—as in the case of the Experimental Arts Center. Therefore, space emerged as an important parameter for implementing educational commons in art museums. Most importantly, the familiarization with the museum exhibitions helped participants to construct new routines and to reverse existing student-educator hierarchies.

Time was also an important factor for cultivating egalitarian forms of participation, and more open engagement with art practices, leading to the development of a relation to the museum as a common resource. Educational time, freed from the pressure of achieving measurable outcomes, created possibilities for discussing, sharing and debating both over issues related to the direction of creative engagement, and issues related to commoning governance processes.

Reflecting on our four case studies as a whole, we could argue that critical for the successful implementation of commons-based creative educational work in museum contexts is the existence of a set of certain qualities that permeate both creative art making and the character of collaboration and sharing:

- *Dismeasure* [7]: "losing a sense of time in the process of teaching and studying, avoiding linearity, and being taken into unexpected territories as a result of exploration" ([16], p. 155).
- *Suspension* [7]: "the possibility to step 'outside' ordinary time and practices, outside the imposed obligation to 'produce' use-value" ([16], p. 156).
- *Profanation* [1]: "an act of moving beyond the sacred character of knowledge, freeing it from its canonic, hierarchical use and function, opening it up for playful engagement "at everyone's disposal for 'free use'" ([23], p. 159). Profanation induces playing with ideas, studying them in unexpected ways, studying them away from their formal function and application" ([14], p. 96).

The implementation of those case studies has been particularly challenging for museum educators, in that they had to embrace 'the impossible', initiating a mode of educational practice that moves "beyond the pragmatic and functionalist implementation of an idea or a program […] [and] encourages acceptance of a massive loss of control and of the risk of failure" ([37], p. 5).

In order to infuse creative artistic practices with the ideals of educational commons, the educators had to liberate themselves for traditional patterns of action, placing co-creation at the center of the process, prioritizing the creative act as a way of initiating a dialogue between the participants, opening the way towards 'a pedagogy of open form' ([15], based on [2]). Such a pedagogy requires "unlearning the things we take for granted, as well as those that our audience does. In the process, we create contexts and ask questions of ourselves, of the institutions in which and with

which we work, and of society" ([37], p. 9). In this way, commons-based creative educational work might be seen as belonging to what Mörsch has referred to as of transformative discourse of gallery education, "expanding the exhibiting institution" and enabling it to function "as agent of societal change" (28), p. 10).

Thus, commons-based creative museum education can be seen "as an expression of a desire for a future that is more socially equal" ([8], p. 80). As Alexandros Kioupkiolis has stressed, "commoning practices start from the need to fundamentally change in social life", and encourage "a collaborative mode of living, acting and organizing in terms of collective autonomy, equal freedom, creativity, diversity, sharing and participation, eschewing top-down, centralizing logics of the state and a profit-driven individualism of neoliberal markets" ([18], p. 113).

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Educational Commons in Mixed Educational Settings

Democratic Nowtopias from the Educational Commonsverse in Greece

Yannis Pechtelidis, Anna Chronaki, and Naya Tselepi

Abstract The chapter examines the role educational commons can play in addressing inequities, advancing democracy, and fostering inclusion by allowing teaching and learning to be shaped by students and teachers through values of equality, freedom, and creativity. The case studies discussed have been conducted in formal and non-formal settings in Greece comprising a self-organized autonomous libertarian educational community, three public preschool classrooms, of which one cooperated with university students, and a primary and secondary school. They sought to establish the preconditions for co-creating a community that offers opportunities for self-formation and equal participation. The paper argues that, under certain circumstances, the logic of the commons can flourish in pedagogical settings through enhancing active participation and inclusionary practices. However, the co-production and co-management of the teaching and learning process enacted by all members of the educational community in its everyday life and on a footing of equality, solidarity, autonomy, sharing and caring, still have a long way to go. Despite this fact, the diverse case studies presented here as examples of the Greek 'commonsverse' can operate as 'crack' in the education status quo inspiring new conceptualizations, methods, and actions pertaining to the educational commons.

Keywords Commons · Educational commons · Education · Children as commoners · Commoning practices · Community · Nowtopias · Commonsverse

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G. Cappello et al. (eds.), *Educational Commons*, UNIPA Springer Series,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51837-9_10

1 Introduction

The concept of 'commons' refers, mainly, to the dynamic processes of self-organized systems and communities that emerge around the need to reclaim natural resources or to socially produce goods including information and knowledge. These systems are structured or co-constructed as shared resources through active citizen participation and ongoing collaboration [24, 35]. Commoners are considered the subjects who embrace the commons' philosophy aiming to create social networks based on solidarity, communication, sharing, care, and interdependence within communities. For this, education holds significant importance acting as catalyst for both societal development and personal transformation. Research on 'educational commons', emphasizing participatory and transformative teaching and learning, aligns with inclusive pedagogies that combat social injustices and inequalities [7, 30, 26, 27, 31, 32, 42, 43, 37, 44, 39]; and addresses the loss of shared knowledge (epistemicide) in favor of a caring approach to land and science [15, 16].

The present chapter emphasizes the need to discuss empirical data from diverse case studies in Greece conducted under the EU-funded project SMOOTH ([47], https://smooth-ecs.eu/). The project introduces 'educational commons' in formal and non-formal educational settings, exploring whether this conceptual framework can promote inclusion by treating children and teachers as commoners. These studies encompass diverse pedagogical sites in Greece, including a self-organized libertarian educational community, public preschools in Thessaloniki, a collaborative workshop between a public preschool in Athens and two departments (Education, Architecture) at the University of Thessaly, and a primary and secondary school in Thessaloniki where Mamagea, an environmental organization, implemented Workshops for Nurturing and Developing Environmental Resilience (i.e., WONDER). And they can all be seen as situated in the Greek commonsverse—'a loosely connected world of different types of commons' [5].

The primary objective of all these studies was to investigate the feasibility of enacting the commons' logic in educational settings to combat inequality and knowledge gaps. In addition, they aim to highlight the unique experiences of participants as commoners, examining how alternative subjectivities, rituals, practices, and mentalities developed in these alternative educational spaces. Further, this chapter approaches educational commons as 'nowtopias' [5], realized in the present as 'here and now' aiming to promote social inclusion for all children and youth while subverting injustices, inequalities, and knowledge loss. Whilst all these concepts were not equally adopted by the case studies design, the shared goal was to address inequalities and provide open access to knowledge practices through the co-creation of a classroom or school community. This community offers young children, students, teachers, educators, parents, and the locals the opportunity for self-formation and equal participation through commoning practices such as peer governance, co-creation of knowledge, and collaborative learning. The chapter is organized into five sections including this introductory Sect. 1, the enactment of educational commons in diverse pedagogical sites Sect. 2, the discussion of methodologies and fieldwork

Sect. 3, the presentation of findings around the axis of children as commoners, commoning practices, and community Sect. 4, and concluding remarks Sect. 5.

2 Enacting 'Educational Commons' in Diverse Pedagogical Sites

Before delving into the methodological details of each case study, we provide brief overviews of the diverse pedagogical settings and the case studies where the principles of educational commons were enacted by young children, students, teachers, and researchers: *First*, the 'Little Tree' is a libertarian educational organization located at the outskirts of Thessaloniki in northern Greece, comprising a community of fifteen children aged 2–4 and five educators along with parents, guardians, and a researcher (Silia Randitsa) who all actively participate. The study led by Yannis Pechtelidis and took place over two years, in the springs of 2022 and 2023. Activities were conducted in the school's semi-forested area and during field trips. Little Tree operated based on values of self-organization, self-formation, teamwork, solidarity, sharing, caring, and hands-on education. *Second,* action research was implemented in two *'public preschools'* located at the urban scape of Thessaloniki in northern Greece and led by Yannis Pechtelidis. These two case studies occurred in the springs of 2022 and 2023, with sessions happening bi-weekly in the school environment. The first round included 40 children aged 5–6, two educators, and two educators-researchers (Angeliki Botonaki and Chrysa Gatzelaki) whilst the second round comprised 16 children and two preschool teachers from a different preschool, along with two researchers (Angeliki Botonaki and Elena Viseri).

Third, a Collaborative Design Commons for artefact making was co-created amongst children and teachers at a public preschool in Athens and students from two departments at the University of Thessaly (Education and Architecture) in the context of LeTME (i.e. Learning Technologies and Mathematics Education) laboratory and led by Anna Chronaki with Iris Lykourioti and Ioanna Symeonidou. Based on long term experience with pedagogic experimentations and/or interventions enacting principles of educational commons for subverting local injustices and troubling essentialism through in/formal mathematics education practices (see [11–15, 16]) the study involved around 20 children in the ages of 4–6, 10 university students in the ages of 19–21, a teacher-researcher (Eirini Lazaridou) and a researcher (Danai Binkel). Our collaborative experimentation was focused on reclaiming place (i.e., virtual and actual notions of land and territory) and mathematics (i.e., processes, objects, techniques, artifacts that allow potentialities to happen) as commons through the creation of affective spaces for both preschool children and adults who care in diverse pedagogic modalities. For this, the idea of 'the island' became the common denominator across all participants for not only to ponder with complex issues around 'what is an island today for us and for the Mediterranean archipelago?' but also to espouse the idea of 'making an island for us'. As such, this co-creative process resulted into

reclaiming the imaginative place of an 'island' by tapping into its virtual transformative capacity to cover diverse needs and desires such as making: a place-based-tool for role-playing and storytelling, a hands-on game to play with dice and role-playing characters and, finally, manipulative artifacts for building a multiplicity of space constructions.

And *fourth,* the *WONDER Schools Project:* The first round was focused on environmental education, took place in a primary school in Thessaloniki's city center in spring 2022 and comprised 13 pupils and their parents/guardians participated. Weekly workshops were held by educators and environmentalists from the organization 'Mamagea' in collaboration with a researcher (Stelios Pantazidis). The second round of the case study took place during spring 2023, lasting approximately 2–3 h on a weekly basis, involving 18 students, teachers, an educator from Mamagea (Dominiki Vagati) and a researcher (Naya Tselepi). In both case studies, led by Yannis Pechtelidis, participants combined components of educational commons and cutting-edge practices about environmental education. Peer governance and combating adultism were the two main tenets of this design, which was built upon the collaborative planning of the schoolyard.

3 Methodologies and Fieldwork

The case studies organisation followed four main steps: (a) planning pedagogical projects; (b) enacting projects in educational settings; (c) evaluating project impact on children and communities; and (d) reflecting on project outcomes. Collaborative discussions occurred among teachers, educators, and researchers during each project's development. The teams in each study worked together for enacting the case studies and they had additional opportunities to engage in reflective training sessions during the design phase, reflective discussions on data collection and interpretation with a reference group, and regular meetings throughout the studies with the UTh reference group. These sessions included academics, activists, teachers, researchers, and artists, addressing fieldwork challenges. Below, the specific methodologies employed in each case study will be denoted.

At the Little Tree, the pedagogic practice of project-based learning created the basis for extra methods employed to promote conflict resolution amongst children and to introduce educational commons values. Active listening and pedagogical documentation were key tools for making such efforts visible. Data collection involved teachers, children, and the researcher. Interpretation occurred in collaboration with the UTh reference group as mentioned earlier. The case studies enacted in the two public preschools in Thermi, Thessaloniki included pedagogical methods such as peer-to peer governance, games, and drama whilst the methodology for data collection was based on action research. Activities ranged from imaginative improvisation to cooperative games and balance exercises. Qualitative data was gathered on children's collaboration and roles.

The Collaborative Design Commons study focused on a central urban neighborhood preschool in Athens, involving 21 children, including four with special needs, teachers, and researchers. A collaborative pedagogic experiment based on the 'island' project ran from November 2022 to February 2023, employing ethnographic fieldwork methods. The impact on children's engagement with the commons was examined through various means, including participant observation and multimedia artifacts. And, finally, the Mamagea project employed two rounds of qualitative data collection and analyses. The first round encouraged verbal and nonverbal expression through peer-to-peer governance, active listening, and project work. The second round employed additional methodologies like Sociocratic Circle Method, participatory planning, SWOT analysis, and SMART goals. Below, the preliminary analysis of data collected in these diverse case studies will be presented with a focus on children as commoners, the commoning practices enacted and their effects for the community.

4 Children as Commoners, Commoning Practices and Community

This section reports the findings from the aforementioned case studies in these diverse pedagogical sites by focusing on how they enact the educational commons in three distinct but interrelated axis: children as commoners, commoning practices and community.

4.1 Children as Commoners

The notion of the 'child as a commoner' has emerged recently [41, 43–45] and has affected relationships between adults and children. This notion was developed based on the image of the child as a protagonist and an engaged member of society ([8], 368–369), as well as on the argument that children have the right to participate in the public sphere. This argument aligns with the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child [40]. In a commons-oriented education, understanding children as social actors is vital not only for how they become visible, but also for their contribution to knowledge production and their participation in the decision-making processes. In this context, pupils and students do not depend on teachers or adults in general explaining reality to them. In particular, the main objective is self-formation, sharing and caring, community identity and experimentation and, consequently, the emancipation of children from adults (teachers and parents) at 'here' and 'now' or the 'nowtopia' as mentioned earlier. Specifically, in the libertarian learning community of the Little Tree, for example, educators work towards how young children (aged 2–4) will be able to take initiatives within the 'school' without their help. It is characteristic

that before the beginning of the assembly, children allocate roles by themselves, they coordinate, keep the minutes with the help of an adult companion. Children are treated by the adults as capable of making decisions and of shaping their everyday lives. Therefore, through their everyday practices, they experience and perform the role of the active citizen within the boundaries of a micro-community. The emphasis in Little Tree is placed firmly on the present of children's life, which is not sacrificed in the name of a successful adult future [41, 43–45].

Further, in a commons-based education, children actively engage in the social life of their community. Their involvement constantly evolves through new ways of participating and experimenting. This alter or hetero-pedagogical approach of commons questions the traditional discourses on children, which construe them as passive, weak, defective, and ignorant beings that are lacking not only in specific knowledges, capabilities, and skills, but also in learning capability [41] that also becomes evident in traditionally fixed epistemic areas such as mathematics [13–15, 16]. Companions and/or educators through educational commons can challenge in effect the predominant relations of dependence between children and adults. As such, children's active engagement throughout our pedagogic experimentation based on the 'island' project of the public preschool in Athens also noted children's potential as commoners. More specifically, we were able to experience their involvement as creative commoners with huge interest in participating and contributing to the emerging activities. This realization could be noted at three levels: taking part in classroom assemblies, sharing learning including mathematics, struggling with relations amongst them all. Concerning the first level, children were noted as being active participants in classroom assemblies taking place as everyday routines (i.e., the regular morning or noon assembly, other assemblies along the process for setting or clarifying what the project was about and what could be the aims for activity, negotiating ways of working, sharing the making of varied products such as drawings, artifacts and arriving at specific conclusionary remarks or key points). In addition, children co-created ideas (e.g., what is an island, how to name it, what stories could they narrate, how to understand the island as a place of being, how to create and construct our own island, how to measure its perimeter). In this, they were involved in making the map of an island and they further problematized the idea of measuring its perimeter and area so that to know what objects could fit on the island. Their convivial creations were transformed into a floor-game that stayed with them and was also shared as a playful activity with children from other classrooms.

However, children's awareness of themselves and others as active participants and contributors in the classroom setting differed according to age, gender, and ability. In particular, children between the ages 4–6 needed closer guidance to follow the procedures of exploring an idea (i.e., what is the island), expressing their views orally, making or contributing towards making a product (i.e., creating drawings, constructing a map together with others etc.). In addition, a couple of boys and girls expressed dominant behaviors through oral or body language in the ways they shared experiences and construction of artifacts. And moreover, although the four children diagnosed with ASD were present in all classroom activity by being accompanied with two special needs teachers, but it was harder to follow the full series of daily

routines that required oral expressions (i.e., classroom assemblies or voicing their views) or attention to precision (i.e., constructions, counting, measuring). Attendance to such differences meant a serious reorganization (also in negotiation with the two special needs teachers) and highlighted the importance of the teacher as caring, continuously, for mediating values of sympathy and self-other dialogue that supports and facilitates a differential access to the series of activities as a teaching and learning process that matters for all but in diverse ways to each one of the participants throughout the case-study.

Although it is mainly adults initiating the commoning processes, children play an active role in these practices, which they conceptualize and enrich with their own experience and views. Adults try to avoid too much interference and they carve out a space for children to express themselves freely and to shape the process in their own terms. Children have the ability to influence educational and social life as a whole and to partly steer the process of subjectification [41]. In this context, adults are able to recognize, value, and respond to this image of the child as a commoner. During the WONDER project of Mamagea in the public High School of Thessaloniki, the educator of Mamagea and the researcher avoided too much interference in children initiatives and acted as 'companions', which was aligned to the practices of educational commons and proved to have helped a lot of youngsters in their process of empowerment, self and collective autonomy. The additional value of this case study was that elements of the Sociocratic Circle Method (SCM) [6, 19, 46] were introduced by the educator of Mamagea and the researcher, expert in Sociocracy, as a methodology to cultivate the culture of communication, peer governance, decision making and roles distribution within the class and their assemblies. Here, it is important to remind that the ambiance of a typical classroom within a public High School in Greece evokes disciplinary approaches and hierarchical power relationships; the students' desks are aligned and the teachers usually teach in a one-way direction, whereas, there is little space for active participation, co-creation of knowledge and co-shaping of school life. Thus, when participants were asked, from the very beginning, to create a 'circle' (of chairs without desks), this fact in itself was a 'crack' in the everyday school life of these students. The 'circle' under facilitation, as the basic structure of the Sociocracy Method's operation [10] was necessary because everyone could look each other in the eyes as well as they could pose their bodies towards the speaking person. Nobody was left out of the circle, all participants were visible and could be heard because their voices matter. The facilitator provided a safe space and time for each participant to express herself and respected the right of not wanting to speak. In this class, the challenge for the students was to break their previous pattern of communication; to not actually listen to others, to speak over them and to be highly judgmental of the other's sayings. Through the Sociocratic circle with facilitation, they experimented to wait patiently for their turn, to actively listen to each other and to say something meaningful on their turn. As for the judging pattern, that was worked out through another process of Sociocracy for the evaluation of the tasks, within which they learned to give positive feedback to the work done by a classmate or a group, as well as fruitful proposals of how this could be done better. The role of facilitator was mainly performed by the educator or

the researcher but soon the students felt intrigued to experiment. In this framework of communication and respect, class students slowly understood that the educator of Mamagea and the researcher really cared about them and their ideas, that we wanted to help in bringing them to life and that we meant our words. This was the key point for their 'transformation', somewhere in the middle of the project's implementation, when most of the class students ceased to behave in apathy and started to actively engage in the process. This was the basis for the passing from their individuality to collective formations and activities of the class.

