

The Transition Initiatives - How is Commoning applied?

A descriptive analysis of commoning in three Transition Initiatives.

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Abstract

Relating to the debate of where the commons movement and the Transition Initiatives coincide, this paper examines the principles and practices both concepts share through the analysis of commoning in three Transition Initiatives. Despite a considerable amount of theory about the commons on the one hand and the Transition Initiatives on the other, very little empirical research on the specific elements of commoning in real life examples exists. Thus, in this paper the following main research question is addressed: “*What are the elements of commoning discernable in Transition City Lancaster, Transition Town Lewes and Transition Penwith?*” In order to answer this question a conceptualization and operationalization as well as an ideal type of commoning is established on the basis of different accounts. This ideal type provides the most characteristic elements of commoning as defined in the literature and is used in the analysis as a measuring rod to evaluate and compare the findings from the three selected cases. In this process, directed content analysis of web-data provided on the websites of the Transition Initiatives, is employed. Furthermore, interviews with members of the core groups of the three initiatives are conducted to gather even more specific data. During the analysis, the qualitative data analysis program ATLAS.ti is used to facilitate organization, categorization and coding of the data. The analysis produces a rich description of commoning in the three Transition Initiatives and provides valuable insights into the specific elements of commoning applied. Eventually, the results suggest that commoning cannot be reduced to a definite set of elements. Yet, it can be regarded as a complex and flexible composition of activities and elements special with regard to context and geographical position.

Keywords: *Commons; Commoning; Ideal Type; Transition Initiatives; Transition City Lancaster; Transition Town Lewes; Transition Penwith*

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1. Introduction

Climate change, social injustice and enduring military conflicts are admittedly some of the most relevant and urgent issues today, just to name a few. Forecasts about the development of those issues delineate an alarming vision of the future, taking into account that little is being done to address them. In order to stop climate change for example, especially the industrialized nations are required to lead the way. This implies a substantial decrease of fossil fuel dependency on the one hand and the development of clean, renewable energy infrastructure on the other. However, a superior focus on economic growth still prevents a large proportion of governments in the world to address these issues with all certainty. Trade-offs between the scope of climate protection measures and the demands and interests of national economies frequently turn out for the benefit of the latter. Yet, the capacity of our society to understand that the demand for endless growth hazards the well-being of future generations, will become decisive. Meanwhile it is important to recognize that these issues are anthropogenic, which means that they are evoked by humanity itself. In this regard the concept of the era of the Anthropocene requires deeper consideration. The Anthropocene began around 1800 with the beginning of the industrialization (Steffen, Crutzen, McNeill, 2007, p. 1). This relatively new epoch in geological time can best be understood as a situation in which the effects of human actions need to be regarded as so powerful, that their effects on the environment will leave a mark in the long-term strata record. In this regard Steffen, Crutzen and McNeill (2007) explained that “Human activities have become so pervasive and profound that they rival the great forces of Nature and are pushing the Earth into planetary terra incognita. The Earth is rapidly moving into a less biologically diverse, less forested, much warmer, and probably wetter and stormier state” (p. 1).

With reference to this situation it needs to be doubted that an appropriate response will be achieved through the political approaches which have been applied so far. This claim is supported by different scholars. As Esteva (2014) explained “Both scholarly scrutiny and empirical experience are evidencing that the dominant system cannot deal with the current crises. It lacks realism to continue expecting that conventional paths will deliver what we urgently need” (p. 56). Already earlier, Bollier and Helfrich (2012) took this up when they explained that the conventional political discourse is not capable of naming the problems, suggesting alternative solutions or implementing reforms. Based on this assumption, the role of spectators who rely on the capabilities of the current system to tackle the transition, is no longer acceptable for some people. “Surrounded by an archaic order of centralized hierarchies on the one hand and predatory markets on the other, presided over by a state committed to planet-destroying economic growth, people around the world are searching for alternatives” explain Bollier and Helfrich (2012) in this regard. They describe the logic of the *commons* as the main tool, through which such alternatives are explored. Attributed with a new vocabulary and understanding the commons are said to provide the potential to escape many of the limitations brought about by the current system. For a better understanding, the traditional idea of the commons of yesteryears referred to the

shared use of land between a distinct group of people. Such people, who were referred to as the commoners, shared the utilization rights for this land and applied self-reliant norms and obligations. The term itself was coined in Britain but various similar arrangements existed around the world. While the traditional setting of the commons did not withstand over time, its ideals of a strong community, close collaboration and sustainable livelihoods sustained. The current discussion about the commons takes up these ideals and connects them to the activity and initiative of modern people who aim to establish a socially just and more sustainable future. A prime example of such are the Transition Initiatives which Bollier and Weston (2012) describe as some of the most innovative and practical examples of modern commons. The Transition Initiatives can be regarded as grassroots organizations, established to transform their regional and local environment and guide into a low-carbon and socially just future (Hopkins, 2010). In this endeavor, the preparation of the local community towards the challenges of peak oil and climate change, ranks first. With these issues, being main characteristics of the era of the Anthropocene, the Transition initiatives seem to provide a community, bottom-up response aiming to overcome the deadlock of conventional approaches. While the first Transition Initiative has been founded in 2006, 479 official and a multitude of yet unofficial initiatives have been founded around the world, involving thousands of people.

1.1 Research Problem

There has been much controversial scientific debate on the commons over the past years. Thereby, the *Tragedy of the Commons* described by Hardin (1968) as well as *Governing the Commons* developed by Ostrom (1990) rank among the most popular and influential accounts on the concept. However, the commons have arrived in current scientific discussions. In this regard, many experts and commons activists are agreed that new ideas and approaches brought along through the concept have the potential to provide alternatives to various issues of modern society. Amid such accounts, especially the possibility for change provided through the commons, is described as extensive. Esteva (2014) even assumes that certain types of commons are already the cell of a new society, emerging within the old one. In the scope of the debate the term commoning was coined by Linebaugh (2008) to describe the activity in the commons from which their potential and appeal arises. The activity of commoning is closely related to the existence of the commons as such, since the commons only become vibrant through real people acting together to achieve a shared purpose (Helfrich, 2012). Thus, the activity of commoning may be regarded as the basis for the emergence of commons nowadays. However, what is still missing in scientific literature is a delineation of the specific elements of commoning which can be found in real life examples.

Yet, there are no commons initiatives or institutions which exclusively conduct commoning. Commons are diverse and special with regard to purpose, context and geographical position as well as being frequently mingled with diverse ideas and backgrounds. Thus, as Esteva (2014) explains: “We

also need to explore the limits and contours of all the social forms we call commons, and also its strings attached, its oppressions, its straitjackets” (p. 47). This demands for an in-depth analysis of the structures underlying current commons in order to differentiate and establish a clear and communicable picture of the concept. Since the Transition Initiatives have been defined as prime examples of contemporary commons they provide an excellent starting point for this endeavor. Wessling (2012) clarified this further when he explained:

“One area of further challenge is certainly to look closer into the many principles and practices the commons and Transition share. They are like natural fellows and very much at ease with each other. Thus it will be most inspiring to see how more and more Transition and commons projects globally overlap and thrive together in a most joyful and life-enriching way.” (p. 301)

Starting from this approach, the study aims to clarify what elements of commoning are discernable in the Transition Initiatives. Thus, there is an inherent need to define what commoning implies in the first place. For this purpose, a definition of the concept and its indicators is provided based on different accounts. On the basis of the latter, an ideal type of commoning is developed combining the concept’s most characteristic elements. This ideal type serves as a characterization and measuring rod in the analysis through which the reality of commoning in the Transition Initiatives is observed. Finally, the description of commoning in the Transition Initiatives makes it possible to explain, grasp and apply its specific components and additionally enriches the understanding of the three selected Transition Initiatives. Furthermore, the insights enable to envision whether the idea of the commons, and more specifically the approach of commoning as applied in the Transition Initiatives, can be regarded as a practical response to the issues brought about in the era of the Anthropocene.

1.2 Research Approach

Particular importance of this paper lies on developing a description of the elements of commoning applied in the Transition Initiatives. For this purpose, three specific Transition Initiatives are selected. The main research question addressed towards these cases sounds as follows:

“What are the elements of commoning discernable in Transition City Lancaster, Transition Town Lewes and Transition Penwith?”

In order to structure the analysis of the main research question, four consecutive sub-questions are employed. These sub-questions serve to answer the main research question in a comprehensive way and are defined on the basis of the four dimensions of commoning derived from the literature¹. Thus, the sub-questions relate the preconceived theory of commoning to the reality in the Transition Initiatives

¹ E.g. Chapter 2.

and are also aimed at addressing emergent elements of commoning special to the individual initiatives. The first sub-question in this regard is as followed:

1: *“What are the basic ideas of commoning underlying the activity in the Transition Initiatives?”*

This sub-question serves to investigate the basic ideas of commoning, resembling the elements defined in the first dimension of commoning. Additionally, emergent basic ideas and principles underlying the activity of commoning in the three individual Transition Initiatives are addressed.