In educational commons, children are considered capable of making decisions and shaping their daily lives. This challenges the prevailing idea that children can only learn certain things at certain ages. Children in the learning communities of the study through everyday practices, such as children's assembly, sociocracy circle etc., experienced themselves the role of citizenship within the boundaries of their community. 'Citizenship' in education is linked to an eminently political question: 'what is your image of the child and childhood?'. The image of the child as a commoner challenges the dominant stereotypical discourses for children, which marginalize them, as they are considered by nature immature and incapable of participating in the social and political scene [41]. It also challenges the image of a selfish child who does not care about others: For example, the adage 'Let's check to see who is crying, guys' appears frequently in Little Tree. Instantaneous crying is a common response to minor conflicts between young children or when they are hit while playing in a group of children. Crying is a social expression that solicits assistance, communicates a need, validates, and strengthens bonds between people. When a youngster screams, the others put an end to what they are doing and focus on the individual who is pleading for assistance. Children pick up and use phrases like 'Are you okay?', 'Do you need anything?', 'How can I help you?', and 'Do you need a hug?' extremely quickly. In the community, small acts of kindness—like lending a hand to someone who has fallen, offering a drink of water, or offering a tissue—occur touchingly frequently, and educators support them in any way they can. Children easily absorb acts of mutual aid and empathy and gladly repeat them at every chance in an environment of respect, freedom, and diverse ages and skills.

Furthermore, in one of the preschools in Thessaloniki, a child from the next class came over and started sobbing nonstop, causing two children to react in an unplanned way by showing him unselfish love, devotion, and concern. The same thing happened to a young child who was having trouble adjusting to being away from his mother and a girl who was guarding him during what she perceived as vulnerable times. Additionally, one child informed the researchers that he wasn't feeling well and was a little sleepy before we even began the intervention. To support the boy's propensity for self-care, the researchers asked him what he believed would be helpful. He responded—surprised at the promptness of the response—that he needed to relax and lie down for 30 min, precisely outside the classroom, where the children' coats were situated. He did leave and lay down on his own for a half hour and then returned, demonstrating our trust in his judgment and commitment to the arrangement we had formed. Furthermore, two girls offered to save others by inviting them to share their raft during a game of self-activity and problem solving that took

place at the beginning of the interventions, but it turned out that most of the children were only interested in their own rescue.

4.2 Commoning Practices

The commoning practices in the educational field is a form of minor politics, which develop around specific themes that are critical stakes in society, such as childhood and adulthood, education, and community. Minor politics in educational settings undermine the power of dominant discourses which define what is true and rational and hence govern our acting and doing; and move discussion, for example, from the application of a practice which is deemed as developmentally appropriate to the politics of developmentality, or from speaking about interventions and regulations on 'the child in need' to the politics of the image of the child ([20], 145).

Minor politics of the commons might create a convivial environment for facilitating and supporting the practice of 'care of the self', making a space for critical thinking and democratic discussion about subjectivity, opening possibilities for new relations to self and the world (ibid, 146). For example, during the assemblies in the public preschool in Thessaloniki (2nd round), children formed several group rituals related to convivial tools. Using a totem to organize discussions, greeting 'our little dove'—an imaginary friend who needs our love, care, and tranquility—sitting in a circle on the floor, thumbs up/down to make decisions, and saying goodbye after each meeting by forming a tight circle, piling their hands on top of one another, and saying aloud 'Shiny Little Stars,' the name of the group the children chose during the meeting. Through open-ended games and drama games, researchers and teachers provided young children the time and space to find and develop their own priorities while assuring that they were engaging equally and without any conflicts. Moreover, during the second round, the children asked to have about ten minutes to express their thoughts and share their experiences. The researchers and preschool teachers decided to give room (the first 10 min of the interventions), where they could talk about anything they wanted, such as home issues, their dreams, hobbies, or just plain thoughts. This made the children feel better and helped the class become more cohesive.

Some routines were also generated, through the Sociocratic methodology, in the WONDER project of Mamagea (2nd round) in the public High School of Thessaloniki, some of which were: sitting and communicating in a circle, looking (with eyes and body) the speaking person, active listening; showing their consent with corporal expressions of 'like', 'dislike' or 'so and so' (using either a thumb or both of hands) etc.. 'Rituals' were also important; as for example, within the processes of 'check in' and 'check out' to pose the questions 'how do I come in the circle?' and 'how do I leave the circle?'. In this way, time and space were given for the participants' feelings and particularities. Class students were initially making fun of it because they were not used to expressing their feelings within the school environment, however, they seemed to like it and commonly use it as the project evolved.

Another important highlight from the same case study is that new understandings of the common resources—here, the school yard—introduces new practices and uses of it. The first step, within this respect, was to give to the students the opportunity to map the school yard; they were asked to trace spaces and places as well as its common uses. The next step was to bring to the map's surface the invisible spaces; the ones where vulnerable groups of school children tend to go and hide; spaces of isolation and spaces of gender discrimination. Within the map making processes, the classmates worked collectively, and they showed a great interest and joy. The maps created attempted to be a new view of the uses of the school yard and a stimulus for reflection for the youngsters. Followingly, we accompanied students in a visioning methodology, within which we asked them: to put into words and emotions 'how the school yard appears in their dreams'; to place themselves and others in there and; to imagine new imaginary ways of using the space. Our aim was to transform the current school yard's uses into imaginary ones, to expand the boundaries of 'what the realistic is'. Then, we mapped the youngsters' ideas and images per category and created the first mind map. This map, together with the previous ones, offered new understandings and imaginaries of the school yard that provided triggers for new uses; in this way, the yard started to be a place of our meetings and working during the project.

The final step of the collective decision-making process was to organize the students' ideas by using the S.W.O.T. and S.M.A.R.T. analysis in order to find out what interventions in the school yard are more realistic—under the new understandings of realistic—and according to our project's framework. In addition, students decided by consent that they wanted a football pitch within the yard and graffiti related to this topic. Here it is important to remind that the four (4) girls of the class also acknowledged the need for a football pitch and consented to the proposal although they wouldn't become actual users of it. Even more, students were encouraged to prepare an official document and a layout of their proposal as a request towards the Municipality's Department for Technical Services. Finally, they participated in the open celebration of the school year's ending with a full presentation of their project, proposal and graffiti. Through *peer governance* people make decisions, set limits, follow rules, accept responsibility, and resolve disagreements on an equal footing. It is a trustworthy way for children/students, teachers and educators, and parents/guardians to forge sincere bonds with one another and a cohesive kind of commons.

Students of the public secondary school of Thessaloniki from the WONDER project of Mamagea (2nd round) also experienced *peer governance* through various processes based on the Sociocratic Circle Method (SCM) [34, 36, 49] Following the circle structure of discussion, *the decision making* was made with consent after a process of 'shaping the consent' under the SCM facilitated by the certified facilitator. The consent has contributed that all voices were heard and included in the final decisions, that participants were happy with them as well as committed to the tasks. In addition, by this process students discovered and fostered their own priorities and improved active inclusion. *'Open election'* for roles distribution contributed a lot in the change of the students' representation of the 'other' and following to the

creation of 'trust', as a basis of collective bonds. The process supported the students to acknowledge and speak out the positive characteristics of the 'other' and, therefore, of themselves. This very fact empowered them—even the most introverted ones—to take on roles, to be responsible for the realization of their tasks, to have trust in others and to actively involved in *collective activities*. The following quotes related to this transformation come from the researcher's diary notes: "It was not something that they took over with joy and pleasure; instead, we had to work a lot in the roles distribution. A decisive point was when we followed the open election process of the Sociocratic Circle Method, within which we asked them to elect the presenter's role and to give positive arguments for him/her. It was encouraging to hear that they could see in depth the others' capacities and talents and say something good for them, contrary to their previous pattern of 'judging'. After this process, it was easier to find presenters for the day."

In the public preschools of the study in Thessaloniki, through open-ended drama games, children gained abilities for peer governance. Researchers used Augusto Boal's 'Stop and Go' methodology to 'freeze' the children and hear their thoughts at crucial moments. They also called for brief assemblies to give children the chance to express their opinions fairly on how they built their game. The classroom rules were developed by all the children. Children were given the authority to behave as social agents actively participating in 'public life' when they impulsively urged the other children to be quiet in an effort to take action and so contribute to the regulation of the latter. Children were encouraged to remind other children to follow the rules they have set for themselves rather than having researchers do it for them. As a result, some of the responsibility is shifted to the children and the researchers avoid exercising complete vertical power, which leads to more horizontal peer-to-peer governance. When we need to make a group decision, like where to hide the treasure, we listen to everyone's ideas and make a choice based on what the majority of children desire. Also, children were given a box with an upper side opening similar to a ballot box so they could communicate with the researchers while they were not present. This demonstrated to young children that their voice mattered and that everything they had to say would be heard, empowering them to behave as social agents and actively participate in society. All of these instances involved democratic open discussion and the engagement of most of the children of the class.

Similar instances were also denoted in the Collaborative Design Commons study as children participated actively in different phases of the project sharing skills for the use of tools and artifacts and supporting each other to express ideas publicly either orally, in writing and through drawings and constructions. It was noted that opportunities for children to alternate roles in these processes created for them trajectories for transformative growth not only for the children who were assumed as not having yet these types of knowledge or modalities to communicate but also for those who assumed for being able and thus in need for leaving that privileged position behind. In a commons-based education, the teacher and the students work together to *co-create learning* experiences rather than aiming for a preset result that was planned specifically for them [39]. *Peer learning* is a popular practice in educational commons where children collaborate, support one another, and use their knowledge

and abilities to teach younger children while also learning themselves. Peer learning can be viewed as a method of co-learning without the involvement of a teacher, as well as a manner of facilitating the process of co-constructing knowledge.

One of the themes that emerged from the WONDER project (1st round) was "Designing together with children and promoting community building". The participants co-shaped their ideas for the school yard during the participatory design process. This tendency has been seen in many other experiments when participants shared an aim [29]. Children's roles are frequently constrained and directed by adults, even in the context of participatory planning [48]. In light of this, the educators in our situation made an effort to avoid imposing their opinions on the group's other participants, instead serving as a facilitator and offering their own knowledge and experience. Strong connections among educators, researchers, parents/guardians, and children were built through the workshops. During the participatory design process, every time the responsibility was given to the children, there was, in general, excitement. Old and new participants collaborated smoothly during the participatory design session. The new members first struggled to operate independently and were reluctant to take the initiative. But the older members—the children—took the initiative to assist the younger members. In the participatory planning (bottom-up approaches) process of the study, the users actively engaged in it, in contrast to the traditional design methods (top-down approaches) where the participating components are typically the designer (active role) and the client (passive role). Because it encourages respect and understanding for the protection and maintenance of the place, this participatory planning led to a more immediate and in-depth appropriation of a space by users [9]. Users participated in all phases of the educational project, from planning to the final formulation of the developmental process of the plan, using the three primary levels of participatory planning (information, co-planning, and co-decision). In addition to transforming the expert-user collaboration into ongoing, mutual learning, participation also turns the process into an organic one with the goal of enhancing place—and community-based identity [18].

4.3 Community

In a world where inequalities increase more and more, democracy is challenged, competition, individualism and an intensified exploitation of the environment is experienced and where the coexistence of people's contrasting interests, values and cultures trigger racism and xenophobia, there is an urgent need to rethink and reshape the concept of community. According to the sociological theories of late modernity and the post-traditional risk society, individualism becomes the key feature of contemporary societies [2, 3, 23]. Although they contribute significantly to the understanding of the relationship between the individual and the social in the late modern era, they appear largely abstract and detached from people's everyday lives and experiences. They focus exclusively on individualism and ignore the elements of solidarity, cooperation, collective meaning making, and struggle for common

values. Therefore, they fail to offer a comprehensive description of contemporary social reality. Moreover, these theories fail to acknowledge that traditional class and gender divisions of people still affect the life chances of individuals, although their effect is increasingly indistinguishable from the subjects ([42], 147–149).

Additionally, several important philosophers, such as Nancy [33], Esposito [22] and Agamben [1] have responded to the need to reshape the concepts of community, commons, and politics. The philosophical approaches of these theorists are very interesting, however, as Kioupkiolis [25] points out, they remain trapped at an abstract level of an ontology of being-together. They construct the 'common' as an ontology of co-existence cut off from any real political practice. They do not engage with central issues of democratic politics such as dominant forms of power and specific forms of collective action struggling to defend and shield democracy. Consequently, they fail to focus their analysis on key concepts around which societies and communities develop, such as antagonism, segregation, power, and hegemony. These concepts have been adequately developed in the work of Laclau and Mouffe [28] and, recently, utilized to theorize why adolescents refuse formal knowledge such as mathematics [13]. To the critical remarks by Kioupkiolis [25], we could add the absence in the work of the above theorists of an actual educational policy of commons that would aim for an ontology of coexistence and sharing ([42], 147–154).

The concept and value of community is central to any form of commons. Therefore, in order to understand the concept of community in its complexity and materiality and not only in abstract terms, we have carried out research in the framework of SMOOTH in formal and non-formal education settings, where emphasis was placed on the process of commoning governance, self-formation, as well as on the practices of conflict resolution within educational commons, which create a strong sense of belonging to the community. Specifically, the two preschools in Thessaloniki have enacted peer learning, collective decision-making, and open, reflective conversations all contributed to a stronger sense of community among the children. Additionally, during some activities, participants created small artifacts together, such as two drawings done in collaboration, a story with illustrations they called 'Athropocrocodile Tale' based on a drama game they had played earlier in the day, and a spaghetti and marshmallow tower. Most crucially, children co-produced calm and respectful conditions of sharing, cooperating, and coexisting during drama games.

In relation to the community, the Collaborative Design Commons study made efforts to create a sense of community not only amongst children as classmates but also between the school and the parents including their worldviews as well as amongst children in the school community and students at the two departments of education and architecture at the University of Thessaly. For this, *first* the school project based on the idea of 'the island' supported for creating bonds across children, adults, and the idea of 'the island' as a place to be imagined, inquired, understood, constructed, and transformed into something that could become children's own space to work with. Children brought into the classroom stories and materials from their homes such as pictures, pebbles or, even, sand from the islands that they or their relatives had visited. In addition, maps were also brought into the classroom for the children to explore and find out what an island looks like when represented on two-dimensional

maps and even when it had to be scaled down so that it fits on a piece of paper and, thus, opening up mathematical questions of size and scale. Issues of counting and measuring were thus introduced as tools for inquiring and identifying in approximation questions related to size and scale. *Second,* a dialogue was created amongst the school children's work on 'the island' and students at the university through organizing workshops where children's constructions and ideas were listened to and encountered for a co-design experience of artifacts related with 'the island' idea. This dialogue was supported with discussions amongst children and students, the workshops, and a padlet was created that documented visually the whole process of pedagogic experimentation (https://padlet.com/dan_iii/reclaiming-place-and-maths-as-commons-through-affective-spac-sloq5f7vz93rb5uy). *Finally,* the tribute issue of the school newspaper opened the project not only to the school community but also the communities of nearby schools and the neighborhood as well as the final year school ending celebrations where children shared their work and the university student artifacts with everybody.

In the High School of Thessaloniki from the WONDER project of Mamagea (2nd round), we cannot argue either that a 'community' was shaped, instead a 'sparkle' of a school community emerged that provoked 'cracks' in the school everyday life. This school community, consisting of school students, teachers and experts of the SMOOTH project co-shaped and put the basis for the co-governance of the common source; the school yard. This 'community building' was implemented through a series of steps, highly based on the Sociocratic Circle Method, starting from the individual towards the school environment. Four aspects in this process are interesting to note. *First,* students' empowerment; participation in issues of their concern. The participatory planning and intervention in the school yard through the Sociocratic Circle Method helped students—even the most introverted ones—to take on roles and to be responsible for the realization of their tasks. When the classmates were discussing the creation of graffiti on the yard's wall, a girl spontaneously started to draw some design drafts. She was receiving poor support from her classmates, so she asked for help from schoolmates experienced in graffiti. We shall highlight that these girls were not experienced graffiti makers, however they stood up in a boys-graffiti-world; they believed in themselves and took the initiative to make graffiti related to football, a traditionally man's field, from scratch. Their motto from the beginning was "what counts is the effort". *Second,* the transformation of teachers and active involvement. A transformation was noticed in the attitude of the High School's Principal during the realization of the project; at the beginning she was suspicious and negative towards the class students' initiatives and proposals. However, when she learned that they took an active stance and they had already found a way to finance the graffiti she proposed, alternatively, that the school council could cover the cost and she motivated them to continue with the other activities. Hence, her attitude, which was highly influencing the other teachers', was generally positive and more active towards the class's activities. *Third,* sharing with other classes. At the same time, the class children aimed to share the progress of their project with the other school students. Thus, on the last day of their school year, an open celebration was organized in the school yard where they presented the project and the Sociocratic

Circle Method; their request towards the Municipality's Department for Technical Services for a new football field and the layout; the initial mental maps of the school yard as well as the graffiti. The other school students appeared to be highly interested and raised questions in this respect. Even more, some school students, experienced in graffiti making, helped the girls' team within the relative task. And *fourth,* joy and happiness. Joy and happiness were important factors in the implementation of the case study, since both of them seemed to have been missing from the students' school life. By providing some snapshots of collective activity and joy within the implementation of the WONDER project, students seemed to have enjoyed it a lot, and this fact can be a meaningful contribution to their school's day life.

In all case studies, the dominant relations of dependency between children and adults are being challenged whilst the values of 'autonomy' and 'self-formation' are promoted for the emancipation of children within the communities formed. The concept of dependency, in general, implies vulnerability and precariousness. This is particularly evident in relation to children, who according to prevailing discourses on childhood are considered vulnerable by nature and therefore need to be dependent on invulnerable and powerful adults. In these cases, 'dependency' refers to forms of power that threaten and violently undermine children's status. In this context, misconceptions about 'humanity' are created on a bipolar axis, i.e., there are vulnerable children on the one hand and invulnerable or strong adults on the other. In this sense, 'dependency' occupies a central position in the hegemonic violent dispositif/apparatus of the educational institution. However, 'dependency' can take other forms and contents. The concept of 'dependency' is ambiguous and ambivalent. In the case studies of the SMOOTH project, dependence on one another is inevitable and necessary because everyone is seen as vulnerable, not just children. One cannot survive and thrive without interdependence and a supportive environment ([42], 152–154). In this sense, the value of community is of utmost importance for members of the diverse pedagogical sites presented here.