The second sub-question aims at determining the purposes of commoning in the three Transition Initiatives. To this end, elements resembling the aspects of the second dimension of commoning as well as related emergent elements, are investigated. The corresponding sub-question is as followed:

2: *“What are the purposes of commoning in the Transition Initiatives?”*

The third sub-question aims at working out the social practices of commoning discernable in the activity of the Transition Initiatives. Therefore, the preconceived social practices defined in the third dimension of commoning as well as related emergent elements are taken into account. The corresponding sub-question sounds as followed:

3: *“What are the social practices of commoning discernable in the Transition Initiatives?”*

Finally, the fourth sub-question is aimed at identifying the ways in which commoning is organized and applied towards a mutual strategy in the three individual Transition Initiatives. For that purpose, preconceived elements of the fourth dimension of commoning are taken into account as well as related emergent aspects. Thus, the final sub-question is:

4: *“In which ways are the activities and practices of commoning organized in the Transition Initiatives?”*

As a guideline to answer the four sub-questions the ideal type of commoning is consulted. By providing the most characteristic aspects of commoning as defined in the theory, it serves as a measuring rod throughout the analysis to assess similarities and differences in the reality of commoning of the three Transition Initiatives.

To sum up, in this introduction research problem, research approach and the applied research questions have been defined. To end this chapter, a short outlook over the following contents of this research is given. The second chapter theorizes on the concept of the commons and commoning. Origin and historical development as well as the theoretical evolution of the concepts are outlined, involving different theoretical accounts. Based on the latter, an appropriate conceptualization concerning the

concept of the commons in general, and commoning in specific, is established. Additionally, the ideal type of commoning is constructed. This ideal type serves as the main tool for systemizing and comprehending the data concerning the main variable of commoning. In the third chapter a qualitative approach is applied and justified in order to answer the research questions. Additionally, the methods of case selection, data collection and of data analysis are introduced. The analysis of the collected data follows in the fourth chapter. It includes web documents provided by the three Transition Initiatives as well as interview data gathered for each individual case. This data is analyzed based on the operationalization of commoning defined in the third chapter. During the analysis, codes and categories are recorded by use of the qualitative data analysis program ATLAS.ti. On the basis of this analysis, patterns are reported and answers to the research questions are formulated. Finally, the results of the analysis are compared between the three cases and comprehensive conclusions are drawn in the fifth chapter.

2. The Commons, Commoning and the Transition Initiatives

It has been acknowledged by various scholars that the Transition Initiatives constitute prime examples of modern commons². However, despite this assumption the commons miss one undisputed definition which can be applied to describe what they consist of. This can be partly explained by the fact that the commons had and have different forms and characteristics due to context, origin and geographical position. Additionally, the different academic perspectives through which the commons have been considered, have contributed to ambiguous definitions. Thus, definite indicators through which the commons and the underlying activity of commoning can be defined and measured hardly exist. With that in mind, this chapter strives for clarification and aims to deduce a conceptualization of commoning which refers to its most essential characteristics. For this purpose, definitions and descriptions of various commons activists and experts are applied and summarized into one ideal type. The latter serves as a measuring rod in the analysis through which the reality of commoning in the Transition Initiatives is observed. Yet, it is crucial to understand that this ideal type does not aim to be a summary of all average statistics and characteristics that can be found in reality, but constitutes a specification of the most characteristic elements of commoning. Thus, the first paragraphs of this chapter elucidate the historical background of the commons in order to establish a comprehensive perspective. The second step reviews the most acknowledged and frequently applied theoretical accounts on the commons, around Hardin (1968) and Ostrom (1990). This is necessary because these theories involved such different contexts and starting positions that they contributed substantially to the vague theoretical situation associated with the commons today. The review allows to contextualize their findings with regard to their approach and research discipline and to establish a conceptualization of commoning appropriate for the purpose of this study. The most important characteristics of this conceptualization are finally summed up into the ideal type of commoning involving four interrelated dimensions and appropriate working definitions.

2.1 Origin and History of the Commons

For many centuries human populations have established environmental sustainability through the use of commons governance (Byrne et al., 2009). Even though similar arrangements existed around the world in various settings, the term itself originates in the British agrarian system. Large areas of the latter including pasture, forests or fisheries had been used by communities on the basis of collective rights of disposal. These commons had neither been owned by private persons nor the state but had been in possession by the members of the regional and local communities. However, the commons were far from open-to-all or open-access-regimes as some scholars later supposed (Linebaugh, 2010). Their utilization was restricted to the community of local people. These people, referred to as the commoners,

² Cf. (Helfrich, 2011); (Bollier & Weston, 2014); (Wessling, 2014).

had utilized their commons guided by mutual rights, norms and obligations. Compliance with these arrangements had been observed by an authority whose task was to sentence breaches and settle disputes between the commoners (Linebaugh, 2010). Benefits provided or generated in the commons were free for the commoners as long as the mutual obligations were fulfilled and the rules were applied. Such rules included, among others, the number of animals which each commoner was allowed to pasture and the time frame in which a commoner was allowed to do this (Linebaugh, 2010).

However, these traditional commons were not to last when the industrial revolution began (Shiva, 2012). Since the effects of the industrialization on the peasant population and the rural economy were extensive, the commons were almost completely dissolved. More effective land management was introduced to feed the increasing population. Agrarian innovations, such as cultivation of forage crops and the feeding and fattening of cattle in stables, initiated a change in the way land was managed. For the sake of efficiency and revenue increase commons were enclosed and transformed to agrarian cropland, since they were deemed incapable of providing sufficient output. Thus, intensive agribusiness was initiated and privatization replaced the commons. Protests from the commoners against the enclosures remained without sustained success. The enclosure movement finally installed laws of private property to replace the customary rights of the commoners (Esteva, 2014). The latter were simply dispossessed of their utilization rights without any substitution. Zückert (2012) even describes the enclosure movement as the true tragedy of the commons with respect to Hardin's (1968) famous theory since it contributed to the poverty crisis of the peasant population in the late 18th century. Although the enclosure process was deemed necessary to feed an increasing population the methods applied were devastating for the peasantry which utterly impoverished as a consequence. In this regard Linebaugh (2010) puts the enclosure process as one of the major crimes of modernity lined up with slave-trade, burning of witches, the Irish starvation or the Native-American genocide. Whereas pre-industrial societies have not had the power to match the great forces of nature, the beginning of the industrial revolution changed this situation significantly. Thus, the end of the traditional commons overlaps with the beginning of the Anthropocene as a new era in human history. This era is characterized substantially by the great acceleration of population growth and the anthropogenic increase in carbon emissions, species invasions and extinctions, and the production and discard of metals and plastics.

2.2 Theory and Review of Hardin and Ostrom

In the 20th century many theoretical tracts and critiques were developed reviewing the disappearance of the traditional commons. Different accounts, about what was allegedly labelled as commons, attracted much attention. One very popular example was developed by biologist Garrett Hardin (1968). He involved the commons in an inevitable 'tragedy of the commons' which has been frequently and mistakenly used as an argument for the necessity of commons regimes to fail. Hardin theorized that many people may use a commons collectively for centuries as long as the breaking point of the land is

not exceeded. However, when living conditions improve and population density increases, he assumed that the commons would necessarily be overused and destroyed through rational individuals. He proceeded on the assumption that every additional user would try to maximize his profit and would increase, for example, his number of cattle on the pasture. Thus, if the free disposal of the commons would have been maintained, the limitedness of resources and the growing number of residents would ultimately have led to the tragedy of the commons (Hardin, 1968). However, Hardin included some major misconceptions in his theory. He later acknowledged himself that he did not describe a commons regime but an unmanaged commons, which actually refers to an open-access regime with very different prerequisites than the commons (Esteva, 2014). Yet, the commons always included an authority whose task was to pay attention and sanction the breach of the utilization principles (Linebaugh, 2010). Additionally, the rational user, Hardin referred to, was rather eager and sightless than rational towards his fellow users.

Ostrom (1990), who later won the Nobel-prize in economics for her work on the commons, criticized Hardin exactly for his mistakes. She wanted to show that it is possible for small scale communities to manage, what she called common-pool-resources (CPR's), without necessarily overexploiting them. Therefore, she conducted various field studies on CPR's all over the world to observe their governance. Based on this studies, Ostrom developed certain conditions for the successful management of CPR's referring to specific norms and regulations. Thus, she developed design principles of CPR governance through robust, long enduring CPR institutions, which she found most important for their long-term sustainability. These design principles involve aspects such as appropriation rights and rules and sanctioning and conflict resolution mechanisms, which Hardin disregarded. Ostrom's design principles are often referred to as the most reliable foundation of commons governance.

However, even Ostrom's theory allows space for criticism of misconceptions and historical inaccuracies. As Esteva (2014) explains, the use of the term commons and the term resources in Ostrom's theory are problematic. The commons traditionally did not share the connotations of the term resources, which Ostrom used. This is clarified in the following: "Ms Ostrom did not notice, for example, that resource is the opposite of commons, that the transformation of commons into resources dissolves them, that you cannot treat commons as 'common-pool resources'" (Esteva, 2014, p.48). Shiva (2012) further explained that the modern connotations of the term resources implicate the destruction of the commons. Shiva based this argument on the fact that industrialism and colonialism initiated a conceptual break, which changed the implications of the term. Prior to the advent of the industrial revolution and colonialism the resource concept represented the independent power and exceptional creativity of nature to regenerate (Shiva, 2012). However, after the beginning of industrial revolution and enclosure movement "Resources are now merely 'any material or conditions existing in nature which may be capable of economic exploitation'" (Shiva, 2012, p. 228). Through the developments in the scope of the enclosures, nature and resources lost their regenerative and creative

power. Their value became dependent on the extent to which it was possible to create economic value for an industrialized economy. Hand in hand with nature, also the commons lost their regenerative and creative power and were transmogrified into resources. The connotations of the term resources, which indicate this destruction, can be found in Ostrom's (1990) definition at various points. One example is Ostrom's description that resource units in the CPR's are appropriated from a resource system to be owned and sold by the appropriator. These appropriators use the resource units as inputs into production processes (Ostrom, 1990). The value of such resource units is based on their economic potential emerging through the disposal of the resource unit. Thus, they become dependent on the extent to which they may serve as an input into production processes. Since Ostrom's scientific starting position was economic and her quest was efficiency in collective resource management, this categorization of the commons is reasonable (Esteva, 2014).

The basis of the commons, however, is in fact contradictory with the connotations of the term resources. Linebaugh (2008) clarified this when he explained that commons do not refer to natural resources but to the social activity, representing social relationships which are strongly connected to nature³. He warns that it is even misleading if not dangerous to use the term commons as if it would be a resource. Accordingly, Linebaugh introduced the verb commoning in order to emphasize the social activity at the basis of the commons without which they cannot arise. This aspect was then incorporated by other commons activists and experts, as it is explained more profoundly in the following section.

2.3 Definition of the Commons and Commoning

Linebaugh's (2008) approach emphasizes that the social activity of commoning is the basis of any commons. However, there are neither a consistent definition nor measurable indicators for the concept of commoning established yet. Thus, there is the need to explore it in more detail in order to be able to understand and observe it. With this in mind the commons might first of all be understood as the institution comprising the social activities and practices of commoning. While referring to an activity, commoning needs to involve certain people. These people, who are called the commoners, usually constitute a community limited through context and catchment area. Next to the commoners, commoning is connected to specific material or immaterial elements which the commoners apply (Esteva, 2014). In addition to these practical prerequisites, commoning involves certain social and conceptual elements. Since these elements take a key role in distinguishing and characterizing the concept, the following paragraphs define and combine them into four interrelated dimensions.

The first dimension of commoning refers to the very basic ideas underlying the activity of commoning. They refer to the foundation on which the social practices are performed. These basic ideas

³ Linebaugh (2008) hints that this might also be a trap. "Capitalists and the World Bank would like us to employ commoning as a means to socialize poverty and hence to privatize wealth." (p. 279).

assume the commoner in an interactive role as a creative, distinct individual strongly interrelated with his environment (Bollier & Helfrich, 2012). This implies that the commoners are strongly related to the people around them and primarily willing to cooperate and help each other (Helfrich, 2012). Thus, the first basic idea is the interrelationality between the commoners assuming that “Individuals and the collective are nested within each other and mutually reinforcing.” (Helfrich, 2012, Chapter 1, The Logic of the Commons & the Market, row 5/column 3). The second basic idea implicates that humans are primarily cooperative and mutually supportive. This originates in the critical role cooperation has played in human evolution. It stresses that humans are primarily willing to participate, interact and collaborate with others (Bollier & Helfrich, 2012). Through the application of this basic ideas social responsibility of the individual for his activity arises, considering the wellbeing of the people related to him. In this regard Meretz (2012) emphasizes the interdependency and the need for inclusion of others inalienable within the commons. To sum up, the core ideas of commoning reinforce the intention and importance of the individual to serve the whole rather than the few (Pór, 2012). This logic seeks to abandon the myth of the self-made man celebrated by market culture and revives the essentiality of collaboration and interaction with other people (Bollier & Helfrich, 2012).

The second dimension considered is the purpose of commoning. This dimension refers to the issues and aspects which the commoners aim to establish through commoning. To this end it takes into account short and long term objectives of commoning as well as the vision which unites the commoners. According to theoretical accounts, the purpose of commoning is mainly characterized by the desire for change the commoners share (Esteva, 2014). Based on this aspect, the purpose of commoning is primarily defined as to conceptualize and implement transition to a better and different future (Bollier & Helfrich, 2012). This purpose presupposes a dissatisfaction concerning the status-quo as the point of departure for the desired transition. Thereby the dissatisfaction involves a criticism of the increasingly dysfunctional market-state partnership of conventional systems (Bollier & Helfrich, 2012). This results in a rejection of utopian ideals of endless growth and consumer satisfaction in which individual consumption is valued most and sustainability and social justice become disregarded (Esteva, 2014). Thus, the second aspect of the purpose of commoning is to collectively establish sustainable livelihoods as well as a socially just future in which the value of the community is appreciated. This purpose seems to have the potential to tackle, or at least to deal with the issues characterizing the era of the Anthropocene on a community basis, especially biological damages and effects of climate change.

The third dimension are the social practices of commoning which are grounded in the core ideas and aim to establish the common purpose. They refer most directly to the practical aspects of the activity of commoning (Bollier & Helfrich, 2012). Distinctive for this activity are the basic ideas of commoning presupposing interrelationality and cooperativeness between the participants (Helfrich, 2012). This implies that individuals are related to others and their environment and primarily willing to cooperate with others. “In its simplest form, commoning is creating and maintaining something collectively” explains Pór in this regard (2012, Chapter. 3, School of Commoning, para. 4). Thus, the practices of

commoning are primarily to be seen as the collective activity of a specific group of individuals which aim to create and maintain something together. This collective creation produces intellectual value such as common ideals or strategies as well as material value based on the practical implementation of projects and strategies. As an example, establishing sustainable livelihoods may be approached through collective creation of common values and strategies and realized through the collective creation of practical projects to reduce energy consumption. Essential in this regard are the practices of cooperation and active participation with others (Bollier & Helfrich, 2012). Bollier & Helfrich (2015) describe this through the statement that “A commons requires active, ongoing participation with others in implementing and maintaining a shared purpose” (p. 48). Cooperation and participation with others are the practices which unite the commoners and allow for the establishment of connections between them. Participation with others involves the practice of collective exchange of interests and demands with others through dialogue and discussion. In this regard Esteva (2014) explains that the commons define social relationships. Grounded on the participation with others, the social relationships provide the basis on which collaboration towards the shared purpose and cohesiveness between the commoners are established. Furthermore, “No commons can exist without widespread knowledge about its nature and widespread acceptance and respect for the groups, institutions, and arrangements that care for it” explains Nahrada (2012, Chapter 1, The Commoning of Patterns and the Patterns of Commoning, para. 3). Therefore, knowledge is regarded as abundant in the commons. This means that the practice of sharing and spreading of knowledge and information with others is the norm in order to create awareness and a common knowledge base for the commoners. These practices are based on the social relationships between the commoners which are defined as a prerequisite of commoning (Esteva, 2014). Through these social relationships norm of behavior, mutual obligations and specific forms of social organization are established (Esteva, 2014). These elements require responsible action of the individual commoner towards others as well as the reconciliation of individual needs with the needs of others.

Accordingly, the fourth dimension of commoning includes certain elements of social organization. Thus, the organization dimension is applied in order to describe how the individual ideas, motivations and demands of the commoners are ordered into a common strategy. In this regard the first element to be noticed is that commoning is equally accessible to all people who aim to establish the common purpose (Esteva, 2014). Yet, since the commons are frequently delimited by local or geographical context the number of commoners is correspondingly confined by the catchment area of the respective commons. Because the demands and aspirations of these individual commoners can be diverse, space for robust dialogue and experimentation is required (Bollier & Helfrich, 2012). This space is established through decentralized coordination from the bottom up by the commoners, demanding strong participation and self-initiative. These aspects are directly related to a non-hierarchical structure applied between the commoners which reflects their interrelationality and equality. It involves collective decision making based on the principle of consensus (Helfrich, 2012). This process seizes the basic ideas of commoning introduced in the first dimension which refer to the

interrelationality and equality between the commoners. Finally, social relationships between the commoners establish norms of behavior and mutual obligations (Esteva, 2014). These include behavioral norms of fairness, social justice and equality as well as mutual obligations to behave sustainably and respectful towards others and the environment.