Interdependence, solidarity, collectivity, participation, recognition and acceptance of diversity and autonomy, self-formation, movement, and experimentation are the materials with which the community of educational commons is built. The community that emerges from educational activity and peer governance is not perceived as a closed and fixed and consolidated entity, but as an assemblage of evolving encounters between people and groups that coexist and symbiote. The community is evolving as each participant influences and is open to be influenced by the other [21]. An education of the commons aims at the collective and equal formation of a community consisting of people with different perceptions, values, beliefs, and interests that are very likely to cause antagonism and conflicts between them. It is therefore necessary to resolve conflicts or disagreements that arise, for the benefit of both the individual and the community to which they belong, thereby promoting its sustainability and resilience. The way children dealt with disagreements and conflicts that had been arising among themselves during the investigation was a significant issue that came to light in Little Tree. The educators aimed to explore the ideals of cooperation, solidarity, and nonviolent communication with the young children in the Little Tree's environment. In this situation, the adults provided the children with communication

tools by recommending the various ways they can ask for what they want, express their emotions, or set boundaries. During the pedagogical documentation, it has been found that children not only use these tools in a useful and efficient manner, but also create new ones on their own. Additionally, some children take on the role of a mediator or facilitator to assist other children in settling conflicts.

Finally, in order to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors—since some behaviors may be (un)acceptable for some people but not for others—active listening and conflict resolution practices [4] were used in the public preschools in Thessaloniki. Simple descriptive behaviors were distinguished from those that included elements of personal judgment, active listening exercises, emotion recognition, empathy-building, practice in responding to unacceptable behaviors, and experiential pantomimes (i.e., bullying management through I-Messages like, "When you shout at me, I feel afraid," for instance). This point refers to one of the basic design principles of a common proposed by Ostrom [35], namely the need for commoners to co-create conflict resolution mechanisms for the maintenance and well-being of a community of the commons.

5 Conclusions

The SMOOTH project as enacted through the Greek commonsverse has yielded evidence for combating inequalities from participatory observation in different case studies, ´discussion with preschoolers and students in focus group interviews, evaluation games, and feedback from teachers and educators. Specific conclusionary remarks for each one of the case studies summarize as following:

First, at the *Little Tree*, young children (2–5 years old) are treated as capable decision-makers within a micro-community, fostering active citizenship. Children readily embrace mutual aid and empathy in an environment of respect, freedom, and diverse ages and skills. *Second,* at the two *preschools in Thessalonik*i, active listening and conflict resolution practices are essential for peer learning and governance. Rituals within learning and decision-making processes contribute to self and other understanding. *Third* at the Collaborative Design Commons study, age, gender, and ability affect children's awareness, active participation in all classroom activities and in processes of artefact making, dramatisation and transforming. Teachers play a vital role for mediating values like sympathy, dialogue and self-other awareness but also techniques for making artefacts that involve important mathematical ideas. Cooperation between children and teachers at preschool and students at the university departments creates bridges for transdisciplinary knowledge construction across mathematics, arts and crafts. And *fourth*, *at the WONDER Project of Mamagea*, older students (approximately 16 years old) need to experience respect, validation, and opportunities to shape their own environment by themselves. Involving students in decision-making processes is crucial for a vibrant school life. The Sociocratic Circle Method empowers students in peer governance.

Based on the findings discussed above three main points must be noted here. *First,* it is feasible for education to enact the commons. Educational commons are frequently established outside the formal education system in small-scale libertarian communities of non-formal systems, although the logic of the commons can be developed and gain ground in public formal education as well. *Second,* educational commons can be realized in the 'here and now' even within the formal educational institution. And *third,* promoting social inclusion for children and youth can be experienced as 'nowtopias'.

Moreover, specific reflections and recommendations for further work in the Greek commonsverse could include the following points:

- The collaborative management of educational commons by the school community must be considered as work in progress.
- Public preschools are more open to new approaches as compared to primary and secondary schools.
- Public schools face challenges due to rigid Ministry programs and the pressure exerted by the capitalist market on education and curricula.
- Teachers need support for pedagogical processes, including participatory peer practices.
- The local community plays a crucial role in shaping the school environment.
- Strengthen cooperation among preschools, primary and secondary schools, academic institutions, and other members of the communities.

As a final point, one could denote that studies like this can challenge the status quo of contemporary schooling and work towards inspiring educators for enacting new concepts, methods, and actions for educational commons. We believe that this could foster democratic 'nowtopias' in the Greek commonsverse.

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Children, Citizenship, and Commons: Insights from Three Case Studies in Lisbon on the 3 C's

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Abstract Listening to children in educational settings is vital for establishing inclusive and equitable environments. This approach recognizes children as active agents and contributors to their education, enabling them to express their needs and participate in decision-making processes. By involving children in educational discourse, pedagogical practices can better align with their interests, resulting in more effective, engaging, and democratic learning experiences. The synergy between Childhood Studies and Educational Sciences underscores the necessity of heeding children's voices to enhance educational quality and foster active citizenship. This chapter presents the findings of the SMOOTH subproject—RED_*Rights, Equity, and Diversity in Educational Contexts*. It conducted three case studies in Lisbon, Portugal, involving focus groups with children from diverse educational contexts, involving both formal and non-formal settings, between September and October 2022. These studies aimed to explore diverse dimensions of the educational commons concept, including *children's roles as commoners*, *commoning practices*, and *communal aspects related to goods and values* within educational and community settings. The findings apprise children's perspectives as citizens and commoners, highlighting their creativity, self-awareness, interests, and active participation in activities. Additionally, they shed light on emotional and expressive reactions and highlight intersectionality issues within these contexts. This research underscores the vital importance of listening to children, ultimately enhancing educational quality, and promoting active citizenship.

This paper is supported by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under grant agreement 101004491. Project SMOOTH—Educational Commons and Active Social Inclusion: https://smooth-ecs.eu/.

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G. Cappello et al. (eds.), *Educational Commons*, UNIPA Springer Series,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51837-9_11

Keywords Children · Citizenship · Commons · Portuguese educational settings

1 Introduction

Over the past three decades, children's participation has emerged as a significant and prominent subject of discussion, particularly following the enactment of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN 1989). This has led to the development of a substantial *corpus* of legal and scientific literature, both at the international and national levels. These contributions originate from fields such as Childhood Studies, Child Rights Studies, and Educational Sciences [7, 11, 14, 17, 19, 36], shedding light on the challenges associated with children's participation and its profound impact on their daily lives as they seek to fully realise their identities as citizens and rights holders.

However, children continue to be excluded from full citizenship status, becoming "waiting citizens" [23]. They face exclusion and invisibility in the public and sociopolitical sphere [18, 32, 33, 35, 39, 41], including at school, where they spend most of their time.

Children are subjects with the right to actively participate in social, cultural, and educational life. They possess the capacity to influence collective decisions and engage in community life. This aspect constitutes a central dimension in the development of the child-citizen paradigm [14, 16, 30, 38] and the existence of horizons of possibility in favour of education as a common good [5, 8, 40]. It is important to think about a different perspective of education to build the common(s). Education, as a common good, stands as a fundamental pillar of political empowerment for both children and adults [27].

These are indeed some of the fundamental dimensions of the SMOOTH project, titled *Educational Common Spaces: Passing through Enclosures and Reversing Inequalities* (Horizon 2020, EU). Specifically, the project aims to develop and implement the concept of educational commons. This concept provides an alternative framework of principles and actions that pertain to shared and open educational resources, materials, and practices. These resources are collaboratively developed, maintained, and made accessible, ultimately benefiting a broader educational community.

Informed by a dialogue between the fields of Childhood Studies and Educational Sciences, and situated within the context of the SMOOTH project, this chapter presents the findings and reflections of the subproject RED_*Rights, Equity, and Diversity in Educational Contexts*, which conducted three case studies in Lisbon, Portugal, by NOVA team. These case studies explored the three dimensions of the educational commons concept: (i) *the role of children as commoners* [27] refers to their involvement in and contributions to common resources and shared spaces, particularly in the context of educational and communal settings*;* (ii) *commoning practices*, delved into elements such as sharing, caring, cooperation, and conflict resolution within these communities; and the (iii) *communal aspects of goods and values,*

examined aspects of community belonging, collaboration among stakeholders, intercultural dialogue, and social integration. These dimensions are grounded in core principles of *sharing*, *caring*, and *cooperation.*

This chapter presents qualitative findings obtained through methodological procedures used to collect and analyse children's perspectives on the three dimensions across the three educational settings. Prior to this, we introduce the conceptual framework of the research.

2 Concepts Utilised and Associated Perspectives

2.1 Children as Commoners

The concept of children as citizens with rights has evolved from the recognition of children as active individuals entitled to engage in the public sphere and within the socio-political context [1, 15, 19, 31, 38]. Children's participation is a multifaceted and intricate process, encompassing both a valuable learning experience and a fundamental individual and collective child right, which serves to reinforce democratic values [6, 7, 20]. The epistemological and theoretical-methodological heritage of the Childhood Studies has extensively investigated children's participation [11, 20, 37, 38]. However, there are challenges associated with establishing and implementing structures and processes to actively engage with and consider children's perspectives and agency. It is, however, crucial to listen to them, recognizing their existence and their social and political competence. However, it is recognized that children's participation is often crossed by adultism [21, 22], asymmetrical power and domination relations, especially in educational contexts. Children's voices, a complex and vague terminology, must always be considered from specific institutional contexts, inherently multidimensional and conflictual [10]. Being attentive not only to verbal communication and actions but also to the diverse languages employed by children, including their moments of silence and non-verbal expressions, is crucial for truly listening to and comprehending children's perspectives and recognizing the implications of their voices.

2.2 Commoning Practices and Childhood

Commoning involves the management and communal sharing of resources, the collaborative creation of entities, and cooperative efforts aimed at achieving shared objectives within a community of individuals [4, 5]. Those engaged in commoning processes are individuals who emphasise the importance of mutual care. Acts such as volunteering, altruism, selflessness, peer-assistance, and mutual support can all be regarded as synonymous with commoning [3].

Commoning encompasses the act of establishing and managing a shared resource based on principles of openness, equality, collaborative participation, diversity, and sustainability. The educational commons encompass the communal ownership and control of educational resources and processes by a community [27]. This extends beyond conveying formal knowledge about rights and responsibilities, encompassing identity development across sociopolitical, cultural, and economic aspects. The notion of educational commons is associated with citizenship, but it diverges from conventional formal education-based citizenship. The educational commons represent an alternative pedagogical approach capable of fostering democratic transformation [27]. This potential emerges from the structure of the commons, which brings together common goods, rules, and "commoners." In the context of education, these participants encompass both adults and children, both of whom contribute to shaping community practices and regulations through their active engagement and participation in decision-making processes.

Building upon this perspective, Childhood Studies [11, 13, 34], as mentioned above, introduced a critical perspective on redefining our understanding of childhood as a social construct and the role of children as active agents. This counter-hegemonic perspective on childhood introduces complexities that have an impact on the relationships between adults and children, including within educational settings.

2.3 Community and Common Goods and Childhood

Within the realm of sociological and educational literature, a growing discourse has arisen regarding education's status as a shared asset and the adoption of a communal perspective on education [2, 24–27]. The idea of common goods indicates a transformation of public institutions, emphasising increased citizen and community involvement in the implementation of viable policies and practices. This shift aims to move away from utilitarian and individualistic approaches, ultimately fostering the development of more democratic education systems. Furthermore, the concept of education as a common good challenges the prevailing utilitarian model that views education solely as an individual socio-economic investment. Instead, it advocates for a humanistic perspective that prioritises individuals and their interconnectedness with the community [24]. Elinor [26] concept of 'commons' refers to shared resources managed collectively and equitably by communities. She advocates for principles of collective ownership as effective alternatives to privatisation or external regulation. Ostrom emphasises the importance of community-based sustainable frameworks, extending the concept of common goods to encompass social relationships and various educational assets, both physical and intangible. In education, this involves collaboration within interconnected networks to ensure the well-being of individuals and collective resources.

3 Methodology and Ethics

The qualitative research conducted in this study promotes a dialogue between the fields of Childhood Studies, specifically Sociology of Childhood, and Educational Sciences. Its primary objective is to document children's perspectives and experiences concerning their roles within school and community contexts. Additionally, it explores their viewpoints on aspects such as sharing, care, cooperation, and conflict resolution within these communities, as well as their sense of belonging to the community.

The research comprises three distinct case studies conducted by the NOVA research team, involving children from kindergarten, the 1st, and the 2nd Cycle of Basic Education (CBE) across one private school and two public schools located in Lisbon, Portugal. The research was carried out between March 2022 and June 2023. In this chapter, we focused uniquely on the period during which the focus groups were conducted, which occurred between September and October 2022. Given the various ways in which these focus groups were organised, it was necessary to adapt the provided script, encompassing the three dimensions and questions, for all SMOOTH partners. This adaptation became necessary due to delays encountered in the NOVA case studies (CS) resulting from bureaucratic and contextual challenges. Additionally, researchers introduced extra questions to improve the quality of interactions with the children. In the case of younger participants, there were instances where they showed resistance. Although these children initially participated enthusiastically in the focus groups, they later exhibited restlessness, which included interruptions and signs of fatigue. To address these challenges, the interviews were structured with intermittent breaks for play, providing the children with opportunities to refocus and actively engage in the interviews afterward.

Demonstrating a firm commitment to children's rights and adhering to ethical research practices with children [12, 29] we obtained informed consent from responsible adults and the participating children. In all three contexts, children's voluntary participation in focus groups was a fundamental criterion for conducting the interviews, ensuring anonymity, confidentiality, and promoting more equitable power relations and information sharing.

In our research, we exclusively interviewed children, but we received support from adult supervisors overseeing the groups. For the kindergarten, we had a 38-year-old educator with 12 years of experience and a 27-year-old educational assistant with 3 years of experience. In the 1st cycle, a 44-year-old teacher with 10 years of experience, four at the current school, led the group. In the 2nd cycle, a 54-year-old teacher with nearly 30 years of experience, five at this school, was responsible for the group.

Twelve focus groups were conducted in total, with four in kindergarten, five in the 1st Cycle of Basic Education (CBE), and 3 in the 2nd CBE. Each group consisted of 3–4 children. We employed semi-structured scripts from the SMOOTH project containing questions grouped into three research dimensions (see Table 1 in the annex for details).

Table 1 Children's perspectives for each of the cores—Synthesis

Core dimension and number of questions	Sub-dimensions	Typology/nature of the questions	Children's perspectives
1—children as commoners (25Q)	• Children's response as creative and self-aware subjects • Children's interest and participation in activities • Children's emotional and expressive reactions • Children's living conditions and status (intersectionality issues)	Favourite activities in an educational context Educational environment Children's participation (times, spaces, materials, activity proposals)	**Best experiences at school** Play with friends, draw, and participate in school activities (kindergarten and 1st CBE) **Worst experiences at school** Conflicts between peers (kindergarten and 1st CBE) Some activities/subjects (1st CBE) **Diversity, inclusion, and justice** Demonstrated empathy between peers in the 3 contexts, and shared positive experiences of inclusion and welcome with foreign children (1st and 2nd CEB) or younger children (kindergarten)
2—commoning practices (30Q)	• Sharing and caring • Cooperating and collective creativity • Engaged citizenship • Conflict resolution • Conviviality	Peer interactions and collaboration in group activities Participation Participation and gender Participation and social inequalities	**Working in groups** More freedom to choose which group to join (kindergarten) Limited flexibility regarding collaborative activities (1st and 2nd CEB) **Gender** Perception of gender distinctions in play linked to specific spaces (kindergarten) and the distribution of group work responsibilities (2nd CEB), with a focus on inclusive play regardless of gender (1st CEB) **Conflicts** Children discussed conflicts and how they are resolved, including seeking help from adults such as assistants and teachers (1st and 2nd CEB) Children emphasise the importance of helping their friends and, in cases of conflict, resolution usually involves talking, apologising, and sometimes temporarily stopping playing (kindergarten)

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Core dimension and number of questions	Sub-dimensions	Typology/nature of the questions	Children's perspectives
3—community and the common good (18Q)	• Community belongingness and educational commons • Collaboration with local community members (parents, educators, practitioners, etc.) for developing commons attitudes • Intercultural and intergenerational dialogue and social integration	Relationship with the community, territory and public space Family participation at school Interaction in extended sociability networks at school Activities and belongings outside of school Policy, processes and actors	**Cultural Context Inclusion:** In the context of cultural background, children living near the school have a stronger connection to their school neighbourhoods, while those who live farther away feel disconnected. Kindergarten children, on the other hand, live in close neighbourhoods and have a sense of belonging. The kindergarten context encourages neighbourhood socialisation through grassroots associations and events, even for those living farther away. In contrast, the 1st CBE school struggles with limited family involvement, and caregivers face challenges in taking children to extracurricular activities due to resource and time constraints. Similarly, the 2nd CBE context lacks a strong connection between neighbourhood projects and the school, and family involvement is minimal, with attendance primarily limited to disciplinary or academic meetings **Peer education and common goods:** In the 1st CBE and kindergarten contexts, peer interaction and collaborative activities are encouraged and facilitated. However, in the 2nd CBE context, there are limitations due to restricted time and space, particularly after class, which hinder opportunities for peer interaction and collaboration **Social inclusion:** Children from vulnerable social groups continue to present a persistent challenge in all three contexts. The kindergarten context demonstrates relatively more success in addressing this challenge due to the reduced social and intersectional differences among its children

Table 2 Analysis of schools, number of children, and their socioeconomic status—summary for 2022/2023

Indicators	Kindergarten	1st CBE	2nd CEB
School territorial insertion	Urban context	Urban context (TEIP)	
Socioeconomic composition	Predominance of the middle class	Predominance of the lower class	
Number of children/class	25	23	24
Number of female children	12	10	10
Number of male children	13	13	14

Source Data collected under the RED—SMOOTH project

3.1 Context and Participants

The case studies were conducted in three schools located in Lisbon, Portugal. These schools are situated in areas affected by processes such as gentrification, touristification, fragmentation, and institutionalisation, which have led to significant socioeconomic, cultural, linguistic, and educational diversity. The two public schools are situated within the urban context and are part of Educational Territories of Priority Intervention (TEIP). In each of the three contexts studied, there were classes consisting of 25 children in kindergarten, 23 children in the 1st Cycle of Basic Education (CBE), and 24 children in the 2nd CBE. These schools are in two distinct neighbourhoods within Lisbon. Importantly, it is worth noting that both the 1st and 2nd CBE schools predominantly cater to students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, as illustrated in Table 2.