2.4 The Ideal Type of Commoning

The most typical characteristics of commoning defined in the previous paragraphs are finally condensed into one ideal type. This ideal type neither corresponds to all aspects of any particular, real existent case nor does it involve statistical averages. Moreover, it does not comprise clear rules about how commoning needs to be constructed. However, it is designed to capture the most typical and essential characteristics of commoning by focusing on the four dimensions. Firstly, there are the basic ideas underlying the activity of commoning. Secondly, the purpose of commoning follows, corresponding to motivations, intentions and objectives the commoners aim to establish. The *purpose* dimension takes into account the starting point and the future vision of commoning. The third dimension are the social *practices* of commoning which include the activities, conduct or methods which the commoners apply to achieve the purpose. Finally, the *organization* dimension follows. It refers to aspects of planning, coordination and administration of the social practices and activities of commoning. During the analysis the ideal type serves as a measuring rod to describe and compare the reality of commoning in the three Transition Initiatives with each other.

The Ideal Type of Commoning

Dimension	Characteristics
Basic Ideas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Individuals and the collective are interrelated. -Humans are primarily cooperative and mutually supportive.
Purpose.	-The purpose of commoning is to initiate transition from the order of centralized hierarchies, predatory markets and planet-destroying economic growth to a socially just and more sustainable future .
Social Practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Collective creation and maintenance of common value. -Strong cooperation and collaboration with other people. -Active participation of the individual in the activities of the collective. -Free sharing of knowledge, information and skills.
Organization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Equitable access to the commons. -Space for robust dialogue and discussion between the commoners. -Decentralized, bottom-up organization. -Non-hierarchical structure between the commoners. -Application of the principle of consensus in collective decision making. -Practice of emergent Social Norms and Obligations.

In this chapter it has been argued that the certain conventional theoretical frameworks on the commons are rather inappropriate to be applied for the purpose of this study. In this regard, the important difference between commons and resources as well as the vital connection between commoning and the existence of the commons as a social institution has been highlighted. Subsequently, an ideal type of commoning has been constructed based on different theoretical accounts. This ideal type is used in the following chapters to guide the analysis and the comparison of the three Transition Initiatives. Thus, in the next chapter it is delineated specifically, how the analysis of commoning in the Transition Initiatives is conducted. For this purpose, the reasons for the selection of the three particular Transition Initiatives are elaborated. Furthermore, the methods of data collection and data analysis are explained and finally the link between the ideal type of commoning and the process of coding is explained.

3. Methods

After the specification of the research problem, the conceptualization of the concept of commoning and the introduction of the Transition Initiatives in the previous chapters, the following chapter explains specifically how the research questions will be answered. Thus, in a first step the employed cross-case study design is clarified. In this regard, advantages and disadvantages of the design are introduced and discussed and it is explained why it is the most appropriate design for the purpose of this research. The second step addresses the case selection, with special consideration of the applied selection criteria. In the third step the method of data collection is explained and finally, in the fourth section of the chapter, it is explained how the collected data is analyzed. With regard to the latter, the coding method as well as the specific research activities through which the data is structured, evaluated and analyzed are explained. Furthermore, the employment of the coding strategies is illustrated as well as the steps through which findings are drawn from the coding process.

3.1 Research Design

A descriptive cross-case study design is employed in this study in order to answer the research questions. Case study designs are particularly useful to observe whether a specific theory and model actually applies to a phenomenon in the real world (Gerring, 2004). Furthermore, case studies are very appropriate in situations where not much is known about an issue or phenomenon. Since both aspects apply to the initial situation of this study, the cross-case study design is most appropriate in order to observe and compare the real-world application of commoning in three Transition Initiatives. In this regard a disadvantage of the small number of cases selected is that it provides little basis for reliability and generalizability of the findings. However, the in-depth description of the three exemplary cases focusses on the applied elements of commoning in specific and thus, justifies a trade-off against generalizability of the findings. Additionally, case study research involves time-consuming, in-depth analysis of the respective cases and hence, the scale of this study is limited by the workload one researcher can handle. Considering this, the analysis employs three cases allowing for very specific insights and the possibility of literal replication in the findings while respecting limited human and time resources. Additionally, the applied multiple case design which takes into account three cases, puts special attention on the case selection. Thus, three cases are selected which are considered to be literal or direct replications of certain conditions while focusing on the questions concerning the elements of commoning in the Transition Initiatives (Yin, 2013).

In order to analyze the three selected cases only descriptive research is applied. The latter involves gathering of information concerning the elements of commoning applied in the Transition Initiatives and the description of this information with regard to the theory. To this end, the data collection applied in this study involves triangulation of data. Triangulation is defined as one of the great strengths of case studies. This can be explained by the fact that it refers to data collection from

different sources, contributing to the validity of the research through the compensation of bias in the individual data sources (Rowley, 2002).

3.2 Case Selection

In order to answer the research questions a multiple case design is employed. However, “the conduct of a multiple-case study can require extensive resources and time beyond the means of a single student or independent research investigator” (Yin, 2013, p. 53). Therefore, the number of selected cases is reduced to three interesting cases. The latter are supposed to be very characteristic Transition Initiatives and predict similar results or literal replication. However, since commoning is not directly observable and the Transition Initiatives do not refer to commoning themselves the case selection is, amongst other things, required to define what kind of data the cases need to entail. In this way it is ensured that the selected cases provide data valuable for the analysis of the elements commoning. Therefore, the case selection is based on a what Yin (2013) calls a two stage screening procedure. In the first round of the screening process some more general criteria need to be fulfilled in order to reduce the cases to a manageable number. Thereupon, in the second round of the screening the data as well as the extent of collaboration provided by the respective Transition Initiatives are decisive for the case selection. This is attributable to the applied triangulation of data, taking into account documents provided by the websites of the Transition Initiatives in the first place as well as personal interviews requiring collaboration from members of the core groups of the initiatives. Therefore, to begin with the case selection involves two criteria in the first round of screening. First of all the selected initiatives have to be listed as “Official Initiatives” by the Transition Network⁴. The official status requires the initiative to fulfill certain criteria⁵ which are determined and verified through the Transition Network. Most recently (January 2016) there are 472 official Transition Initiatives listed⁶. The second criterion requires the selected initiatives to be productive in existence for a considerable amount of time and active to date in order to be regarded as experienced, persevering and progressive cases. This is observed by a review of the initiative’s websites for regularly happening events and steady reports about projects and progress. In this way, stagnant or paused initiatives have been excluded.

The second round of screening considers the data provided by the initiatives as well as the extent to which the initiatives are willing to collaborate with the author. Therefore, a second review of the potential cases has been conducted which is based on certain sub-criteria. Sub-criteria 1), 2), 3) and 4) specify what kind of data a potential case must provide whereas sub-criterion 5) specifies the extent of collaboration required. More specifically, sub-criterion 1) requires data describing what the purpose of the initiatives is, based around the questions what aims the initiative pursues and why the initiative

⁴ The official Website can be found here: <https://www.transitionnetwork.org/>

⁵ Criteria can be found here: <https://www.transitionnetwork.org/support/becoming-official>

⁶ The List of Official TI can be found here: <https://www.transitionnetwork.org/initiatives/by-number>

is pursuing these aims. Sub-criterion 2) demands that the data offers a description of what the initiative is doing generally, including practical elements concerning organization and the administration of the initiative. Sub criterion 3) requires the data to describe the projects, events and actions through which the initiative is approaching their aims. Sub-criterion 4) prescribes what can be considered a sufficient amount of data: Data needs to be detailed enough to see individual steps and procedures of action which are based on, and in addition to more generally defined aims and objectives. Finally, sub-criterion 5) demands that a member of the core group of the initiative agrees to conduct an interview comprising specific open-ended questions. After the two rounds of screening six Transition Initiatives, fulfilling all the criteria, had been requested for interviews from which three cases have been selected as most appropriate. The order of the analysis of the three initiatives does not follow any rule but is based on the order in which the data collection has been completed.

1) Transition City Lancaster (TCL) is the first selected case in this regard. Since the launch of the initiative in 2008 in the United Kingdom (UK), development, activities and structure have been documented on a regular basis on the website. Additionally, the initiative established a sustainable and enduring approach. Furthermore, an interview with T. Haslam, communications coordinator of TCL and long-term member of the steering group has been conducted to specify the data.