The kindergarten is associated with the Pink School, a Private Institution of Social Solidarity, and follows the Pedagogical Model of the Modern School Movement.[1] It caters to 25 children aged 3 to 6, primarily of Portuguese nationality (see Table 3). The 1st CBE (White School) is part of a school cluster in Lisbon, comprising three educational institutions. Our research encompassed both formal and non-formal contexts, including Curricular Enrichment Activities (AEC in Portuguese). In this 1st CBE, the group of children displays significant ethnic and cultural diversity. While the school itself represents diverse social backgrounds, the case study group reflects a lower socio-economic status and consists of 23 children aged 6 to 8 from various countries (see Table 3). The 2nd CBE (Blue School) is also located within a Lisbon school cluster comprising four institutions. Our research primarily focused on the

[1] The Pedagogical Model of the Modern School Movement in Portugal, known as "Movimento da Escola Moderna" (MEM), is an educational approach characterized by progressive and student-centred teaching methods. It is influenced by the global modern education movement but has distinct features tailored to the Portuguese context. Key aspects of this model include a child-centred approach, cooperative and active learning, democratic classroom practices, an interdisciplinary curriculum, promotion of critical thinking, project-based learning, a commitment to inclusion and equity, and a focus on professional development.

formal context. The case study group from the 2nd CBE consists of 24 children aged 10–12, representing various nationalities (see Table 3).

4 Unveiling Children's Perspectives: Research Highlights

In this section, we delineate the findings obtained across the following dimensions: (i) Children as Commoners: Reflection on their rights and duties; (ii) Children's Acts of Commoning: Caring and showing concern for each other; (iii) Community and Common Goods: A sense of belonging to the neighbour.

4.1 Children as Commoners: Reflection on Their Rights and Duties

The most striking difference between the contexts is the approach to activities. In the kindergarten, there is a diverse array of activities for children to select from, promoting autonomy. In contrast, the other two schools require all children to participate in the same activity simultaneously, with a compulsory collective completion time, which frequently leads to frustration for the children. Additionally, during group activity discussions, children with more institutional experience expressed their views more assertively and sometimes prevented newcomers from sharing their thoughts.

The 2nd CBE group, which follows a traditional pedagogical model, struggled to comprehend the concept of rights. Many children in this group could not answer questions about rights because they lacked a fundamental understanding of the concept. For instance, when asked if they believed they had the same rights in the classroom, they remained silent. On the other hand, the 1st CBE group was able to articulate their responsibilities as pupils in their school, primarily related to organising classroom spaces. For example, Luisa suggested, "keeping the teacher's desk but adding a reading corner to the room". Marta chimed in, expressing the need for "a reading corner to read instead of just working and feeling uninformed". However, they found it unfair that there was a reading corner in preschool but not in the second grade, prompting Luisa's remark, "Very ridiculous" (1st CEB).

Children's speech highlights space issues in the 1st cycle, where there is a lack of equipped spaces for non-formal education activities, and the formal education room lacked recreational spaces until the SMOOTH project intervention. In contrast, kindergarten children had a clear understanding of their rights, as they frequently discussed them during their daily and weekly meetings.

In the 1st CBE, the teacher determines the nature and objectives of the activity, but in general children have autonomy in deciding how to carry it out. However,

Table 3 Socio-demographic characteristics of the children interviewed

Ages	Kindergarten		1.º CBE		2.º CBE	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
3	Carlos	Patrícia				
	Felipe	Lis				
	Rodrigo	Clara				
4	Diego	Rute				
	Daniel	Maria				
		Julia				
5	Martim	Carolina				
	David	Aline				
	Rafael	Joana				
	Francisco					
	Pedro					
	Bruno					
	Lucas					
	Anónio					
6	João	Ana	Guilherme			
		Susana				
7			Lucas	Marta[1]		
			José	Luisa		
			Fernando	Camila[2]		
			Rui	Carolina		
			Pedro	Júlia		
			Francisco	Letícia		
			Rafael	Joana		
			Gustavo	Catarina		
			Carlos	Yana[4]		
			Tiago			
			David			
			Marcelo			
			Sonam[3]			
8				Maria		
				Raquel[1]		
				Laura[2]		
10					Francisco	
					Tomás	
11					Mateus	Ana
					Tiago	Inês

(continued)

Table 3 (continued)

Ages	Kindergarten		1.º CBE		2.º CBE	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
					João[6]	Maria
					Pedro[2]	Carolina
					José	Clara[5]
					Francisco	Aline
					Ricardo	Natália
					David	Mariana[2]
					Gabriel	Luciana[3]
					Raj[7]	
					Roger[8]	
12					André	

Legend: [1]Venezuela; [2]Brazil; [3]Nepal; [4]Ukraine; [5]Cape-Verde; [6]São Tomé; [7]India; [8]United States of America

in the 2nd CBE, rules are established without children's input, serving as tools for control and reinforcing power dynamics, resulting in activities imposed on them.

The topic of excessive rules gains prominence in kindergarten, with children expressing their feelings about these rules during focus group discussions. The conversation revolves around numerous rules, such as not interrupting, not talking to the side, and not walking with Patricia and Susana mentioning the practice of leaving the room and returning, which they find challenging (kindergarten).

Adults primarily create the rules in both traditional education contexts (1st and 2nd CBE). When asked about school rules in the 1st CBE, a child mentions rules like "behave well, don't climb on the table, don't hide under the table, don't shout, don't get up without asking." (1st CBE). When questioned about who makes these rules, Leticia responds, "The teacher does!" (1st CBE), and the children remain silent and do not suggest any alternative rules.

In the 2nd CBE, children are aware that not following the rules results in punishment, such as being sent home and receiving a note from the teacher in their notebook. There are no formal or informal opportunities to discuss rules involving children, which means they do not see the possibility of making changes in this regard. They appear confused by the idea that they could have a say in creating rules, as they perceive rulemaking as something done exclusively by adults.

4.2 *Children's Acts of Commoning: Caring and Showing Concern for Each Other*

In the kindergarten, there is a strong emphasis on caring for and sharing with others, fostered through various activities. During outings or study visits, children always go out in pairs, with one older child paired with one younger child. This arrangement is intended to ensure the safety of the younger children, as Rafael mentioned, "When we went to the park, the little children had to stay on the side of the wall, because if they're not careful, a car could run over them." The goal is for one child to look after the other, and they are encouraged to participate in pairs. Rafael further explained that this pairing helps the younger children understand the different areas and encourages them to hold hands.

In situations where a child struggles to complete an activity, they are encouraged to seek help from a peer rather than an educator or educational assistant, promoting cooperation and collaboration among peers.

In the other two CBE contexts, children also displayed empathy and support for their younger peers, particularly those with disabilities or language barriers. They independently assisted their peers in understanding questions and provided explanations for why some children did not respond, such as shyness or language difficulties. Additionally, children took it upon themselves to organise the belongings of hyperactive peers who tended to create messes, demonstrating a sense of collective care and responsibility.

In the second CBE context, a child shared with the researcher, during the focus group interview, that he doesn't feel comfortable discussing his feelings in a group setting. This suggests a reluctance to express dislikes and a lack of self-reflection among the children. In general, adults handle conflict resolution, and the children are not informed about how these conflicts are resolved. Furthermore, issues arise from unfair comparisons and positive reinforcement, which can lead some children to feel inferior and unfairly treated. This, in turn, results in their reluctance to participate in certain activities. In both schools, some children expressed their dislike of certain activities due to the adults' tendency to make comparisons, which creates discomfort among the children.

The study identifies significant intersectional issues [9] influencing the responses and behaviours observed in the three CS contexts regarding social class, gender and migration background affecting their language skills, sense of inclusion, and interaction patterns.

The social class factor plays a significant role in shaping the responses and behaviours of primary school children during the interviews. This is reflected in their language use, sentence construction, and body language. Children from more literate family backgrounds have a conversation more fluidly. In contrast, children from less privileged backgrounds faced more difficulties, struggling to understand certain words. These children often displayed insecurity in expressing themselves openly, frequently interrupting sentences and asking to repeat questions or confirming if they were using correct language.

In 1st and 2nd CBE, children's perspectives on the world, especially concerning immigration issues, present notable challenges, as observed in the research. Language barriers are evident, with Brazilian and Angolan children facing difficulties in comprehending questions posed in Portuguese or English. Children with Portuguese as their first language but from different cultural backgrounds encounter identity-related obstacles. Stereotypes about countries persist, even among younger children, leading to Brazilian children feeling marginalised and hesitant to engage in conversations.

In the 2nd CBE, children with Portuguese as a second language faced communication challenges. To accommodate language diversity, the researcher divided the presentation of focus group topics into two parts, with Raj, Sonam, and Roger, non-Portuguese speakers. Raj volunteered to participate in the group, prompting the researcher to communicate in both Portuguese and English to ensure comprehension.

The gender factor was clearly visible in the organisation of the room's pre and post interviews. The girls who frequently cleaned the environments that the boys messed up and they did this without the researcher asking. The girls also play this organisational role in the activities, and the boys said that they often look for them to ask help to finish a task or to organise a group activity. During the interviews, the girls often voiced their concerns about boys leaving messes without cleaning up and instances of boys exhibiting violent behaviour during conflicts. Mariana from the kindergarten said, "when a girl hits or a boy hits, it's different (…) the boys hit harder, and the girls hit less." Subsequently the teachers from the three contexts also affirmed this when asked about the differences in how boys and girls resolve conflicts.

Individual characteristics and peer internal dissymmetry is another important issue. For example, in the 2nd CBE context, Clara and Maria displayed reserved and quiet behaviour, even during the focus group discussions. In contrast, both her peers and Aline herself recognized her as a leader. She expressed a preference for group work when collaborating with some peers, but she assumed her dissatisfaction with her science group due to interpersonal conflicts: "I enjoy group work when I have specific classmates. I want to work with… I did not really enjoy my science group. It was an activity I didn't like because my group didn't get along".

4.3 *Community and Common Goods: A Sense of Belonging to the Neighbour*

In each of the CS, children's integration into their respective cultural contexts varies significantly. In the 1st CBE, there are clear distinctions between two groups of children. Some commute from distant areas solely for school, while others are active members of the neighbourhood community. From a sociological perspective, these disparities are especially evident among children residing in more distant areas where discrimination and racism are part of daily life [28]. These children

frequently experience a sense of detachment and estrangement from their neighbourhood. This disconnection becomes evident when they engage in discussions about local parks and historical landmarks. In contrast, in the 2nd CBE, most children are divided between two neighbourhoods, and they demonstrate familiarity with urban spaces, mentioning places of interest like the skate park, gardens, and the Lisbon Mosque. They also engage in outdoor activities independently, such as playing football, cycling, and exploring with friends without adult supervision. The 2nd CBE children displayed vibrant discussions about their communities, street games, and neighbourhood characteristics. They addressed problems like garbage disposal and recycling bins.

In the kindergarten setting, children experience a seamless integration into their neighbourhood. Notably, there are no significant disparities in how these children connect with the local community. They all express a profound sense of belonging to the neighbourhood and share equal opportunities to explore its surroundings. These children often visit both public and private spaces in the neighbourhood with their families, expressing their genuine enjoyment of the area. However, a significant challenge emerged in June 2023 when the 2nd CBE schools faced difficulties related to a shortage of buses provided by the Lisbon City Council. This issue led to the suspension of field trips from January 2023. The problem stemmed from increased class sizes in public schools and a backlog of over 30 children, primarily immigrants, awaiting enrolment. In contrast, a private kindergarten benefits from superior resources, including its transportation system and community partnerships, which enhance the integration of children within the local area.

In summary, the challenge of ensuring social inclusion for children is hindered by the lack of specialised departments or offices in all three contexts. Although it should be a primary concern, it becomes particularly crucial in the 1st and 2nd CBE contexts, marked by significant diversity. Consequently, the adoption of commons-based approaches to address inequality and intersectionality and promote social inclusion among children from vulnerable social groups is less developed. The kindergarten context, on the other hand, demonstrates a more effective response to this issue, as it involves a group of children with fewer social and intersectional disparities.

In the 1st CBE and kindergarten, children have more opportunities for peer interaction and collaborative activities, which foster the development of peer-based common goods through programs like after school programmes. However, in the 2nd CBE, children depart immediately after classes, lacking dedicated space and time for such interactions, resulting in a deficiency of full-time school initiatives. During focus group interviews, children expressed criticism of certain school activities and a strong desire for more group-based activities. They also articulated their aspiration for greater involvement in reshaping their classroom environment.

5 Conclusions

In the RED project case studies, we explore the intricate dynamics of Commoning Practices in relation to children's understanding of citizenship. These dynamics vary across educational settings, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of children's roles as citizens. For example, in the kindergarten group following the Modern School Pedagogical Model, active participation and collective decision-making foster a tangible sense of care, a core aspect of citizenship. However, emotional expression differs among children, highlighting the complexity within the citizenship framework. Variations in rules and activities also influence children's autonomy, shaped by the structural framework. Social class influences children's discourses and interactions, particularly for marginalised backgrounds, intersecting with social inequality. Migration backgrounds introduce further complexity related to language, identity, and stereotypes. Gender roles add another layer, with girls often assuming organisational responsibilities, shaped by societal expectations.

Our case studies underscore the substantial impact of Community and Common Goods on children's integration into their communities, which is also influenced by school conditions. The handling of issues related to social inclusion and intersectionality varies, thereby impeding progress toward achieving equitable citizenship. In conclusion, our exploration underscores the significance of incorporating children's participation, sharing, caring, and a sense of community belonging to foster equitable outcomes for children, enabling them to be active community members and global citizens.

At its core, this chapter extends an invitation for collective reflection and the enactment of distinct approaches within the realms of the '3 C's'—children, citizenship, and commons, all centred around engaging with children and advocating for their rights and interests, while also delving into the rich landscape of educational resources within the commons.

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Commoning for Social Justice: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation in Two Learning Environments

Carlos Moreno-Romero, Stamatia Savvani, Ülly Enn, and Alekos Pantazis

Abstract This study delves into the relationship between education for social justice and the concept of educational commons, seeking to elucidate the connections that exist between these two distinct yet complementary components of inclusive and humanistic pedagogy. Education for social justice represents a fundamental tenet in contemporary educational discourse, emphasising the imperative of fostering equitable opportunities and social cohesion among learners. Educational commons, as an emerging paradigm, embodies the idea of shared and open educational resources, knowledge, and practices that are accessible to all, co-designed, co-assessed and serve the whole learning community, transcending traditional notions of ownership and hierarchy in education. This study explores the diverse strategies that are based on or are aligning with commoning principles as enacted in two educational contexts in Estonia. Through Action Research, which included observations in a formal and a non-formal learning environment, and focus groups interviews, these practices were documented and are discussed in relation to the principles of social justice, namely: redistribution, recognition, and participation. By investigating the interplay between these two pedagogical approaches, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the potential synergy between education for social justice and educational commons, highlighting their capacity to catalyse positive change within education systems.

Keywords Redistribution · Recognition · Participation · Educational commons · Social justice education

In the landscape of contemporary education, the principles of social justice have garnered significant attention. Social Justice Education advocates for equitable access

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G. Cappello et al. (eds.), *Educational Commons*, UNIPA Springer Series,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51837-9_12

to education and inclusivity. Educational Commons and Social Justice Education share common principles and mechanisms as their main objective lies in reducing inequalities and promoting diversity and inclusion. Often there are disparate agendas as to how Social Justice Education can be fostered and can range "from creating a vision of culturally responsive schools to leaving no child behind" ([24], p. 8). Educational commons are understood via horizontal forms of interrelation among educators and learners, the democratisation of decision-making processes, availability and relatedness, and the (co-)creation of open educational resources.

According to Means ([35], p. 122), we live in an era where different pedagogical approaches or methods are presented as a new paradigm—i.e. pluralism vs multiplicity, democracy vs communism, this study brings attention to the shared principles and elements of the implementation of the commons in education and pedagogical efforts aimed at promoting and strengthening Social Justice and inclusion. The discussion circles around how elements of the first can inform the latter, both in theory and in practice.

To situate our inquiry, two idiosyncratic educational contexts located in Tallinn, Estonia, (VIVITA and Suvemäe-TKG) are examined and provide evidence as to their democratic, inclusive, and commoning practices. In spite of the fact that neither of the contexts explicitly sides with educational commons or social justice education, characteristics and principles of the two approaches are manifested in their day-to-day practice, as well as to their organisational mechanisms. For this article, we look at observational data to answer the research questions of this inquiry which are:

- How are educational commons enacted in the educational contexts of VIVITA and Suvemäe?
- How can the dimensions of a framework for Social Justice Education, namely recognition, redistribution, and participation, be informed through the educational commoning practices observed?

The next sections provide a theoretical framework for Social Justice Education, as well as the processes involved in commoning educational settings, which will be then discussed through evidence acquired in the researched educational contexts. Finally, this paper intends to provide evidence of the interrelations available, while highlighting potential future research possibilities.

1 Literature Review

1.1 Education for Social Justice: A Theoretical Framework

In order to promote empathy [41], make marginalised and excluded narratives visible [5], challenge Eurocentric and patriarchal practices [2], dismantle individualistic and competitive beliefs [38] and to critically consider concepts such as race, gender and class [6], educational practices must include vulnerable communities, democratise

decision-making, and promote social justice. In this sense, pedagogical spaces are privileged contexts for citizenship education [55] since, in addition to being a place of encounter with otherness—which influences the consolidation of one's own identity—they are organisational spaces that involve rules, obligations and rights, constituting "the principle of order and social organisation where forms of rationality are socialised" ([54], p. 160).

The objectives of Education for Social Justice. In regard to the goals of social justice education, Fogelman [17] suggests focused instruction, collaborative work through student-led projects or activities, and the use of resources outside the classroom. However, the full and equal participation of all members of the community in solving social challenges is also essential [3]. Other education researchers [50] suggest that social justice education should focus on human dignity through the development of capabilities and overcoming inequities [42], the achievement of individual and collective well-being through mutual aid, cooperation and participation in a just democracy [45, 46] and the promotion of just attitudes and actions in active, autonomous citizens who are critical of the social, political and economic structures that promote inequities and injustices [59]. In this way, it is understood that Social Justice is not limited to human rights [37] or equal opportunities or access, as access would become a form of legitimising inequity [14]. Likewise, it cannot relate exclusively to the equitable (re)distribution of goods, as social justice challenges discrimination based on gender, ability, culture, ethnicity and sexual orientation.

Social Justice Components. According to Fraser [18], there are three components in social justice: redistribution, recognition and participation.

To begin with, the focus on distributive justice stems from the approaches of Rawls [48] and Dworkin [13] with respect to individualistic liberalism and the egalitarianism of social democracy. Thus, one could speak of (re)distribution of material goods [48], primary goods [38], capabilities [42, 53], and other goods such as education, power and access [52]. In the educational context, it has been suggested that it takes the form of compensatory programmes and additions to the curriculum, such as a chair on Amerindian cultures or ethnic or religious minorities [7] and that it relates to questions of control and the location of resources for certain activities [56].