2) The second case of selection is Transition Town Lewes (TTL); founded in the UK as well. It was established in early 2007 and thus, corresponds to one of the first and oldest Transition Initiatives in the world. The corresponding website provides much valuable information about the organization and the activity of the initiative and a lot of relevant data was gathered through the interview. The latter has been conducted with S. Fleming, member of the steering group of TTL.

3) Finally, the third case of consideration is the district-wide organization Transition Penwith (TP). In November 2006 the initiative was founded in the UK and since then has gone through major challenges and changes. This wealth of experience makes it particularly interesting and useful for this study. Additionally, an interview with J. How, a longtime member of the core group has been conducted.

Apparently all of the three selected Transition Initiatives originate from the UK. This can be explained by the fact that the movement has been founded in 2006 in Totnes in the UK and thus the very first and most constant Transition Initiatives have been established close by. Due to their experience and institutional progression these initiatives provide the most relevant and valuable information.

3.3 Method of Data Collection

The purpose of this research is primarily to understand and describe the elements of commoning applied in the selected Transition Initiatives. Therefore, the approach of data analysis employed in this study incorporates aspects of interpretative social research allowing for in-depth understanding of specific phenomena (Angen, 2000). Due to the in-depth approach of interpretative research wide-ranging information and special attention to the concept of commoning as well as to the context of the cases is

required. In order to establish this, the method of understanding applied in the analysis involves triangulation of data (Denzin, 1970). This implies that a combination of web-documents and interview data is employed. The use of the different data sources seeks for convergence and corroboration of the findings and establishes strong internal validity since bias or unspecific information from one source can be compensated by the other (Bowen, 2009).

Thus, in the first step a document analysis of web-based documents is applied in order to gather background information about the technical aspects, the structure and the context of commoning in the respective Transition Initiatives (Bowen, 2009). The selection of documents from the websites is done purposively, oriented on the four dimensions of commoning characterized in the ideal type. This implies that documents providing information about the basic ideas, the purpose, the social practices and the organization of the respective initiatives are selected as data⁷. Additionally, documents about the projects run by the respective initiatives are analyzed in order to observe the social practices of commoning in a practical context. The topicality of all selected documents was ensured through consultations with the respective initiatives.

In the second step of the analysis three personal interviews are conducted and analysed in order to generate more specific, interrelated data which is not or only partly covered in the documents (Turner, 2010). Additionally, the interviews are employed in order to gain deeper insights into the social aspects of commoning. To this end, one respondent for each case is addressed who is part of the core group of the respective initiative and has specific insights and knowledge about its structures and activities. The interviews follow the standardized open-ended method. This method involves a base frame of eight to ten semi-structured, open-ended questions oriented on the dimensions provided in the ideal type. These questions are supplemented by individual sub and probe questions which are applied to gather more specific information about a topic or issue and to explore the participant's information in more depth (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Preceding the data analysis process, the selected data was made available for entering into the qualitative analysis program ATLAS.ti. In the case of the data collected from the websites of the three Transition Initiatives the documents have simply been replicated into PDF format in order to make them compatible with the program. For the same purpose, the three recorded interviews have been transcribed and replicated into PDF format. The transcriptions of the interviews aim to display the exact wording of the dialogues and thus serve as the basis for the scientific analysis⁸. In terms of the transcriptions philological aspects are disregarded because only the content of the interviews is regarded as important for the purpose of this study. Finally, all of the three interview transcriptions are considered appropriate in order to gather answers to the research questions⁹.

⁷ E.g. Case selection, second round of screening.

⁸ Transcription guidelines can be found in Appendix III.

⁹ Short summaries of the interviews can be found in Appendix IV.

3.4 Method of Data Analysis

Directed content analysis is employed in this study in order to analyze the selected web-data as well as the conducted interviews. This method is particularly useful when incomplete theory about a phenomenon exists which would benefit from additional knowledge and description (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Thus, in the first step key concepts and elements connected with commoning have been identified from existing theory. In the second step these concepts and elements have been condensed into the ideal type of commoning and ordered into four interrelated dimensions and specifying working definitions. In order to apply a theory to a phenomenon usually categories and indicators are to be suggested by the literature which are then applied to the data (Babbie, 2007). Thus, the preconceived dimensions and working definitions of the ideal type are formed into categories and are then applied to the reality of commoning of the Transition Initiatives. Additionally, preconceived codes are established on the basis of the working definitions. The preconceived codes correspond to the most characteristic keywords describing the content of the working definitions. The preconceived categories and codes are summarized in the codebook which can be found in Appendix 2. In the following paragraph the logic of the categories and codes is explained.

The logic of the four categories is constructive, beginning with the basic ideas of commoning as the first preconceived category. The basic ideas are mainly derived from Helfrich's (2012) comparison of the logic of the market and the commons. The basic ideas constitute the foundation of the work and the social activity of commoning. This category includes the codes of interrelationality as well as cooperativeness defined as the primary intention of humans (Helfrich, 2012). Both ideas are frequently emphasized and occupy the key position in the theory. Strongly related to these basic ideas follows the purpose of commoning as the second category. This purpose, derived from various scientific accounts, refers primarily to the inherent will for change associated with commoning. Thereby the establishment of social justice and environmental sustainability is assigned most value. Thus, three preconceived codes are established, displaying the most characteristic elements of the purpose of commoning¹⁰. Subsequently the social practices of commoning follow as the third category which are applied in order to achieve the common purpose. This category involves certain practices mainly referring to interactions and associations between the commoners. Thus, four preconceived codes are associated with the category. As suggested by the literature the social relationships defined in the commons establish norms, obligations and social organization. Thus, the fourth and final category of commoning is its organization mainly drawn from the theory of Helfrich (2012) and Esteva (2014). This category refers on the one hand to social aspects such as emergent social norms and mutual obligations and takes into account administrative aspects. Those refer to access, structures and coordination of commoning. The complete set of related codes can be found in the codebook in Appendix 2.

¹⁰ The exact wording of the preconceived categories and codes can be found in the codebook in Appendix I.

In the first step of the directed content analysis the four preconceived coding categories are applied to the data. All data that represents or relates with these categories is highlighted and then coded by use of the preconceived codes. All data that does not fit with the preconceived codes but appears to be related to the concept of commoning in another way is given a new code. These emergent codes are categorized according to either one of the preconceived categories or to new, emergent categories if required. New codes and categories expand the theoretical framework and contribute to the understanding of the diversity in the conduct of commoning (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Through this approach the four preconceived dimensions of commoning defined in the ideal type are applied to the data. Additionally, special elements of commoning found in the data can be described through emergent categories and codes. The findings of the coding process are reported by use of incidences and patterns of preconceived codes and categories appearing in the data which confirm existent theory. Additionally, emergent codes and categories that offer differences and specialties to the theory are presented. The directed content analysis approach yields newly identified categories to either redefine the theory of commoning or show deviations from it (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). During this process the ideal type of commoning helps to categorize and organize the data by emphasizing the most typical and essential characteristics suggested by the literature. Thus, any deviation from or conformity with the ideal type is used to reveal the reality of commoning as found in the Transition Initiatives.

3.5 Concluding Remarks on the Methods

To sum up, this chapter has clarified the methodological approach applied for the purpose of this study. It has been explained that the descriptive cross-case study method is most appropriate for the analysis due to the in-depth approach it provides. Additionally, special attention has been paid to the selection of cases which is justified by the use of different criteria. In this regard, the data provided on the websites of the respective Transition Initiatives plays a key role since the analysis partially builds upon these. In total 29 web-documents are employed. Furthermore, one interview per case is conducted in order to gather more specific information. The analysis of the data is conducted through directed content analysis and open coding. Thereby it takes into account codes and categories preconceived through the theory as well as those emerging from the data. Through the program ATLAS.ti the coding of the data is conducted and organized. In the next steps of this study, coding and categorization of the data as well as analysis and interpretation of the findings are explained. In this context the following questions are addressed: How do the preconceived codes and categories of commoning apply in the three individual initiatives? What specific codes and categories emerge from the data? And to what extent do the findings of the three individual cases resemble or differentiate each other? Finally, the results are evaluated and supplemented by the answers to the main research question.

4. Analysis of Commoning in the Transition Initiatives

In the previous chapter the explanation of the methods used in this study has been provided. Thus, in this chapter these methods are employed in the analysis of the elements of commoning. The first step of this analysis relates the concept of commoning to the approach and activity in the three Transition Initiatives. For this purpose, the preconceived categories and codes specified in the codebook are applied to the data. Based on this, it is described what aspects of and to what extent the categories and codes provided through the conceptualization of commoning match the reality in the three individual initiatives. In a second step the analysis examines what emergent categories and codes appear from the data. Thus, specific features of commoning and deviations from the theory are analyzed which potentially expand the theoretical framework. Finally, it is evaluated what the most fundamental elements and patterns of commoning in the Transition Initiatives are. Through this process the analysis delivers specific descriptions of the elements of commoning applied in three real world examples. In addition, a rich description of the basic ideas, purposes, social practices and organization of the Transition Initiatives is produced. Finally, a summary of the most important elements of commoning found in the three Transition Initiatives is provided.

During the analysis special attention is put on the three conducted interviews since they provide very specific and purposive data. Thus, the following section briefly explains the main points and interesting aspects of the three interviews:

The first interview, conducted with the communications coordinator of Transition City Lancaster (TCL), revealed that the initiative is applying the most structured approach of the three cases. In the interview it became obvious that TCL is very much following the Transition-model suggested by the Transition Network and Transition Town Totness, the first Transition Initiative. Thereby the role of collaboration and integration is described as extremely important. These practices are applied constantly and improved through training in order to make sure that nobody is left out and the groups do not become isolated. Additionally, special emphasis is put on the social relationships and the practice of caring for each other within the initiative. This is exemplified through the description joint adventures, joint meals and frequent celebrations establishing connections and mutual understanding between the members.

The second interview, conducted with a member of the steering group of Transition Town Lewes (TTL), offers a different perspective. The structure of the initiative is described as much less interrelated since the individual groups focus on their individual realms on a day-to-day basis and do not necessarily socialize with each other. While loosely connected to TTL the groups and projects appear more isolated and frequently cooperate with external experts and groups in their areas of interest. However, the role of collaboration in the groups is referred to as absolutely essential since experiences with difficult individuals showed that whole projects may fail due to uncooperative behavior.

Finally, the third interview, conducted with a member of the core group of Transition Penwith (TP) reveals an even more different approach. A major structural break in 2010 segregated the special interest groups of TP from the core group since many people were not willing to carry on with the Transition Initiative. However, the core group apparently stayed active, serving as an umbrella organization of the Transition activities in the district. Consequently, the applied approach focusses on the establishment of a network of Transition projects in the district. In this regard, awareness raising in the area is described as the most important thing TP has done since the break. Additionally, during the interview certain issues about a lack of principles and structures applied in the initiative have been criticized.

4.1 Case 1: Transition City Lancaster (TCL)

In line with the sub-questions relating the reality in the Transition Initiatives to the concept of commoning the following paragraphs refer to the analysis of the preconceived categories and codes in the data. Furthermore, emergent categories and codes related to the concept of commoning in the three Transition Initiatives are analyzed and highlighted. The analysis is structured among the three cases, according to the chronological order of the data collection process. This is as follows:

1. Transition City Lancaster (TCL)
2. Transition Town Lewes (TTL)
3. Transition Penwith (TP)

To start with, context information about the first case of consideration TCL is provided briefly. TCL refers to itself as a community response for the creation of a sustainable future (“About TCL,” 2014). Founded in 2008 in the city of Lancaster in the western part of the UK, the initiative is not only comprised of people from the city but covers the whole district, involving members from different areas of local life (“About TCL,” 2014). TCL involves seven active interest groups next to a steering group at the center of the initiative. The interest groups focus on particular themes and specific projects (“Groups,” 2014). Currently the themes of the groups are: Deep Ecology, Food and Growing, Real Wealth & Livelihoods, Sewing, Transition Approaches to Death and Dying, Education, Film. Concerning the number of members, it can be said that around 550 people are on the mailing list of TCL and denoted as “Active Transitioners” (T. Haslam, personal communication, February 15, 2016).

Referring to the preconceived categories and codes of commoning¹¹ the first category to be considered are the basic ideas of commoning and their appearance in the data. In this regard the idea of interrelationality is frequently analyzed as the basis for the activity in all groups of TCL. Especially the Deep Ecology group, the longest running TCL group, puts special emphasis on the interrelationality

¹¹ E.g. Codebook Appendix I.

between the members. Generic for the idea of interrelationality is the following quote: “Underlying the work is an assumption that we are all connected to each other and our environment, so we can all respond individually in a way that will help the whole” (“Deep Ecology,” 2014, para. 6). The content of this quote resembles very much the idea of interrelationality as suggested in the literature, describing that individuals are strongly interrelated with the people around them (Helfrich, 2012). Likewise, to interrelationality instances of the basic idea of cooperativeness are frequently analyzed. The cooperativeness brought along by the members can be regarded as the prerequisite for the activity in the groups and TCL as a whole. This applies to the work within the groups of TCL as well as to cooperation with external groups. In both instances cooperativeness is analyzed as fundamental for the activities in TCL. Additionally, to the preconceived basic ideas, instances of two emergent basic ideas appear in the data. First in this regard is Egalitarianism underlying the work of TCL based on the model provided by the Transition Network. This is emphasized by the following quote from Interview I: “...we very much taken the model that Transition Totnes and Transition Network have suggested and that means that we are very keen on making sure that it's a--an egalitarian based action” (T. Haslam, personal communication, February 15, 2016). Furthermore, the ideas of scholar and activist Joanna Macy appear to be important since TCL was founded by people who were involved in her work. This implies that “...it's all about coming from the heart and--you know it is connecting with what you are doing and caring for others...” (T. Haslam, personal communication, February 15, 2016). This idea applies especially in the Deep Ecology interest group and is strongly related to interrelationality suggested by Helfrich (2012) since it emphasizes the importance of social relationships between the members.

The second preconceived category to be considered in the analysis is the purpose of commoning. In this regard, the establishment of transition, defined as the main purpose of commoning by the literature, is analyzed as deeply grounded in the activity of TCL. This purpose is mainly evoked in TCL by criticism and concerns towards inappropriate measures of the government in tackling climate change, social injustice and environmental destructions. This criticism strongly resembles the dissatisfaction concerning the increasingly dysfunctional market-state partnership of conventional systems described by Bollier & Helfrich (2012). The frequent appearance of this purpose in the data suggests that the other two preconceived and strongly related purposes to establish sustainability and social justice appear in the data in similar fashion. This holds true, while establishing sustainability is coded more frequently and has been analyzed as an essential purpose of nearly every single Interest Group. From establishing sustainable food supply in the Food Group to more sustainable approaches to burial in the Death and Dying Group it refers mainly to the establishment of sustainability in environmental regards. Instances of the third preconceived purpose of establishing social justice have been coded less frequently. However, special emphasis is put on this purpose in the approach of the Real Wealth and Livelihoods Interest Group. The latter seeks to explore a new set of values which allows for “... social structures that develop wealth and livelihoods for all of us, not just for a tiny minority of billionaires with the rest of us struggling in poverty” (“RealWealth & Livelihoods,” 2014,

para. 5). Furthermore, while referring to categories and codes emerging from the data, the purpose of establishing local solutions related to needs and demands of the local community is analyzed as important. This implies the preparation of Lancaster for the challenges of the future in general and the establishment of resilience towards climate change and peak oil in specific. Based on this purposes, the approach TCL pursues might be regarded as a community response to the issues related to the era of the Anthropocene.

Strongly related to the purposes of commoning in TCL are the social practices of commoning since they are deemed necessary for the establishment of these purposes. With regard to the social practices, it is observed that instances of all four preconceived codes have been found in the data. Thereby, cooperation and collaboration between the members of TCL, between the groups of TCL and with external groups is analyzed as fundamental. This is illustrated by the following quote from Interview I: “So we are trying to put forward this emphasis on the whole town collaborating, not just within Transition, but trying to work with other groups and make sure that everybody is aware that we are working for the same thing” (T. Haslam, personal communication, February 15, 2016). In this process, the emergent practice of supporting local and regional structures is frequently coded. This requires active participation of the individual members of TCL, resembling the theory: “A commons requires active, ongoing participation with others in implementing and maintaining a shared purpose” (Bollier & Helfrich, 2012, p. 48). In order to establish this participation, the members of TCL are strongly and frequently encouraged and stimulated to take the initiative by themselves. The emergent practice of integrating everybody into the activities of the group is emphasized as very important in this regard. As suggested by the literature, the collective creation and maintenance arising from this initiative is the most frequently analyzed practice of commoning in TCL (Pór, 2012). Examples include the collective creation of innovative approaches to tackle social and environmental issues and the establishment of workshops and events to inform and strengthen the local community. In this process the preconceived practice of sharing of knowledge is essential, resembling the demand for widespread knowledge without which the commons cannot exist (Nahrada, 2012). This applies to sharing of knowledge and information within the groups of TCL as well as more generally “To raise awareness within the Lancaster area of the challenges of peak oil, resource depletion and climate change and the consequent need for change” (“Constitution,” 2014, p. 2). Related to raising awareness, the emergent practice of dialogue and discussion has been coded frequently. This practice appears to encourage the establishment of strong social relationships on which special attention is drawn on in the Deep Ecology Group. This is exemplified by the following: “It helps us move from ‘I can’t’ to ‘We can’, thus releasing our creativity and passion for change. It is a place where we are not seeking specific solutions but somewhere to develop a sense of common purpose and connection” (“Deep Ecology,” 2014, para. 7).