The perspective of recognition emanates from the subjectivity of minorities and diverse groups, as opposed to liberal individualism and social homogenisation. In this sense, recognition as a component of social justice seeks the valuation of cultural, social and personal differences [20, 38, 60] and the acceptance of the differences of subaltern groups [16], while at the same time criticising distributive perspectives, as they assume an understanding of the needs of each group without taking into account their opinions and values [7] In the educational context, recognition as a component of education for social justice aims to problematise conceptions of normality [31] naturalised in teacher training, questions the culture of competitiveness and social exclusion [56], and understands any kind of diversity (cognitive, motor, sexual, racial, etc.) in its own terms. It also seeks to address a crisis of knowledge [27] that, on the one hand, installs "the values, perspectives and worldviews of dominant groups in institutional and cultural norms" ([34], p. 143), and, on the other hand, legitimises the

marginalisation in school curricula of the historical experiences and epistemologies of minority groups [39], including young people.

The third component of social justice is participation, although, originally, Fraser [19] spoke of "parity of participation" in relation to a greater participation of diversity (gender, sexuality, race and class) in the political-economic-cultural organisation of society in terms of redistribution and recognition. However, in a later text, Fraser [21] speaks of representation in order to define "more adequate frameworks for demands for justice that integrate fair recognition and fair redistribution, guaranteeing people full political representation" ([16], p. 1). Today, however, the term participation (rather than representation) is more widely accepted to refer to the active involvement of people, especially traditionally excluded groups, in decisions that affect them [3, 50, 61].

In the educational context, some questions related to participation have to do with the dominant models of participation in schools, the decision-making mechanisms and roles about what happens in the classroom, and the mechanisms for collecting the voices of community members and their participation in decision-making [56]. It has also been suggested that the shift from representation to participation occurs when children are educated in the process of democratic dialogue and negotiation in which they discuss what is important to them [47]; when historically marginalised groups have a genuine voice in negotiating the educational opportunities that are important to them [7]; and when "knowledge is provided that enables students to seek solutions beyond established structures, with justice as the ethical reference point for them" ([10], p. 1). In the opinion of Novella [40], in order to promote children's participation, it is necessary to define organised and ritualised educational practices, so that young people intervene as activists in increasingly complex participatory processes where they will develop their responsible and committed civic autonomy progressively. These practices involve a combination of socio-affective strategies, deliberation and action (p. 400–1).

In summary, when considering Social Justice as Participation, Murillo and Hernández [38] underline that a culture of respect should be cultivated; the participation of all should be promoted; classrooms (and any learning environment) should be organised democratically through Assemblies that allow for the discussion of decisions (such as classroom organisation, content, teaching strategies, assessment strategies, etc.) that affect students; and finally, collective decision-making by the school community (open meetings), distributed leadership, and openness to the environment should be encouraged.

Social Justice as Inclusion. For Flecha [15], the focus on diversity has legitimised inequality, through separation and segregation by attainment levels, without taking into account an inclusive approach that values diversity. Similarly, Sapon-Shevin [51] suggests that this approach—attention to diversity—is very restrictive, since young people are different in multiple ways, meaning that racial, ethnic, sexual, linguistic, religious and class differences are often ignored when an education system is intended to be inclusive for a group of differences (commonly called disabilities). Thus, inclusive education must create a warm and welcoming community made up

of six components: (a) cooperation over competition; (b) inclusion of all, without anyone having to ‘earn’ a place in the community; (c) a context that values differences and openly discusses them; (d) spaces, dynamics and attitudes that value each person and their multiple identities; (e) an environment where courage to challenge oppression and exclusion is encouraged; and, (f) a context in which there is physical safety as well as emotional and relational safety for all, so that they feel safe in the school community where they learn.

Finally, according to Poutiatine and Veeder [44] the goal is not to treat each person equally, but to ensure that each person gets what they need to be successful; transforming the school, so that the organisation and pedagogical practice takes into account each person, trying to remove barriers [1]; and promoting egalitarian differentiation [23], which facilitates various levels of inclusion that serve the needs of each person in order to break down the barriers that limit the development of their potential.

1.2 (Educational) Commons

Commoning is understood in three pillars: community, resource, institution/rules [11]. In education, these commoning terms can translate to: a community, comprised of students (young learners) and teachers (adult facilitators) sharing a resource, tangible or intangible such as a budget for the school, digital resources, and co-creating organisational rules that define the relationships of individuals in relation to the others but also to the access and sharing of the resource. This tripartite: community-resource-rules is governed by the principles of commons, ensuring that all members have equal access to the resources and having rules that ensure this and positive tools for resolving conflicts. Thus, there can be two dimensions of commons “(1) commons as a shared space of experience and (2) commoning as collective and shared practices” ([30], p. 449).

The philosophy of the commons in education specifically sees the resource of knowledge as well as the practices needed for acquiring knowledge as a good that all members of the community should not only have access to, but also have a “say” over. Educational commons move away from authoritarian and hegemonic models of pedagogical practice and has both students and teachers seen as subjectivities that hold equal power, which they can act on.

> In the educational commons, students and pupils do not rely on teachers to explain reality to them. Rather, the main objective is self-reliance and autonomy and, thus, the emancipation of children from adults, teachers, and parents in the present (here and now) ([43], p. 5)

Educational commons have been viewed both in Marxian-critical terms e.g., [12], but also from a post-structural stance, e.g. [9]. Needless to say that even though both philosophies try to achieve similar goals, the philosophy behind each influences the structures and actual implementation of the commons. For instance, Marxian perspectives would emphasise giving voice to the oppressed, ensuring that marginalised

groups have equal access to resources, while post-structural perspectives focus on redefining power on its own from wherever this may come. In this sense, "post-structurally" viewing the commons goes beyond equality (providing the same to all) and equity (providing what is needed per individual). A post-structural understanding of the commons emphasises justice; which is of course it can be—ironically enough—challenging to apply justly. Both have individuals, young or old, experienced or not, taking responsibility for their own learning and teaching. It is not expected for everyone to make equal contributions as this would be irrational; commoning is not about equating; it is going beyond and participating commonly while at the same time acting with agency in individual terms. Hence, this paper views educational commons in a light of justice; not emphasising how to support marginalised groups but rather ensuring that the structures provided are just to the needs of the community.

2 Contextualisation and Methodology

2.1 Two Research Contexts: Commoning in Formal and Non-formal Learning Environments

Education can take place in both formal and non-formal environments. Formal education "is an organised education model, structured and administered by laws and norms, and subject to strict curriculum objectives, methodology and content" ([22], p. 120). When those elements are absent or substantially more flexible, then we are talking about education that is non-formal; yet learning is again intentional and organised [22]. Another key difference between formal and non-formal learning is that in the latter, participation is voluntary. Learning can of course take place incidentally and/or informally, too; the context of this study however is on environments that are intentional, structured and where the roles of the persons are observable and delineated. This study took place in two idiosyncratic educational environments, both operating in Tallinn, Estonia.

The first case study site is VIVITA (vivita.ee), a non-formal learning environment, which identifies itself as a creativity accelerator accessible to children and youth from the age of 9 years. According to its webpage, VIVITA's mission is to innovate by kids, with kids, and for kids. This takes place at their local on-site facilities, VIVIstops, consisting of open plan workshops and innovation studios, supported by hardware and software tools for prototyping, robotics and other creative tasks (vivita.ee). The Estonian branch of VIVITA was founded in 2018 and is based in the Telliskivi area in Tallinn. VIVITA is framed on the notion of: no teachers, no curriculum. Indeed, the staff in VIVITA are experts in their field, professional and experienced individuals in various areas who support children in their innovation and crafting—analogue or digital-learning journey.

The other case study site is Suvemäe-TKG, a formal learning environment which is based on the principles of democratic education within Tallinn Art Gymnasium, a municipal (public) school. Suvemäe-TKG was founded in 2019 as a pilot project of democratic education within the public sector, and currently serves 72 children and youth from 7 to 16 years of age (1–9 classes). Suvemäe-TKG's staff is composed of a dynamic and enthusiastic team of 6 full-time paid coaches and 3 part/time specialists (language, science, social pedagogue), who support students in their academic responsibilities, while involving them in decision-making and co-creating learning activities of their choice. The pedagogical principles associated with 'democratic education' are shared decision-making practices, self-directed learning, age-mixing and free play/time.

2.2 Research Methodology

As has been highlighted throughout this volume, the SMOOTH project intended to educate practitioners on the notions of educational commons and observe practitioners' and children implementing and being involved in the commons while including all participants on reflecting on the processes. The ultimate objective of the project lies in reducing inequalities and promoting inclusion through the implementation of the commons. For the two research contexts as participating partners for the Estonian team, the research objective focused on exploring how the commons are already situated and enacted in the two aforementioned settings given their idiosyncratic character as explained above.

For this study, an exploratory Action Research protocol was used, with guided research questions stemming from the SMOOTH project objectives and deeply ethnographic characteristics. Given the unique character of the research contexts, the researchers adopted an open research inquiry exploring and mapping the educational practices taking place in the two research contexts that bear commoning and/or democratic characteristics. The study has received approval from the Ethics Committee of Tallinn University of Technology. Informed consent was acquired for all research participants involved.

This Action Research study had a rather observational role of researchers, and a more active role initiated by the participants. The level of participation varied at times for researchers, from participating observer to non-participating observer with interactions [4]. Throughout the research and given the idiosyncratic character of both contexts as was outlined previously, researchers recorded characteristics, mechanisms, and procedures in the two contexts even when they were not directly addressed in the Case Studies (CS, henceforth) and were more generally applied in the two contexts.

As for the CS, two of them per context were followed by the researchers (mentioned in the Table 1). For the case studies in VIVITA, researchers followed projects that had been initiated in VIVITA already and observations focused on the processes of participation, decision making, and collaborating. For the case studies

in Suvemäe, the participating youth and educators designed projects for their school guided by the notions of the commons and objectives of the project.

VIVITA's first CS was focused on the activities of the learning community called 'The Social Club' (CS1), which was launched in 2021, inviting children and young people to voluntarily form a small community and collaborate in organising a children's festival as part of the Tallinn Music Week, a well-known international music and city culture festival in Tallinn. Consistent with VIVITA's pedagogical concept, the entire idea behind the children's festival and its execution was driven by the children and young individuals themselves, with adults playing a supportive and inspiring role as mentors on the learning journey. The second case study was born out of a request by the Seaplane Harbour Museum Lennusadam (meremuuseum.ee) and followed VIVITA participants in the creation of an interactive exhibition about the city of Venice (CS2). Initially, children were acquainted with the history and conditions of Venice through a variety of activities, familiarised and empathised with the city's living experience, created their own Venetian masks and decorated house facades. The overall goal was to focus on the main challenges faced by flooded cities, generating ideas collectively and reaching shared decisions on what an exhibition about Venice targeting children and youth would look like. Finally, a series of activities and experiences were prototyped, and showcased as part of the exhibition open to visitors in the Seaplane Harbour Museum in Tallinn.

Regarding the other case studies, Suvemäe-TKG participants decided to develop two sustainable projects that would be left as a legacy to their school and for the school community to use. These included building a Kitchen Island in the Creative (Arts) Room (CS1) and an outdoor Zen Garden (CS2); both utilised funding made available from the SMOOTH project. Both projects spanned approximately six weeks each, involved about 15 working sessions each, and had the voluntary participation of eight young individuals for the first project and six for the second one, supported by two Suvemäe-TKG facilitators. The project began with a collective brainstorming session where participants shared and pitched their ideas. They then voted on their preferences and selected the Kitchen Island and the Zen Garden as their projects. Over the following weeks, participants received guidance from an interior architect, who provided advice on measurements, material selection, and initiated the construction of the kitchen table.

It is crucial to point out that young participants of these case studies were engaged in various activities following the stages of the design thinking process: identifying problems, discovering connections, identifying possible user experiences, focusing

Table 1 Case studies in the two educational contexts

Research context	Case study 1 (CS1)	Case study 2 (CS2)
VIVITA	Organising children's festival in tallinn's music week (the social club)	Designing an exhibition on venice (SeaPlane harbor museum)
Suvemäe	Constructing "Kitchen Island"	Creating "Zen Garden"

on the given conditions, imagining solutions, playing with tools and imagined solutions, prototyping such solutions and sharing with the community.

2.3 Research Instruments

The research instruments were field notes that were created by the researchers while observing the participants actively involved in the study. Field notes were also inserted into a researcher's diary, in a reflecting manner, every time there were observations in the two contexts or other communication and interaction between participants, e.g., discussions with participants, reflective interviews, and chats in social media channels created for communication between the project participants. The purpose of the researchers' diary and field notes were to contextualise the data and capture participants' behaviours and interactions, going beyond what could be captured solely through audiovisual recording devices [26].

Semi-structured interviews, in a focus-group format, were also facilitated to further reflect with participants, both adults and youth. The questions were mainly around the commoning practices that were followed during their project work, for example: how was decision making facilitated? How did you resolve disagreements with each other? The purpose of the focus group interviews was to record participants' collective experience and opinions, and through the interactions between the participants that the data emerged [8]. Focus-group interviews intended to also provide a common reflective space for the involved participants, in line with the aims of the research project.

3 Findings and Discussion

The case studies provided researchers with insights on how young people adapt to commoning practices within a caring and supporting community. Specifically, two interrelated characteristics were found in both contexts, which deal with, on the one hand, setting appropriate mechanisms and spaces for young people to engage in shared decision-making and, on the other hand, practitioners adopting a guidance and non-directive role in the activities. Whenever this happened, young people started building on their capabilities and awareness as agents of change and meaningful members of their communities. Throughout the process, some participants were more active than others, but as a group, they encountered challenges and worked together to overcome them in all of the observed cases. During most of the CSs, children were very open to each other's opinions and feedback, making decisions together and addressing the challenges without blame. Regarding commoning practices in the case studies, there was a clear sense of collective creativity, sharing and caring across all case studies, and both contexts, though expressed sometimes in different ways.

3.1 Reflections from Suvemäe

One reflection that emerged during the Suvemäe CS is whether majority rule should be preferred over consensus or consent when making decisions collectively. To clarify, for major decisions in Suvemäe both youth and adults get equal votes; all activity is peer-governed and initiated by the youth and staff as a collective. This was the case also when deciding what the main task of each Case Study as part of the SMOOTH project should be; researchers' note below describe the major steps in this deciding process:

> Participants start brainstorming, some in Estonian and some in English. They ask each other about their ideas. In general, the exchange of ideas in small groups went smoothly, with kids analysing and improving each other's ideas, giving feedback and considering diverse viewpoints. [...] After 10 minutes, one facilitator invites participants to sum up their main points and introduce them to others. The facilitators call attention to the fact that some of the ideas are based on buying stuff, without developing a more structured project. Participants reflect on that and one participant shares the idea that one of the actions can be an event and another a development for the school. One participant suggests voting for the most appropriate actions/ideas. She takes the place of the facilitator and invites others to vote. (Researcher's diary, 13/01/2023)

As is evident from the extract above, there is a bottom-up approach to all activity and decision-making policies that involves both facilitators and youth in an equal manner. The end goal of all activities is the common good of the school, its members, and its wider community. Engaged citizenship is evident in the voting process followed and respected by all members in the community. The hierarchical roles are not stiff, and youth can also take initiative and call for voting as exemplified above. Adults in Suvemäe are companions in youth's learning journeys, steering, and prompting towards criticality and collectivity when needed.

Common friendly practices in Suvemäe include the weekly meetings with both staff and youth take place in Suvemäe house, where action points and other school activities are determined based on the proceedings/discussions among participants. These meetings were also observed during the CSs and the bottom-up approach in making decisions was evident along with democratic practices of voting before reaching decisions. Some topics that were brought up were: how students' parents could provide with their knowledge or expertise to the school (wider community connections), and also how students should take action towards cleaning practices of the school or taking care of spaces they use (common-friendly policies). While the topics were being discussed everyone had the chance to participate, voice their opinions, and then voting would take place when needed and for points of actions, which were collectively determined. These are non-negotiable policies of the school and are respected by everyone. The character and content of these meetings seem to be well embedded in the identity and practices of the school and were also evident in the case studies, especially in terms of youth taking (a) decisions, (b) initiatives and (c) responsibility. As one example, the students that are in the last year in this school decided to work on the Kitchen Island as a CS project, which would be left

as a legacy to the younger kids in the school—the sense of caring and sharing is well-established in this context and permeates the practices of both staff and youth.

Participating youth in the project were also asked to reflect on whether there was different engagement by boys and girls, or everyone engaged in the process with the same energy and participation?

> Participant E. Of course, tried to make everything equally. It was not only boys who were using the tools. (Pause) We could've done more things together, but sometimes some of us were not at school, so we helped each other.
>
> Researcher 1. Do you mean there was coordination among yourselves? Setting up working times? Or it was rather adults inviting you to coordinate?
>
> Participant D. No, it was definitely ourselves.
>
> Participant E. It was more like our responsibility, we really wanted to make this.
>
> (Focus Group Interview, June 2023)

When overviewing the experiences in both case studies from the perspective of community-building and management of common goods, Suvemäe kids pointed out that such practices were "natural" to them, provided their experiences in the democratic school where young people make decisions together, engage in interdisciplinary projects based on their interests and help others solve conflicts. Other kids were very comfortable and appreciative before the perspective of exploring their own interests and sometimes contrasted this experience to their own practice in conventional educational settings where adults are guiding every learning activity.

3.2 Reflections from VIVITA

In VIVITA, one of the main learning formats is Free Flow where youth can flexibly explore and implement their own individual interests. In addition to this, from time to time there are collective projects initiated and youth is engaged towards serving the wider community. As VIVITA operates through a wide variety of diverse activity formats, also the role of educators varies, sometimes intervening only when asked by young participants (like in Free Flow), while in some other activities adults seem to have a stronger role in guiding the process.

In VIVITA CS 1 the whole process of organising the kids' festival was primarily meant to be self-governed by young participants, with the educator (and one representative from Tallinn Music Week) in a mentoring and facilitating role. While in general the young participants demonstrated a strong self-governance, during that process, also some challenges arose, for example, in relation to a balanced task division, maintaining active and transparent communication within the group about the progress and involvement.

Therefore, the educator assumed a facilitating and motivating role in some stages for some young people to take more active roles. The extracts below, taken from researcher's diary while observing CS1 in Vivita, mention the educator's approach in delineating tasks.