Fourthly, the organization of commoning in TCL is analyzed. In this regard, the preconceived code of equitable access is frequently emphasized in the data and analyzed as closely related to the emergent practice of encouraging and integrating others to participate in TCL. Instances of the latter

appear to establish a friendly, encouraging culture within TCL, facilitated by the explicitly positive approach applied: “Everyone is welcome and everyone has a part to play in taking positive, practical local action” (“About TCL,” 2014, para. 7). In order to establish consensus and unity between the members, regular spaces for dialogue and discussion are incorporated. These spaces include annual and special general meetings in which all members can take part, as well as regular meetings of the special interest groups. These meetings provide opportunities for the discussion of practical things and establish space for socializing. With regard to these meetings, instances of the bottom-up organizational approach are frequently analyzed. This implies that strategies are not prescribed by the steering group but primarily established through individual, non-hierarchical initiative by the members. However, there is some control and review through the steering group. “What we are trying to do is make sure that the ideas arise within the groups and then it is the job of the steering group to make sure that those projects are worthy projects and that they are keeping. So there is that degree of control to make sure that everybody is working together on the same overall strategy” (T. Haslam, personal communication, February 15, 2016). The steering group consists of delegates from the special interest groups and decides by use of the principle of consensus. Next to the administrative aspects of the organization of commoning in TCL instances of social norms and obligations guiding the collective work are analyzed. Most strikingly in this regard is the norm of mutual respect towards others. Instances of this norm are frequently found in the organization of meetings, applied to make sure that everybody is listened to and given time. This is secured by a facilitator as well as through the application of a talking stick which designates the individual who is allowed to speak.

The four sub-questions of this research refer to the preconceived categories of commoning and additionally aim to address related emerging aspects. Thus, concerning the preconceived categories, it can be concluded that they apply relatively consistent to the reality of commoning in TCL. Firstly, interrelationality and cooperativeness between the members of the initiative are analyzed as the basic ideas of commoning. Secondly, the purpose of commoning in TCL is mainly characterized by the will to establish environmental sustainability. Emerging from the data in this regard is the focus and support of local solutions including the preparation of the community for the challenges of climate change and peak oil. Thirdly, collective creation and maintenance can be considered as the most important social practice of commoning, strongly related to sharing of knowledge. With regard to the latter, integration and mutual encouragement of others to participate in the activities of the collective appear to be the most important emerging elements of commoning. Fourthly, bottom-up organization as well as spaces for dialogue and discussion define the organization of commoning in TCL. Additionally, transparency and delegation arise from the data as emergent elements of the organization of commoning.

4.2 Case 2: Transition Town Lewes (TTL)

The second case of consideration is Transition Town Lewes (TTL). To start with, some concise context information is provided. TTL was initiated in 2007 as a community response to the challenges of climate change and the end of cheap oil¹² in the town of Lewes in the UK. Next to a steering group at the center of TTL, several special interest groups have been formed around different areas such as food, energy, waste and finance which aimed to establish sustainability in the area. However, these groups have evolved over time and developed into different projects and initiatives in and around town. Thus, there are no active meetings by the original interest groups at the moment but the focus of TTL lies on the following projects: The Friday Food Market developed by the Food Group; The OVESCO, a company initiated by the Energy Group to develop locally owned renewable energy; A local currency, called the Lewes Pound which was established through the interest of the finance group; The Neighborhood Plan developed by the L&OVE Group through which a shared vision for Lewes is created. Due to the wide approach of these projects, the number of members involved in TTL, can hardly be defined precisely.

The first preconceived category considered in the analysis are the basic ideas of commoning applied in TTL. In this regard the idea of interrelationality is analyzed as important for the activity within TTL: “We work together because we know that together we are greater than the sum of our parts. We work in a collaborative way because we get better results for less effort” (“Aims & Principles,” 2007, para. 2). This quote emphasizes the benefits of the interrelation of the individual with the collective as suggested by Bollier & Helfrich (2012) and introduces the second preconceived basic idea of cooperativeness. Instances of the latter, referring to the primary intention of humans to cooperate (Helfrich, 2012), are not as frequently coded in the data. However, the importance of the social practices of collective creation and collaboration analyzed in TTL suggest that cooperativeness is considered as important. Additionally, to the preconceived implications of interrelationality a second context has been analyzed which relates to the interrelations between human behavior and nature. It implies the need to recognize that humans and nature are nested within each other and should strive for mutual reinforcement. The latter is exemplified by the following: “It's all about the egg of wellbeing and the resilience of the local economy, so recognizing that biodiversity and the health of our environment underpins our own wellbeing AND ... all businesses” (“L&OVe,” n.d., para. 6). Furthermore, the most frequently coded emergent basic idea, concerns the positive approach applied. This is exemplified by the following quote: “We work with a natural momentum driven by our passion and positive approach” (“Aims & Principles,” 2007, para. 2). The latter implies positive action established through preferably joyful collaboration and a positive envisioning of the future to be established through this collaboration.

The second preconceived category to be considered are the purposes of commoning in TTL. In this regard, initiating transition is analyzed as deeply rooted in the approach TTL pursues. This concerns practical aspects such as responding to climate change and peak oil through the transition of energy

¹² The end of cheap oil is also referred to as peak oil.

usage, and an inner transition aiming to transform the mind. Especially the Heart & Soul group emphasizes this aspect, implicating that “Our motivation, comes more from seeing that we have to change our minds and our hearts about the planet we live on. And until we take this whole seriously and see that all is connected in spirit and that if we destroy a species, we destroy our own well-being on this planet” (S. Fleming, personal communication, February 17, 2016). Thus, this inner transition is regarded as the prerequisite for a deeply rooted common purpose to initiate transition and the practical implementation of projects to this end. These projects correspond to the purpose of the establishment of sustainability in different areas. Firstly, sustainable food supply is provided by the Lewes Food Market through the supply of locally produced food. Secondly, the Lewes Pound is aimed at establishing economic and environmental sustainability through a local currency and at the establishment of demands for local goods and services. Thirdly, the OVESCO Energy company which aims at establishing energy efficiency through locally owned renewable energy generation. All these projects are strongly connected to instances of the emergent purposes of establishing local solutions and the preparation of the local community for the challenges of the future. What stands out in the analysis of TTL is that no instance of the preconceived purpose of establishing social justice has been coded. However, since issues such as affordable housing and the tackling of financial inequalities play a role in the work of the initiative, it can be suggested that matters of social justice are related to TTL as well.

Thirdly, the social practices of commoning in TTL are considered. In this regard instances of the collective creation and maintenance have been coded most frequently. This concerns ideas, projects and events to respond to the challenges of climate change and peak oil. Practical results of the collective creation are: The Local Food Market, the Neighborhood Plan and the Lewes Pound. These projects aim to establish the purposes of TTL in their specific realm. With regard to these projects, the emergent practice of collaboration with externals is frequently emphasized, strongly related to the support of local structures and other related projects. However, the practice of collaboration with externals has not always been that central: “Over time we have become much more connected to other groups who are interested or specializing these areas in the town as well. So it is very loose really in this sense” (S. Fleming, personal communication, February 17, 2016). This indicates a shift of the focus on internal collaboration within TTL to more appropriate, practical cooperation with groups, specialized in the respective areas of interest. Additionally, instances of the preconceived social practice of sharing of knowledge analyzed in the data suggest that knowledge is regarded as a plentiful resource in TTL, open to everyone. This resembles the theory suggested by Nahrada describing “... the passive competence pattern that reflexively favors sharing of knowledge with “non-experts” and outsiders” (para. 2, 2012). This pattern is reflected in the data by the following quote: “It is everyone's responsibility to ensure the free flow of information and knowledge around the network” (“Aims & Principles,” 2007, para. 3). Finally, many instances of the emergent social practices to encourage and mobilize others to take part in TTL are analyzed. Emergent in this regard are the social practices of communication and encouraging diversity.