> The educator created a to-do list and approached kids asking to sign up for concrete roles/tasks to try out more structured and divided role division in the group. It turned out useful as in past weeks it had been difficult to get the whole project group together, so kids have joined in during the free flow activities time and took up the tasks. (Researcher's diary, observation at VIVITA, 20/04/2022)

> The educator has a list of activities that needs to be done (for example design the box for questions, design name tags, prepare the text for hosts etc) and young participants choose the tasks on which they would focus to work in smaller teams (2-3 people). So the work continues in smaller teams for the rest of the meeting. [...] The teams seem to work quite well balanced, kids cooperate, discuss the things among them, if needed, ask help from the educator while in general working quite independently. Every once in a while, some members move from their group to others to see how they are doing - so the feeling of the group belonging seems to be quite strong. (Researchers' diary, observation at VIVITA, 28/04/2022)

As it is evident from the extracts above, the educators offer structure to the activities to help maintain a good balance of tasks and facilitate active participation on their own individual terms. Smaller groups are created to facilitate better communication and educators mostly float around, being supportive and offering help when needed, while youth is working independently in teams.

Focus-group interviews also addressed peer governance, allowing young participants to become more aware of their experience in this respect. In such reflections, participants tended first to be rather self-critical (referring to what they could have done differently or when evaluating the success of the festival) but the perceptions seemed to have become more balanced with the interventions and contributions from their peers, educators and researchers. In this way, the learning experiences seemed to be evident also in becoming more self-aware as well as in their capability to identify and address issues related to peer governance.

The concept and practices of VIVITA seek to be strongly rooted in the wider community and respective needs. It may present itself in projects like CS 1 that aims at organising an event for the local community in diverse partnerships (like Tallinn Music Week, local artists, vendors, Telliskivi area community where the Vivita lab is situated and with whom the kids negotiated to decorate the festival area etc.). For CS2, too, the activities put together by VIVITA facilitators were as part of agreed project work with the wider community (in this case specifically in service for a project for the SeaPlane Harbor museum). Youth in VIVITA was thus engaged in developing personalised work, e.g. decorating Venetian masks and Venetian house facades and these activities were part of familiarising themselves with another context but also producing collective work, though personalised, so that it could later be used for the exhibition purposes at the museum.

Overall, there is a strong sense of the role of community in both research contexts, realised in slightly different ways. For example, in the CSs of VIVITA the mentors and facilitators involve youth in projects that have a community impact, e.g. organising a music festival or brainstorming creative ideas for a museum exhibition. In these formats, the goals and in some cases also the activities themselves are decided by facilitators, and engage youth in creative individual work, which can have a collective purpose, process and outcome. However, like described above, the role of children

and young people and hence also the role of the educators seemed to vary in various activity formats. In the CSs of Suvemäe, the activities and the direction of the CSs was jointly decided by staff and youth at Suvemäe following their usual democratic procedures, and within mind that the directions of all activity should be for the greater good and with an aim to help others, in school or more widely. Both contexts, and the CSs developed by them, serve the greater good and have their own impact in their own close or wider communities; how this is done differs based on the philosophy and governing policy of each institution and specific aims of the project contexts. In this regard, it is possible to state that education can be effectively organised on the basis of the commons' patterns as long as young people are involved in shared decision-making practices. Timetables and curricula need to be "negotiated" with children in order to support their interests and build on collaborative learning experiences. It seems clear that a commons-based peer education can contribute to the further development of commons-based peer production, as young people become engaged in collectively finding solutions to the challenges in their communities. Those solutions can, in turn, become available to other contexts.

3.3 The Role of Adults in Formal and Non-formal Educational Settings

Regarding the role of adults in commoning educational experiences, in order for children and youth to collectively experience and construct the commons in educational settings, adults need to provide spaces and mechanisms for the former to ask questions and find solutions.

In the context of formal learning, adults could involve young people as partners in learning, flexibilising the ways the curriculum is used and making sure that timetables provide enough time for young people to start self-directing their learning experiences. It is also important to promote a restorative justice approach in conflict-resolution, in which young people learn strategies to help their peers solve conflicts instead of waiting for their teachers to enforce justice (which often fails).

In non-formal learning environments, children and young participants seem to be more able to decide on their activities and get the support of adults in engaging in their own projects. Undoubtedly, open technologies and infrastructures can empower young people by creatively using the tools available to find solutions to their and their communities' problems and challenges. For this to happen, it is important that young people have enough time to explore and experiment, avoiding grading or external assessment. Instead, the educators can facilitate the learning by empowering learners to reflect on their own process and development, provide constructive feedback in an encouraging manner and create safe spaces for youth to support each others' learning peer-to-peer.

Preliminarily, researchers suggest that some of the effects of applying the commons' logic in addressing inequalities young people endure are (a) the practical

experience of using their voices and participating with others in addressing issues that affect them, (b) the development of critical and divergent thinking when finding solutions to challenges, (c) prosocial attitudes towards their peers and communities, and (d) empowerment of those most vulnerable. Moreover, if the conditions are set appropriately, there should not be any gender differences in how young people engage in shared decision-making, conflict resolution and creative learning experiences. On the other hand, a lack of discussion of shared agreements (for example, respecting each other's turn to speak, not mocking anyone's opinions, etc.) could eventually promote the monopolisation of opinion by some members or exclusion of some others from certain activities (e.g., a popular belief that working with tools can only be done by boys while girls prefer "easier" tasks). As to whether there are gender patterns in the diverse educational commons of the study, in one of the case studies it seemed that girls took a bit longer to become more participatory, although this was not a definitive pattern in all case studies. One way to explain it could be on the basis of cultural practices rewarding boys' exploration and girls' obedience [32]; nevertheless, in STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) education (what VIVITA focuses on) specific focus is directed to attract more girls to it, which surely promotes the conditions for girls to be as active as boys.

3.4 Implementing Commons in Education Through a Social Justice Perspective

This research has described some of the activities implemented in two learning environments in Estonia within the framework of the SMOOTH project in order to shade light onto the potential of the commoning practices to reverse inequalities and promote inclusion. Accordingly, the data collected suggests potential intersections between commoning practices (building a community, democratising decision-making processes and using a resource in benefit of the wider society) and the strengthening of social justice and inclusion of children in meaningful projects to them. Specifically, the situations narrated earlier on the implementation of the commons in formal and non-formal educational environments provide various connections in regards to the promotion of the three dimensions of education for social justice, namely: redistribution, recognition, and participation. These are elaborated on below.

Redistribution. More punctually, the redistributive dimension within the SMOOTH project case studies encompasses the redistribution of goods, resources and practices of different kinds. On the one hand, with regard to tangible goods, it is essential to underline an explicit redistribution of materials and learning spaces, which children can access and use according to their interests, needs and collective decisions both in VIVITA and Suvemäe-TKG. Such dynamic access to spaces, materials and support is based on the belief that freedom of action is essential in the process of identifying one's own interests and needs in order to promote children's emotional, cognitive

and social development. On the other hand, redistribution also covers learning experiences, times and places, based on the belief that people build and promote "scaffolding" [58] to enable learning and development opportunities in different contexts, both personally and collectively through free interaction, and that each person has their own learning rhythms and can contribute to and learn from the community in a variety of ways. In a broader sense, in educational commons we could notice a practice of redistributing power and agency: from the hands of some key players to the building of a collective body where the power to decide, act, organise, order or restrict is redistributed, under a common agreement, upon the willing and rules of the learning community.

Recognition. This research study has identified various ways in which the emerging pedagogical practices of the commons relate to the dimension of recognition, particularly the recognition of diversity in human nature and promotion of inclusion. This is established through a questioning of the concept of normality [31], which pigeonholes children into supposed unilinear and unidimensional processes of development and learning. In this sense, commoning educational practices rejects a restricted view of intelligence and the cognitive and social segregation through levels of competence characteristic of formal educational spaces (conventional schooling). As for the participating children, explicit efforts were made to recognise their individual learning rhythms and creative potential, as well as to establish structures and dynamics that allow them to model and integrate citizenship attitudes and practices through exercises that actively promote the development of competencies to participate in the social life of their communities.

Furthermore, according to the participants' feedback, the collective establishment of social boundaries (rules) and dialogue about the norms of interaction seem to have direct effects on the development of empathy and emotional intelligence. Children's development of empathic attitudes can be promoted when appropriate mechanisms, tools and relational practices are established towards maintaining functional boundaries, accepting and including all points of view, and assuming a dialogic attitude. Relatedly, this research agrees with Nussbaum [41] that it is necessary to consider empathy as an essential condition for the consolidation of democratic citizenship, as it allows the person to develop their ability to "put themselves in other people's shoes", take a stand against acts of injustice, display a genuine interest in and care for others, develop responsible attitudes towards others and the environment, activate critical thinking structures in their daily lives, and express their own emotions and thoughts, even if they are in a minority position.

In conclusion, this research suggests that when a change of status is promoted, and girls and boys are positioned as competent and committed agents of their society, motivation and responsibility improves, as it aims to accompany—rather than instruct—the social and emotional development of these individuals [33]. In our opinion, this change of status translates into a higher degree of personal initiative, collaboration between people to achieve a shared goal—as shown through observations of practice, and empathetic and supportive attitudes towards more vulnerable people/groups.

Participation This is perhaps the most visible dimension in the context of this research, which stems from the idea that there will be no educational change until power relations in learning environments change. According to children's narratives, the possibility of designing/realising their own ways for participation allowed them to consider themselves as active subjects in learning processes and social organisation, supporting the development of tools to follow their learning interests, as well as exercising a critical and active citizenship. Furthermore, this research demonstrates that it is possible to promote alternative forms of participation to the hegemonic ones in conventional schools (i.e. representative or consultative), creating decision-making mechanisms that involve the school community in academic (or non-academic) activities and establishing shared agreements, and exploring different strategies to gather young people's voices. Relatedly, the experienced participatory decision-making socialises children to the importance of listening to others, trying to understand their point of view, and sharing (and adapting) their own. The possibility of 'ritualised' democratic participation with young people in their learning environments could become an exercise in refining democratic dialogue, negotiation and the search for creative solutions to issues that affect the whole community.

In conclusion, when groups of young people actively participate in decision-making and the establishment of learning objectives, responsibility is collectivised, as well as the success of the efforts. Consequently, researchers suggest that there are significant and positive relationships between commoning participation in the management of their own learning and educational space and the moral discourses [28, 29] that participants shared, specifically, regarding the display of responsible attitudes towards themselves, others and the creative process of learning. These attitudes can be summarised as listening skills to others, recognising individual and collective needs, strengthening emotional and social skills and self-regulation [40]. Hence, researchers point out the importance of the implementation of the educational commons in the redistribution of power in decision-making. Accordingly, inner motivation is enhanced, making adult and institutional directivity—turning the curriculum and grades into an end in itself—obsolete. Thus, democratic participation of children, not only in relation to their academic development, but also in making decisions that affect their interaction with each other, extends the perspective that boundaries are necessary to maintain coexistence, creates a general sense of confidence in participating that empowers them to intervene in their own learning pathways and challenge inequitable power relations [25], and, finally, builds critical thinking skills that nurture young people's participation in the civic life of their communities.

3.5 Educators' Role for Social Justice

This research shares some pointers about the characteristics of adult accompaniment in democratic practice, such as active listening and reflection techniques that seek to make children express their emotions and become more aware of them; a

perspective of disempowerment that makes it possible for young people to seize a certain surplus value of power [36] through decisions about their own learning and their participation in decision-making; and respectful attitudes of acceptance that abandon value judgements towards them. Furthermore, it seems clear that the accompanying team strived to sustain the "essential themes" [37] for social justice: the creation and maintenance of safe spaces, structures and dynamics that promote youth self-knowledge, the maintenance and promotion of relational strategies based on mutual respect, and addressing strategic issues for the global community (e.g. environmental sustainability and degrowth).

3.6 Inclusion as Commoning Education

According to Nussbaum [42], the discussion on social inclusion has been limited to socio-economic and ethnic aspects, specifically regarding equal access and integration policies, but there are other levels of inclusion that have not been sufficiently considered: emotional, social and cognitive. For the author, the first level relates to efforts of emotional and social inclusion of children (coming from mainstream schools) who oftentimes arrive affected emotionally and socially as a result of their previous educational experiences, while the second level has to do with cognitive inclusion, in that many of these people who come from mainstream schools arrive with "labels", such as attention deficit and hyperactivity, learning disabilities or autism, which often prevent them from fully developing their abilities, hindering their learning processes and personal development in relation to their areas of interest. In this sense, commoning pedagogical experiences require safe and respectful environments that eliminate structural barriers and seek to ensure respect and recognition towards "egalitarian differentiation" [23], helping each person unlearn "labels" and prejudices and obtain the tools and knowledge to be happy and fulfilled, through the promotion of various levels of recognition and inclusion.

In summary, efforts have been identified to ensure inclusive education and social justice [51], creating a community that values cooperation rather than competition, including all participants without the need to impose pressures for anyone to be accepted, valuing differences and diverse identities through the establishment of spaces, dynamics and attitudes sensitive to such characteristics, fostering a critical attitude towards oppression and exclusion, and, striving for the physical, emotional and relational safety of all participants.

4 Conclusion and Further Research

Following lessons learnt from the explored research contexts, it becomes evident how educational commons and social justice are two interwoven practices and can inform one another. Commoning learning experiences bring attention to collective

action and individual responsibility, while social justice education reminds of the learner's individuality and agency, and the necessity for equitable and supportive learning resources and opportunities. Within this reflection, redistribution is realised in terms of resources, but also power and practices being collectively decided and discussed by youth and adults; recognition of one's individuality is evident not only through celebrating differences, but also by allocating spaces and opportunities for youth to explore their own potential, initiate action and get appropriate support for their own challenges; and participation is reinforced through horizontal decision making processes, but also through making each voice matter, heard, and acted upon. Finally, the critical role of the educator/facilitator—in which we would encourage future research—is highlighted in cultivating empathy, diversity, and catering to youth's empowerment. To conclude with, this research proposes a further consideration of the various theories of social and cultural change [49, 57] in educational contexts, which underlines the need to reflect on the types of changes needed in conventional schools to consolidate spaces for democratic participation, namely: structural changes (systems and structures, access to decision-making); cultural changes (patterns of behaviour and identity, breaking with "centrism", unlearning); relational changes (communication and relationship patterns); and personal changes (perceptions, emotions, self-awareness, self-regulation).

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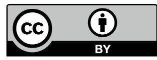

Transformative Commons and Education in Greece. Three Case Studies

Alexandros Kioupkiolis and Naya Tselepi

Abstract This chapter offers a summary account of three case studies conducted in Greece by the research team of Aristotle University, in 2021–2023, in the context of the Horizon 2020 research project *SMOOTH.* The studies considered practices of commoning in diverse educational settings from the perspective of their transformative effects and their contribution to the democratic empowerment of young students in the classroom and beyond. In two cases, in the private institutions of the S*chool of Nature* (kindergarten) and the *Big Bang School* (elementary school) in Thessaloniki, activities of educational commons were experimentally pursued by the researcher and the staff as part of the research project. At the other site, the informal *Solidarity School Mesopotamia* in Moschato, Athens, the case study combined observation of existing practices with limited intervention through focus groups and interviews. Despite their critical divergences, the studies corroborate our main research thesis: the enactment of educational commons, however limited and constrained, addresses inequalities and can instil radical democratic habits in young students. Beyond this broad finding, the three studies pivot around different aspects and dynamics of educational commoning, which this chapter sets out to highlight and critically discuss. The commons-based organization and the alter-political nature of the *Solidarity School* generate considerable transformative effects which are reflected markedly in the ambiance of teaching and learning. A culture of equal freedom, solidarity and civic engagement refashions the hegemonic habitus of consumerist individualism, passivity and submission to socio-political hierarchies. The two other studies at the *School of Nature* and the *Big Bang School*, in which the methodology of *sociocracy* proved to be a good practice fostering educational commons, further developed core insights of relevant research: the role of teachers as 'companions' promoted children's autonomy, while collective decision-making with consent educated young people in peer governance, cultivating collective consciousness and building a sense of equal power.

Keywords Commons · Education · Case studies · Ambience · Transformation · Peer-governance · Sociocracy

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G. Cappello et al. (eds.), *Educational Commons*, UNIPA Springer Series,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51837-9_13

1 Introduction

The ‘commons’ or ‘common-pool resources’ [23] or ‘commons-based peer production’ [4] designate goods that are collectively used and produced. There are many kinds of commons, from natural common-pool resources (fishing grounds, irrigation canals etc.) to common productive assets and digital goods, such as open-source software. These diverse common goods are shared and administered in participatory ways by the communities which generate or use them (see [23]: 90–102, [3]).

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, several attempts to counter socio-political exclusion, the hollowing out of democracy and environmental degradation have explored diverse patterns of commoning, that is, collaborative ways of living which enact democratic ideals [2, 6]. Posing a historical alternative to neoliberalism and state socialism, the commons could guide the reconstruction of social goods and relations across a variety of fields, organizing shared resources ‘through the direct participation of citizens’ ([17]: 69–80).

Education assumes particular significance in this regard, as it can provide a catalyst for new social construction and subjective change in the direction of deeper democracy and ecology. Indeed, there is now growing research in schools of ‘educational commons’ in which teaching and learning are shaped by the educational community on terms of equal freedom and participation [9, 14, 20, 21, 25]. From a critical perspective, educational commons advance struggles against inequalities and exclusions, confronting neoliberal logics which reduce education to a private commodity and turn it into a means of manufacturing docile, indebted and ‘entrepreneurial’ subjects that pursue ‘lifelong learning’ and the accumulation of credentials ([21]: 3, 5, see also [19]: 41–43).

The commons in education can animate critical and emancipatory attempts to transform our relationship to teaching, learning and research ([21]: 3). Education would become a collective good which is created, governed and enjoyed in common by all parties of the educational community. The co-determination of learning would occur on a footing of equality, nurturing openness, fairness, equal freedom, creativity and ecological sustainability. The pedagogical common breaks thus with the competitive ethos of the market and the top-down direction of the state, disrupting also the conventional divides between teachers and students through a process of common inquiry and learning that is inventive, continuous and critical ([7]: 81, [1]: 68–69).

This chapter offers a summary account of three case studies conducted in Greece by the research team of Aristotle University, in 2021–2023, in the context of the Horizon 2020 research project *SMOOTH* ‘Educational Commons and Active Social Inclusion.’ The studies considered practices of commoning in diverse educational settings from the perspective of their transformative effects and their contribution to the democratic empowerment of young students in the classroom and beyond. In two cases, in the private institutions of the S*chool of Nature* (kindergarten) and the *Big Bang School* (elementary school) in Thessaloniki, activities of educational commons were experimentally pursued by the researcher and the staff as part of the research project. At the other site, the informal *Solidarity School Mesopotamia* in

Moschato, Athens, the case study combined observation of existing practices with limited intervention through focus groups and interviews.

Despite the critical divergences of the educational contexts and our research methods, which are reflected in their analysis in this chapter, the studies laid out in the following corroborate our main research thesis: the enactment of educational commons, however limited and constrained, addresses inequalities and can instil radical democratic habits in young students. Beyond this broad finding, the three studies pivot around different aspects and dynamics of educational commoning, which the present chapter sets out to highlight and critically discuss.

The *Solidarity School* is an informal tutoring or supplementary tuition school, which has been established by the grassroots citizens' movement *Mesopotamia* in the municipality Moschato-Tavros in south Athens. One of its main objectives is to support students for the courses they attend in public schools and to prepare them for public school and university entrance exams. This attachment foists constraints on education, vesting the school with a hybrid character: typically informal, but substantially geared to formal public education, transmitting the knowledge contained in public school textbooks. Yet, and this is the thrust of the argument put forward here, the commons-based organization and the alter-political nature of the school put a crucial twist on educational practice. This yields considerable transformative effects which are reflected markedly in the ambiance of teaching and learning. The *School* nourishes a culture of equal freedom, solidarity and civic engagement which refashions the hegemonic habitus of consumerist individualism, passivity and submission to socio-political hierarchies. The chapter argues thus that there is room for educational commons and democratic transformation even in structures which remain tailored to formal schooling but refigure educational hierarchies and modes of governance, infusing education with an alternative democratic ethos of solidarity and grassroots self-organization.

The case study 'House in the Forest' was carried out with twenty-two children, aged from four and half to six years old, at the *School of Nature*, which is a private kindergarten school located in the suburbs of Thessaloniki, northern Greece. The 'Council for the Upgrade of the Humanity' was the case study undertaken at the *Big Bang School*, which is a private elementary school based likewise in the suburbs of Thessaloniki. Fifteen children, aged twelve, participated in the research activities at the premises of the school. The two studies, in which the methodology of *sociocracy* proved to be a good practice fostering educational commons, further developed core insights of relevant research [21, 25, 26]. The role of teachers as 'companions' promoted children's autonomy, while collective decision-making with consent educated young people in peer governance, cultivating collective consciousness and building a sense of equal power. However, the structures of private education in the two schools do not unsettle profit-driven logics in education and fail to set a stage for broader struggles for inclusive education, while the official curriculum set by the public Ministry of Education sets further bounds on autonomous commoning in education.

2 Solidarity School Mesopotamia

As stated in the poster that celebrates the ten years of its operation in 2022, the *Mesopotamia Solidarity School* explicitly construes education as a 'common good' («κοινό αγαθό» in Greek) grounded in participation, creativity, collectivity, democracy and solidarity.[1]

This section will illuminate educational commons and alter-political agency in the *Mesopotamia Solidarity School*. It will set out from the self-presentation of the community itself but will draw mainly on the fieldwork carried out by the author on the premises of the *Solidarity School* from September 2022 till March 2023.

The permanent activities of the grassroots collective in the district of Moschato, Athens, comprise a *Solidarity Time Bank* (set up in 2011), the *Solidarity Basket* supplying families in need with foodstuffs (since 2014), the *Cinema Club* (since 2015), and the *Solidarity School* (since 2013). Throughout the year, *Mesopotamia* organizes a variety of cultural events and socio-political interventions fostering democracy, equality and inclusion, such as friendly basketball games against racism (23/12/2022), talks and open discussions on patriarchy, gender violence and LGBTQ rights (1/12/2019), book fairs, bazaars and music concerts (13/11/2022). For its resources, *Mesopotamia* relies exclusively on voluntary work and the donations of its friends.

As explained in its on-line self-presentation[2] and the information leaflet (2022), in *Mesopotamia* there are no permanent members and no board of directors. Decisions are taken consensually, without voting, in popular assemblies where people participate on equal terms. They consider all different positions in order to reach a decision which reflects the consensus of all people present in the assemblies. There are four regular assemblies: a weekly assembly in which weekly events are decided, a monthly assembly in which they collectively deliberate on proposals for actions, interventions and essays/press releases on current affairs, and the *Solidarity School* assembly, held every three months with the participation of teachers, parents and custodians, and students of all ages.

The *Solidarity School* is an action realized through the voluntary contributions of qualified teachers. It is addressed to young students and people of any age. The school was launched in 2013. Since then, it has offered courses to hundreds of students, many of whom have acquired foreign language certificates or entered university. The school was created in the 'society of crisis,' driven by the need for 'a continuous upgrading of people's knowledge' and qualifications at a time when access to education is subject to intensifying class exclusions and the public educational system is dismantled. Hence, this structure forms an integral part of the *Mesopotamia Time Bank* and its broader solidarity network.[3]

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[1] https://www.facebook.com/solidarityschoolmesopotamia/photos/a.1007638985924302/5732038316817655/, last accessed 29/9/2023.

[2] https://www.mesopotamia.gr/el/about/, last accessed 15/2/2023.

[3] https://www.mesopotamia.gr/el/bank-school/to-allhlegguo-sxoleio/, last accessed 17/02/2023.

Courses include supplementary tuition for high school students, preparation for the university entrance exams, foreign languages, courses of Greek language for migrants, occasional seminars and labs, such as a theatre lab, and a comics course. Tuition covers almost all subjects of the public school curriculum, from ancient and modern Greek to maths, chemistry and biology. The school proclaims that it is committed to a socially sensitive, inclusionary education. It makes decisions collectively and its everyday operations rely on 'work groups' (teaching, secretariat, house maintenance) in which parents and adult students are also involved. Next steps and extrovert activities are proposed and decided in the quarterly mixed assemblies by teachers, parents and students alike (information leaflet, 2022).

Tuition is free of charge. New members enrol at the premises of *Mesopotamia*. They register both with the school and the *Time Bank*, declaring the services (technical aid, education etc.) they can contribute. Adult students and parents select also the work group in which they can take part (information leaflet, 2022). According to the statistics provided by a core member (M., personal communication), in February 2023 the courses taught in *Mesopotamia* amounted to 60, involving 40 teachers and 282 students.

Taking it at face value, this self-description highlights both the alter-political practice of the 'citizens' movement' in the district of Moschato, and how this effectively constitutes a pedagogical common.

'Alter-politics' is used here in the sense intended by the anthropologist Ghassan [16]. It pertains to new modes of politics which have been pursued by grassroots movements and civic associations since the 1990s. Democratic 'alter-politics' departs both from top-down, centralized logics of political activity and from typical patterns of activism that are bent on protest and demands from the state, or they are locked up in insularity, or they step forward as a vanguard. Democratic politics and contestation are refigured thus in ways that advance diversity, openness, assembly-based democracy, attention to process, horizontality, prefiguration, visionary pragmatism, work in everyday life to meet social needs, networking and action beyond closed identities [11, 15, 16].

What marks off contemporary democratic alter-politics is the conjunction of new social construction with opposition to capitalism, patriarchy and all forms of domination ([15]: 4–7, 73–4, 223–233). This is precisely the kind of politics practiced by *Mesopotamia*, which contests diverse forms of domination and exploitation, from racism to hetero-patriarchy, neoliberal enclosures and statist, top-down rule. Opposition is paired with a politics of proposition that configures new social relations and assembly-based models of organization which are non-hierarchical and non-vanguardist, prefiguring thus the egalitarian democratic world this alter-politics envisions. In the case of *Mesopotamia,* the politics of prefiguration constructs a political, cultural and educational space which is governed by open general assemblies and an ethics of solidarity and inclusion. The solidarity, assembly-based democracy, self-empowerment and self-education marking *Mesopotamia* draw the outlines of a vision which is partly realized in everyday practice. The following discussion will examine how *Mesopotamia*'s alter-politics frames its educational commons.

The *Solidarity School* engages in learning and teaching as a freely shared good. All parties involved -students, guardians and teachers- manage in common the educational process on terms of equality, freedom, openness, pluralism and solidarity. The philosophy and the *modus operandi* of the school challenge both the profit-oriented logic of private tuition and the hierarchical governance of public education. Yet, if we construe commons not merely as an alternative within neoliberal regimes but as innovative orientations which would profoundly reshape societies, the question raised about the *Solidarity School* is whether it helps to induce wider transformation ([21]: 3, 5). Although, by its constitution, the *School* opposes enclosures along class, race, nation and gender lines, offering tuition as a common good open to all, learning is substantially defined by the public-school curriculum and state language exams. These are governed by neoliberal priorities and logics -the individual accumulation of qualifications, the training of flexible and competitive employees or 'entrepreneurs' for neoliberal markets. Under these conditions, to what extent could an in/formal structure such as the *Solidarity School* effectively cultivate an ethos of commoning and radical democratic subjectivity? A sceptic could counter that such educational commons contribute mainly to the free reproduction of labour for neoliberal societies.

To fathom the actual impact of the hybrid or liminal commons performed by the *Mesopotamia Solidarity School* research needs to delve deeper in the everyday relations, the practices and the subjectivities configured in this social space. This was precisely the objective of the fieldwork carried out with the community of *Mesopotamia* -core members, teachers and students. From September 2022 till March 2023, the author (Alexandros Kioupkiolis) visited the premises of the *School* on multiple occasions (21 visits), participated in 5 on-line assemblies, interviewed 16 members, held 2 focus group and carried out participant observation in 11 courses, 12 assemblies, 2 cultural events and 1 seminar.

The findings illuminate and complicate the picture, without giving the lie to this initial account. What transpired from the interviews and participant observation is that democratic alter-politics imbues the educational activities of the *Solidarity School*, reshapes social interaction in the classroom by generating an ambiance of horizontal democracy and solidarity, and leaves an imprint on both teachers and students. While attachment to formal schooling diminishes the scope for experiment and undercuts the drive for collective participation, the alter-political orientation of the community brings about considerable subjective and relational displacements.

2.1 The Ambiance of Educational Commons

In attending different courses at the *Solidarity School*, from mathematics for the 1st grade lyceum class (high school, 15–16 years old) to ancient Greek, 3d grade lyceum (high school, 17–18 years old) and English proficiency classes, one typically witnesses a blend of rigorous teaching with a laidback, sociable and informal atmosphere. Despite the age gap and the differentiation of roles, there is no sense of

strict hierarchy, disciplinarity, severity or pressure. Students and teachers appear to collaborate on friendly terms in a convivial, at times humorous and joyful mood.

To illustrate, take Athina who teaches ancient Greek language for the 3d lyceum class. She starts the course (on 4 February 2023, at *Mesopotami*a, on-site observation) smiling and laughing. Four underage students and an adult are present in a small room. She asks one of them why there are no hand-written notes in his grammar book, and the student responds in a humorous mood: 'I care for Oikonomou's [the author] grammar book in the same way religious people care for the Bible. I don't deface it in order to preserve the integrity of the book.' The class, including the teacher, bursts into laughter. Later on, they come across the active verb 'αἱρῶ', and Athina asks the students about its meaning. One of them raises his hand but hesitates as he may be wrong. Athina responds: 'Say it, even if it is wrong, what's the big deal?' The grammar course goes on in the same easy-going and amiable vein for almost an hour.

Teachers, parents and young students typically attest to the good vibes reverberating in the *Solidarity School*. In the quarterly general assembly of the *School*, held at a Saturday afternoon on 10 December 2022 at the Cultural Center of Moschato and attended by fifty to sixty members, Kostas takes the floor to state: 'my daughter…-comes back home happy and smiley [from *Mesopotamia*]. From the public school, she comes back tired.' Anna, a newcomer teaching mathematics and physics, adds: 'I am also impressed at how kids…treat *Mesopotamia* as a company of friends, with a lot of love.'

Fanis (interview, 9 February 2023) sums up the overall feeling springing from the space:

> I really enjoy the everyday dynamics of the space…The space is dynamic, we are not a model...It is unpredictable. Everyday processes are decisive, substantially…The transformations of the space and of people who participated are impressive.

According to Thibaud [30], the ambiance of a situation or a place is the feeling, the affective tonality which colours a situation or a place by conferring on them a certain characteristic appearance and sense. It is indistinguishably a sense of the self and the world, a diffuse, non-localisable and infra-conscious sense which imprints its mark on our deeds and everyday gestures ([30]: 146). We make atmospheres by establishing the conditions which make possible the appearance of an atmosphere or phenomenon ([5]: 2, 3). Ambiances or atmospheres communicate then a particular feeling to participating subjects. 'A solemn atmosphere has the tendency to make my mood serious, a cold atmosphere causes me to shudder' ([5]: 2).

The feeling of reciprocity, the lack of rigid hierarchies and disciplines, the friendly, jokey or even cheerful intercourse between teachers and students, the concern with meaningful learning which infuses courses at the *Solidarity School* is thus an effect of conditions prevailing in the broader space of *Mesopotamia*: solidarity, acting together for the common good, collective decision-making in open assemblies, the absence of bosses and directors, citizens' political activism in defence of democracy.

The two focus groups the author held with eight students in a class of Proficiency in English and a third-year lyceum class (final high-school class) shed more light on

this effect. The first conversation took place on 10 February 2023 (students A–D) and the second on 4 March 2023 (students E–H). Seven of the students were underage, and one was nineteen years old. The collective interviews were a culmination of the fieldwork. The author had attended their classes several times to familiarize himself with them and had already spent five months carrying out participant observation. The first noticeable finding bears precisely on the particular ambience of the *School*.

> Student A: They [teachers] are friendlier than in private tuition centres and the school.
>
> Student C: They create a friendly environment, and they are more willing to assist us.
>
> Digging further into relationships and their 'sense' of the space, students foregrounded democracy, freedom, feeling at ease, intimacy, collaboration and understanding.
>
> Student A: It is more democratic here, we don't have the hierarchy that exists at school, the head of the school…because at school we get grades... Here the style is looser…
>
> Student B: It is more relaxed and freer.
>
> Student E: There is a more pleasant ambience, and this makes the class better. While we keep face, intimacy makes the class more efficient. Without breaking everything apart.
>
> Student H: Teamwork prevails, there is a dialogue between teacher and students, whereas often at school this is not the case.

Several interviews with *Mesopotamia* members and teachers elaborated on the socio-political intent which is reflected in this ambience. Among others, Fanis, who played a key role in founding the *School,* spells out the political rationale underlying it:

> I believe in education as a privileged part of social transformation, if people come [to *Mesopotamia*] for education, this is much better than doing political theory, if we want to say that we intervene in society and we are open (interview, 9 February 2023).

2.2 Commoning in and Out of This World

The 'formal' dimension of education at the *Solidarity School* forces constraints on the kind of educational commons it realizes. The levelling effect of the formal curriculum was a commonplace remark in the interviews with teachers, and it crops up immediately in a casual observation of courses (Aspasia, interview, 11 February 2023; Dinos, interview, 3 September 2022). Hence, teachers voice doubts over whether young students are conscious of the 'difference' of *Mesopotamia* as an alternative socio-political space, or they just look on the *School* as an institution of supplementary tuition which is free of charge (Nikos, interview, 24 October 2022; Adriana, interview, 5 December 2022).

The educational commons staged by the *Solidarity School* remains thus at a remove from a full-fledged mode of commoning in which the entire community of learners, teachers and guardians would freely co-construct the learning subjects and practices by co-managing the school on a basis of equality. The broader contents and objectives of schooling are predefined insofar as they conform to the formal

curriculum, while the actual participation of young students and many teachers in the co-management of the school is low.

But this very limitation aims at reversing inequalities and exclusions in present-day society. By providing free and high-quality supplementary tuition for the public high school, for university entrance exams and foreign language certificates, the *School* effectively assists students from lower income classes and diverse national-cultural backgrounds in overcoming class barriers and gaining access to higher education, scientific learning, professional skills and formal qualifications.

Aspasia dwells on how the incumbent neoliberal government (2019–2023) pushes young students from lower strata to drop out of education and to turn to job training. Against such elitist policies which narrow down mental horizons and professional prospects for working class youth, *Mesopotamia* sets out to defend general public education and encourages youth to 'dream freely' for their future (interview, 11 February 2023). Hence, the *Solidarity School* is committed to extending solidarity and fuelling collective empowerment *in this world*. But, in the vein of democratic alter-politics ([15]: 8), the *School* is in this world without being *of* this world, nurturing radical democratic values and visions of commoning *beyond* it.

Challenging the hegemonic culture and the inequalities of neoliberal capitalism, *Mesopotamia* and the *School* foster solidarity, reciprocity, conviviality, equality across class, race, nation and gender lines, the levelling of rigid hierarchies, care for others and the world at large. Young students feel freer in the classroom itself, in their intercourse with each other and their teachers. The atmosphere of companionship, solidarity and conviviality bolsters youth from strained family backgrounds, who find at the *School* a safe space in which they feel at ease and mutually supported (Athina, 11 February 2023, Dinos, 3 September 2022).

Moreover, young students enjoy real opportunities for participation in decision-making, mainly in the quarterly general assembly of the school, which are typically scant or absent in most public and private schools alike. Without forcing its participatory politics on young students, the *School* supplies this actual space for their participation. It also strives to amplify the real input of youth in other, subtler and 'light' ways, such as the distribution of questionnaires in which students give their feedback on the educational process and other potential issues by responding to both structured and open questions.

Finally, teachers endeavour to transform teaching into a participatory process even when the subject matter is predetermined by the public-school curriculum. Kostis' essay-writing class for the 3d grade of lyceum (final year of high school) illuminates this. He proposes different topics of discussion to the students who pick out one or two. They engage then in a free, open and collective discussion before putting their thoughts on a paper (observation on-site, 5 December 2022). The extra-curricular courses offered at the *Solidarity School* make ampler room for the participatory co-construction of learning and teaching, which commons the educational practice itself. Teachers seize on this opportunity, and *Mesopotamia* members insist on the importance of teaching free courses outside the public-school syllabus.

2.3 Smooth Commons and Transformation

The transformative effect of free democratic education is notable at the *Solidarity School*, despite the burdens of formal schooling. Solidarity, reciprocity, equal freedom beyond fixed hierarchies, learning as a good-in-itself are instilled in young students through the atmosphere of the space, their awareness of its difference, and the interventions of teachers in the 'fractures' of the courses, sensitizing students to issues of racism, exclusion, gender inequality, new enclosures, environmental degradation and the crisis of democracy.

Sotiris fleshes out the political effect of the ambience, which is hard to quantify.

Q: How do you promote solidarity here?

Sotiris: Through the multiple interventions…The processes contribute: assemblies, actions, the rallies outside.

Q: Does the educational process contribute, as well?

Sotiris: To a small extent…. I teach courses for students to sit exams. I give hints, but I need to cover the syllabus. In other, looser courses, such as drawing, there is discussion (interview, 15 November 2022).

'*I give hints…*' Political education in the classroom is light and 'interstitial,' avoiding catechism of any sort. Teachers use 'fractures' in the curriculum, by commenting for instance on the texts of ancient Greek literature, to raise consciousness about inequalities and exclusions.

As a result, the *smooth* character of educational commons is heightened at the *Solidarity School*—'smooth' not only in the sense that it lowers barriers, combatting exclusions and diluting rigid disciplines. The deeper educational influence on subjectivity, inclining young people towards a radical democratic habitus, are also brought about in a smooth, unobtrusive manner, respectful of individual autonomy. This cultural shift is induced through the ambience of the *School*, the democratic and solidary relations between students, teachers and parents/guardians, and the teachers' socio-political interventions in the 'fractures' noted by Sotiris and Fontas, and illuminated in the focus groups.

The two focus groups with the students (10 February 2023, students A–D, 4 March 2023, students E–H) spotlighted the political efficacy of such smooth and hybrid commons. The groups disclosed how their attendance at the *School* has left an imprint on them, even if they do not regularly take part in assemblies or other events at *Mesopotamia.*

Q: When you leave this space will it leave an imprint on you….?

Student A: I want to become a volunteer teacher, too.

Student F: For sure we will be nostalgic, we had a nice time, and a proper class … We have developed certain moral values ... Respect…

Student D: Humanity.

Student H: Team spirit.

Student F: Collaboration, freedom of speech.

Student E: Critical thought.

Student G: Diligence, organization.

Student H: We expand our horizons…I mean that, many times, during courses we get further information that helps us, it is up-to-date and relevant for our career…

Student E: That will give us a more rounded picture of life out there.

2.4 Conclusion

The crucial takeaway from this ethnographic inquiry into a nonformal school of educational commons which teaches, however, the formal public-school curriculum, is that the 'alter-political' organization and philosophy of the school gives rise to a distinctive ambience which enhances the quality of formal education while smoothly ingraining in students an empowering, egalitarian and democratic habitus. Establishing structures of democratic self-governance, cultivating relations of reciprocity, inclusion and solidarity, and eroding rigid hierarchies in education can be effectively conducive to both a heightened quality of formal tuition and the formation of empowered democratic citizenship.

3 House in the Forest and Council for the Upgrade of Humanity

The case study 'House in the Forest' was realized in the *School of Nature*, a private kindergarten school located in the suburbs of Thessaloniki. Twenty-two children, aged from four and half to six years old, took part in the study. In the class, one kindergarten teacher and one teacher of 'side support' participated along with the researcher. The activities were held on a weekly basis, once per week for two to three hours. The main sites of the activities were the school class, the premises of the school and the forest nearby. Children, teachers and the researcher worked together with the school community, the parents and the local society to construct a house in the nearby forest that would host their common activities.

The case study 'Council for the Upgrade of the Humanity' was conducted at the *Big Bang School*, a private elementary school based likewise in the suburbs of Thessaloniki. Fifteen children, aged twelve, partook in the case study. In the class, one teacher regularly supported the study. Occasionally, more teachers -such as the theatre teacher or the music teacher- turned up and collaborated with the researcher. The activities occurred on a weekly basis, and their main sites were the school class and the premises of the school. Students set up the 'Council for the Upgrade of Humanity,' a team of experts whose role was to come up with solutions to major problems of humanity. To better organise themselves, they divided the class into three teams focussed on different topics (environment, energy, human rights), and they started meeting up and working to address the specific problems of their field.

3.1 Objectives and Methodologies

In the *School of Nature* study, the collective construction of the House in the Forest aimed at supporting children in learning and experiencing peer-governance to become autonomous and collective beings aware of diversity and interdependence.

In the *Big Bang School* study, the Council was designed to enable children to engage in learning activities without the assistance of the teacher(s), to work as autonomous beings and self-organized groups, to experience peer-governance by self-organizing their council meetings, making decisions together and putting their words into practice. At the *School of Nature*, the methodologies adopted were participatory learning, and learning from nature and in nature; project learning; peer and autonomous learning; active listening; reflection; class assemblies; community engagement and celebration of multilingualism; active research (interviews with experts); extrovert action and cooperation with other schools and experts. At the *Big Bang School*, the methodologies consisted in participatory and peer learning; project learning; active listening; reflection, and active research (at the school).

In addition, the Sociocratic Circle Method [8, 12, 27, 28] was used in both case studies as a methodology for facilitating communication in circles, for making collective decisions with consent and for holding open elections to allocate roles. In both school contexts, the methodologies were pursued through the school councils. Both schools had already experimented with councils in their classes. However, there was a need to empower these councils for the specific case studies we undertook. Hence, the researcher, Dr Naya Tselepi, who is a certified expert, trainer and facilitator in Sociocracy, introduced the Sociocratic Circle Method (SCM), in line with the logics and the practices of the educational commons. Through the SCM, children developed skills for peer governance, defined rules, rights, and obligations, and reached decisions with consent.

3.2 SCM Activities

To establish the basic structure needed for a council of the commons, the 'circle,' children in both case studies were asked from the outset to create a circle, to look each other in the eyes, to turn their bodies towards the speaking person. The facilitator provided a safe space and time for each child to be heard. She respected the right not to speak and promoted respect and active listening to others. At the same time, children experimented by addressing an entire group, waiting for their turn and actively listening to each other. A facilitating instrument employed at the beginning was the totem, or 'magic stick,' as it was called in both classes. Among the toddlers, most of the time the facilitation was carried out by the researcher and the teacher. The students at the primary school experimented themselves with facilitation and voted for their own facilitators.

Decision making through consent was pursued through the SCM process of 'shaping consent' which was coordinated by the certified facilitator. This process cannot be fleshed out here in detail. In sum, it includes all voices in the final proposal that the facilitator makes to the circle members. To reply to this proposal the options are: 'like', 'dislike' and 'so and so,' which are usually expressed with thumbs. Given the circumstances and the children's needs, the researcher/facilitator introduced a more corporal mode of expressing reactions by raising hands.

'Open election,' another process of the SCM, was employed to allocate roles in both case studies. Its basic principle is that all members vote openly for the most suitable person for a role, justifying their choices with positive arguments. The final decision is also facilitated and reached through consent. This process helps to disclose hidden talents and encourages introverted people to participate in collective action. Within a common task, the invisible becomes visible.

3.3 Main Results/Findings

Children as commoners. Children in the *School of Nature* were keenly interested in the circle with the 'magic stick'/totem, a tool introduced by the researcher, in the context of the SCM, to improve communication in circles [10]. The totem seemed to have helped children wait for their turn, focus more on the person who speaks, and feel safe enough to expose themselves by addressing the group. A child noted: 'I liked it [the 'magic stick'] because everyone was silent.' Most children seemed to also enjoy doing things collectively, such as clearing forest paths. A child remarked: 'I liked it because we all worked together.' During these activities, adults -teachers and the researcher- avoided heavy interference, carving out a space for children to express themselves freely and to configure the process on their own terms.

At the *Big Bang School*, what attracted the attention of children was again the experience of the 'magic stick.' This seems to have fostered actively listening, 'reigning in' their impulse to speak over the others and sustaining meaningful communication. At the same time, the free choice of 'clubs,' that is of group activities around specific topics, fostered teamwork. Many children who had learned to play an instrument in the 'music club' usually played together in school breaks and wanted to attend the Music High School as a group. This convergence and collective activity strengthened relations among them. Relations were also cultivated by the teacher, who encouraged children's choices in a discreet way. He helped them set up a 'music corner' in the class and accompanied them with his own musical instrument. The teacher acted thus as a 'companion' in educational commons, providing children with the space to express themselves freely and to define their process while assisting them in a subtle way.

Commoning practices. Peer Governance, decision-making in common, shared rules, rights, obligations and the collective distribution of roles were key components in the practices of educational commons enacted in both school contexts. Children in both

case studies had honed such skills through the patterns of governance and community life already realized in school and through the SCM methodology [22, 24, 31].

Community life and collaboration in the *School of Nature* class were encouraged throughout the case study through the following activities:

- the definition of the common goals for the 'House in the Forest' that were also signed by all children;
- the creation of three inter-related teams for the preparatory tasks in the forest: to clear the forest paths, to construct the main table for work and eating, to build an open WC;
- the co-creation of 'the rules', 'the treasures' of the forest and of all steps in the process of constructing the House.

Children in the *School of Nature* class were also empowered as commoners, active users, and co-creators of educational commons by performing the role of 'social agents' who participated in school and local social life. They partook in activities of the school, such as the festivals of multilingualism that were held outdoors, in the school yard. During these events, the children, together with their teachers and supportive staff of the school, had to prepare collectively the lunch of the day. When the preparation was complete, and before the common lunch, they gathered in the open-air theatre and shared knowledge and games. The celebration culminated in the lunch at common tables, accompanied by teachers and some parents, and ended with the cleaning up of the place.

Children along with the adults co-managed thus the practices of their everyday life in a manner of openness, equality, co-activity, plurality and sustainability, engaging in a practice of c*ommoning* which builds a 'common' habitus. Moreover, the children of the case study actively shared their knowledge and their structures of consensual decision-making with other classes of the school and with another school in the vicinity. This extrovert dissemination of knowledge was also addressed to parents and families.

Children and adults practiced also peer governance through various processes based on the SCM. Decision-making by consent contributed to listening to all voices and integrating them in the final decision. As a result, children endorsed the outcome and they committed themselves to the tasks it defined. At the *Big Bang School*, in particular, children discovered and promoted their own priorities, enhancing active inclusion. The words of a child who explains the process of changing the colour of the team's T-shirt illustrate this effect:

> Ch2 [a member of the team] didn't like the color of the shirts we had decided before; they were red and she hated red, and we tried to get her to consent and we did, and we changed the color to blue so that we all consent.

'Open election' for the different roles attributed to toddlers contributed also considerably to shifting their arguments from purely sentimental ones—'I vote for my friend'- to arguments based on rational justification—'I vote somebody who is capable of doing the work described.' For children in the primary school, this procedure helped even the most introverted individuals to take on roles, to assume

responsibility for carrying out their tasks, to trust others and to actively involve themselves in collective activities. Children also 'openly' voted for their facilitators, who appeared to be very happy and committed to their roles.

Community and the common goods. Children in the case studies actively shared their knowledge with other actors in the 'local' context where they were embedded: other school classes, other schools in the vicinity, their families and other actors that could relate to the project. Parents keenly participated in the process by sharing their own knowledge, skills and materials with the children in the class. All participants were invited to freely consent to their participation in the class initiatives. Supportive staff of the school and experts from outside have also been asked to contribute their knowledge for the construction of the 'House in the Forest.' Sharing knowledge through presentations, theatrical plays and games was critical for children to be able to grasp the knowledge provided ('the rules of the forest' etc.) as well as the concepts and practices of the 'community of sharing'. Students, educators, parents and local society formed a 'community' that could govern itself and construct the 'House in the Forest.'

An important aspect to note here is that this community was not defined exclusively or primarily in geographical, place-based terms. School children come from a variety of places, from different neighborhoods of Thessaloniki city, nearby villages and other localities. Hence, a new community was set up, whose members were linked together through the common good they collectively manage: the 'House in the Forest.'

At the *Big Bang School*, the 'Council for the Upgrade of Humanity' that the class established aimed at sharing the solutions considered and the methodology used with the other school students. Hence, at the end of the school year, they made an open presentation in the school yard, and they discussed collectively their solutions and other alternatives. Later on, they harvested other students' views on whether they want to set up their own class or their school council. At the end of the event, the class children shared homemade snacks that they prepared with their families.

Feedbacks from students. When kindergarten children were asked what they liked more about the 'Council of the Forest' they responded in various ways, including drawings. The teacher helped them verbalize parts of them:

> I see and listen… To listen when others talk to me and not to pop up… To listen to the view of the others and others to listen to mine… When I listen to the other, I learn more…

Moreover, this class made a valuable gift to the researcher: a booklet with drawings, words and snapshots from the work and their collaboration. One child wrote:

> I drew the council of the forest. We were discussing and deciding how to build a house. There was a need to cooperate. Not everyone would do what they want. We were voicing our opinion and making the right decisions.

Another one noted: 'I learnt the circle…to listen and not to interrupt the others.'

At the primary school, children seemed to be content with the fact that they could make a case for their choice, influencing their classmates, trusting each other and confidently performing their roles. In the focus group, some children argued thus:

Question: Can you pick out a moment that you liked a lot, or not at all?

Ch3: I liked it when we did the 'Council.'

Question: Which part of it?

Ch3: Most, and especially when we were to choose somebody to take the minutes or be a facilitator, because you realized that we were all influencing everyone's opinion.

Question: How did you feel in those roles you took on?

Ch1:… we know that, for example, Ch2 is the facilitator, she knows, and we trust her.

Question: How do you, Ch2, feel?

Ch2: I feel the same, that everyone who has a role, this suits them and there will be trust.

3.4 Overview

Drawing on the participatory observations of the researcher, the focus groups held with the children, the evaluation games, the reflection processes and teachers' feedback, the transformations experienced by children in both school environments could be summarized as follows:

- their self-confidence in voicing their ideas has been strengthened,
- their ability to speak in groups and in public, and to make presentations has improved,
- their respect for and acceptance of others' views has been enhanced,
- the inclusion of all voices has been fostered,
- dialogue between children and within groups has improved,
- argument and debate have been cultivated,
- the ability of the team to self-regulate has grown,
- the ability of the team to decide with consent was enhanced or consolidated,
- active participation in assuming roles and responsibilities has increased,
- practices of cooperation were established,
- understanding and the sharing of resources (materials, goods, knowledge etc.) were promoted,

Particularly among the younger children of the *School of Nature,*

- toddlers' meta-gnostic skills in listening, oral communication, the expression of ideas and feelings, negotiation, and cooperation seemed to have developed,
- their understanding of rules as key to the smooth operation of a team was solidified,
- the extrovert dissemination of knowledge and active engagement with the school community (other classes, families and experts) became habitual.

The Sociocratic Circle Method considerably contributed to these transformative effects. The SCM supported and facilitated the class councils in both school contexts,

boosting the development of children's skills for peer governance: the definition of binding rules, collective decision-making and shared responsibility in various tasks [22, 24, 31]. More specifically,

- children had a safe space and enough time to express themselves and to actively listen by communicating in 'circles' under facilitation,
- the Sociocratic 'circle' ensured equality, equity and the inclusion of all voices and needs: 'all voices and needs matter,'
- the 'circle' provided a comprehensive methodology for decision-making with consent rather than majority. There was no minority that could be overpowered, and all members were content with the decisions made,
- children learned to be committed to the tasks decided; they assumed roles and were responsible for them,
- the method provided alternative open processes, pursuing positive justification for the election of roles with consent.

3.5 Conclusion

The case studies furnished more specific insights into educational commons, illuminating key findings in relevant research [25, 26] :

- The fact that adults (teachers, researcher etc.) avoided too much interference with children's initiatives and acted as companions was in line with the practices of educational commons and considerably assisted children in acceding to personal and collective autonomy.
- By dint of participating in sociocratic 'circles' and decision-making with consent, children were educated in peer governance and were encouraged to feel and act as equals with a robust collective consciousness and social skills.
- The participation of children in the practices of everyday school-life, in a manner of openness, equality, equity, freedom, creativity and plurality, laid the groundwork for ingraining the practices of *commoning* as a common habitus.
- Sociocracy supplied a methodology for radical change in the entire school structure and power relations. Shared power, the co-management of educational commons, is the sociocratic objective for school governance.

At the *School of Nature*,

- sharing knowledge and opening up educational practices to other classes, educators, parents, experts and local society set the stage for constructing a school community which was not narrowly place-based, attesting to how education can be effectively organized on the basis of the commons,
- the school community learned to co-manage their common good (the 'House in the Forest') and to govern itself under the stewardship of the teacher. Governance was transformed thus into a common good accessible to all members of the community, enacting a democracy of the commons [29].

4 Epilogue

The two case studies at the *School of Nature* and the *Big Bang School* lent credit to the original research hypothesis according to which education can be organized as commons. Furthermore, sociocracy proved to be a good practice fostering commons in education and democratizing school life.

However, both schools fall within the private sector. As a consequence, they do not challenge the profit-driven structures of the market and they fail to provide a wider site of struggle for a more equal, fair and inclusive education. Market logics and a predefined curriculum set by the public Ministry of Education are some of the walls to be overcome if educational commons are to become an effective and diffuse reality in contemporary societies. Research in educational commons can open some cracks in these walls, disclosing potential for wider change.

The *Solidarity School* is a considerably different animal. It embodies a liminal or hybrid mode of commoning education, located both within and beyond formal public schooling.

The formal soul of the *School* restricts the room for free commoning through which all members of the educational community would collectively and openly form the contents and methods of learning. The 'informal' or grassroots militant soul operates through open assemblies, fomenting an ambiance of conviviality, solidarity, freedom and equality, which gets diffused in the classrooms and triggers smooth subjective shifts. It fosters participatory learning, it works for change through 'fractures' while covering the syllabus, it upholds education as an end-in-itself. It aims for inclusion, social justice and democratic public schools. The formal constraints on free commoning derive from *Mesopotamia*'s strategic logic which combines social empowerment here and now, for people labouring in present societies, with grassroots egalitarian democracy, moral and intellectual reform, resistance and visionary aspiration.

This is a transformative strategy which is anchored in the present, in actual needs and conditions, but lays the foundations for another world. The offshoot is a distinct, alter-political commoning within and beyond the present world which is, by the same token, an agonistic commoning both internally, reflecting on its imperfections and striving to reduce them, and externally, militating against the status quo that enforces inequalities and exclusions.

The strategic logic informing *Mesopotamia*'s commoning is a typical instance of the composite alter-political strategy advocated by radical political thought [13, 15, 18] and adopted by contemporary social movements, from the Zapatistas to the 2011 'squares movements.' In this strategic synthesis, covering social needs and empowering people in the present is wedded to the politics of opposition to neoliberal capitalism and to the visionary politics of creating, here and now, the institutions of a new world. It is the conjunction of commoning with this three-pronged strategy of visionary pragmatism which begets a distinctive figure of commoning within-and-beyond the present.

The type of commoning enacted by the *Solidarity School* displays a dual concern with achieving a space of grassroots democratic solidarity and acting as a vehicle for change outside the space itself. Hence the limitations and the counter-hegemonic force of this mode of educational commons. In the move from inside to outside the space, we have highlighted the importance of the ambiance -a widespread feel of solidarity, the democracy of any and all, the flattening of hierarchies, freedom, conviviality, humour- which is engendered by the community constructing the space but is transmitted outside the space by making an effective imprint on subjectivities. Through the ambience, subjective shifts are brought about in subtle, inobtrusive ways which are the outcome of personal exposure to the positive vibes of a space rather than of discipline or indoctrination.

Research in educational commons as a new perspective on emancipatory pedagogy has not yet delved into the logics of agonistic commoning within-and-beyond, and the transformative potentials of the ambience imbuing actually existing commons. The example of the *Solidarity School* in *Mesopotamia* sheds light on the significance of both, not only for future inquiries but also for democratic transformations in our times.

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