The fourth and final preconceived category to be considered is the organization of commoning in TTL. In this regard, the preconceived instance analyzed as most important is space for dialogue and discussion which is established regularly through meetings once every month. These meetings provide the basis for the discussion of visions and projects and the reconciliation of interests. Furthermore, town meetings are convened if certain issues or projects concern the whole town like the severe flooding in parts of Lewes. The meetings are employed to inform others in the area and raise awareness of specific issues tackled by TTL. Additionally, the general meetings are applied in cases of disagreement: “If anyone in TTL does not agree that the project is in line with TTL aims and principles then that person can take the project to the TTL Forum for discussion” (“Aims & Principles,” 2007, para. 4). This statement corresponds with the bottom-up organizational approach analyzed in TTL which is based on a non-hierarchical structure: “We give autonomy and support to those who wish to be part of TTL” (“Aims & Principles,” 2007, para. 2). Next to the structural organization certain emergent social norms and mutual obligations organize the social practices of commoning in TTL as suggested by Esteva (2014). Most importantly in this regard is the compliance with the TTL principles, aims and strategy as well as the compliance with the general Transition principles suggested by the Transition Network. Each individual and group has the accountability to act appropriately to the topics and principles of TTL since “The whole of TTL is governed by a set of principles which were agreed by the representatives of the above groups. The way TTL members operate is determined by these principles. If any TTL member acts in a way that is at odds with these principles, his/her actions can be challenged by other TTL members” (“TTL Constitution,” 2012, p. 2). Other instances of emergent social norms and obligations which organize commoning imply self-accountability with regard to the public reputation and the principles of TTL as well as mutual respect towards the work and initiative of others. This is analyzed as related to the diffuse approach TTL pursues which engages in many different areas and projects around town and thus requires this mutual respect and comprehension of others.

With regard to the sub-questions it can be concluded that the preconceived categories and codes of commoning do not apply very consistently to TTL. The first element to be registered concerns the slightly different context in which the idea of interrelationality is incorporated. Secondly, the purpose of commoning focusses primarily on the practical establishment of environmental sustainability as well as the inner transition towards more respect and compassion for the planet we live on. Yet, the preconceived purpose of establishing social justice has not been coded in the data. Thirdly, the social practices of commoning primarily aim to establish practical projects through collaboration with external groups and experts, specialized in the areas of interest. Thereby, the inner structure of TTL is analyzed as rather loose. The practical focus can be explained by recent issues requiring immediate action. Finally, the organization of commoning is based on spaces for dialogue and discussion as well as on certain principles suggested by the Transition Network and the initiative themselves. In addition, mutual respect and self-accountability emerge as organizing factors in the social activity of commoning.

4.3 Case 3: Transition Penwith (TP)

The third and final case of consideration in this analysis is Transition Penwith (TP). To start with some background information is provided. TP has already been initiated in 2006 in the area of Penwith in the south-west of the UK, with the general aim to establish local solutions to the global problems of peak oil and climate change. Several special interest groups had been established around a core group to work and specialize in specific themes related to the general aims and purposes of TP. However, a change in 2010 altered the structure of the initiative radically. Lots of members did no longer saw the need to carry on with the Transition group and decided to go on with their own things (J. How, personal communication, February 19, 2016). Yet, a small number of people carried on with TP and eventually established a new structure. Thenceforward, the core group of TP serves as an umbrella for all the related projects and activities happening in the area of Penwith. Furthermore, more local Transition Hub-Groups are encouraged to develop, thus creating a structure which resembles the approach applied between Transition Network and the Transition Initiatives (J. How, personal communication, February 19, 2016). The first Hub-group established yet is the Hayle Transition Hub, included in the analysis.

The preconceived category considered first in this analysis are the basic ideas of commoning applied in TP. In this regard it is remarkable that no specific instance of the preconceived basic ideas has been analyzed. This can be explained by the fact that the data appears to be different compared to the data provided by the other two Initiatives, due the change in the structure of TP. This change also implies a phase of reorientation which is not yet completed. Additionally, the basic ideas related to the other two cases have mostly been found in the documents concerning the specific interest groups, however, since those have been separated from TP they cannot be used in this analysis. Yet, frequent instances of social practices which employ collaboration suggest that the preconceived basic idea of cooperativeness is connected to the initiative, even if it has not been coded in the data. Additionally, the social practices of community building, networking and the importance of interaction between the members of TP allow for the assumption that the preconceived basic idea of interrelationality is somehow related to TP as well. Additionally, an emergent basic idea, referring to TP as a social experiment has been coded. This basic idea is analyzed as related to the following issue: “We truly don't know if this will work. Transition is a social experiment on a massive scale” (“Transition Penwith Disclaimer,” n.d., para. 2). However, the applied approach is considered as an experiment into a better future, strongly connected to the practice of learning by doing without providing fixed solutions in advance. Thereby it is emphasized that “...there are probably rather too many who see it as just a new permutation of an environmental group” (J. How, personal communication, February 19, 2016). This critique is related to the holistic approach TP aims to pursue, seeking for different kinds of change in the world, not only concerning environmental issues.

The second preconceived category to be considered is the purpose of commoning in TP. The most important preconceived purpose in this regard is initiating transition resembling the desire for

change shared by the commoners suggested by Esteva (2014). This desire aims primarily to move away from a lifestyle dependent on oil and fossil fuels: “Within our communities, we are creating better ways to manage our lives, moving away from oil-dependency” (“What we are doing!,” 2010, p. 1). This statement is exemplary for the purpose in TP and emphasizes the will to improve livelihoods while reducing oil-dependency. Additionally, the purpose of establishing sustainability in the area of Penwith, referring primarily to environmental sustainability, has been analyzed as important. This purpose concerns less use of oil on the one hand, as well as the creation of green, renewable energy supply on the other. Additionally, economic sustainability is envisaged as another main purpose. Instances of the third preconceived purpose of establishing social justice have not been found. However, some emergent purposes have been analyzed in the data. In this regard, the most frequently coded instance is the preparation of the local community for the future and closely related the establishment of local resilience since: “Establishing local resilience through engagement and partnership (based around interconnecting themes such as energy, food, transport, waste and enterprise) helps ensure our low-carbon future” (“What We Are Doing!,” 2010, p. 1). This purpose is analyzed as related to the emergent purpose of raising awareness of climate and fossil fuel issues through practical projects and workshops. Next to the practical elements of the desired transition the establishment of inner transition plays a key role in TP. This inner transition refers to the consideration of the ways of thinking and dealing with others. Thereby, it is described as the aspect of TP which distinguishes the initiative most from other groups just dealing with climate change.

Coming to the third preconceived category, the social practices of commoning in TP, the most important preconceived aspect analyzed is the collective creation and maintenance of events, and of solutions to the challenges of the future. An example of such events was the Transition Roadshow in 2015, a two-day event involving a lot of collective creation and collaboration. This event was based on the following elements: “We had a little mini-conference, we had Rob Hopkins speaking, we had a procession, we had a kind of fare thing and some workshops and stuff like that. So once again there was a huge amount of work and collaboration--very strong collaboration...” (J. How, personal communication, February 19, 2016). Instances of collective creation and collaboration appear to be strongly related in this regard. However, this collaboration is very focused on the time in which particular events have happened. This focus is explained in the interview as well: “My observation of the particular group here is that people work together very very well when there is a focus of a particular event around and a kind of deadline and after that there will be nothing to do” (J. How, personal communication, February 19, 2016). Thus, it seems that collaboration on a larger scale is regarded as very exhaustive evoking the need for breaks between the participants. Analyzed as strongly related to the creation of projects around the themes of TP is the preconceived practice of sharing of knowledge. Especially through workshops and presentations this practice is applied frequently. It facilitates the active support of local and regional structures while encouraging others to get informed and aware of the key issues of the future. Furthermore, the practice of community building is analyzed as a key task

of the core group since the approach of TP aims at combining all the initiatives and organizations in the region: “We act more as a networking kind of thing. So those are two of the kind of pillars. Community building, I think, is a major thing as well.” (J. How, personal communication, February 19, 2016).

The fourth and final preconceived category to be considered is the organization of commoning. In this regard it can be anticipated that TP is applying a much more diffused approach to the organization than the other two cases. Firstly, equitable access is guaranteed without restrictions on the basis of gender, race etc. However, certain conditions of membership need to be fulfilled, such as an interest in helping TP to achieve its aims, the willingness to abide by the constitution and to pay any subscription agreed on. Additionally, the preconceived space for dialogue and discussion is included through talks, conferences and facilitated feedback sessions. The latter serve not only to discuss matters within TP but also with the wider audience and interested individuals. However, no direct instance of the preconceived codes of bottom-up organization or of a non-hierarchical structure have been coded. This can be explained by the fact that TP currently only consists of the core group with a limited number of members, as well as the related Hayle-Hub for which no hierarchical structure has been analyzed. Still, the preconceived principle of consensus is applied in TP to arrive at decisions in the core group.

With regard to the core group, strong social relationships as well as friendship are analyzed as the basis for the work. This reflects the theory suggesting “...that friendship is the basic stuff constituting many of the contemporary urban commons” (Esteva, 2014, p. 47). Based on social relationships and friendship several social norms and mutual obligations have been analyzed. Most important in this regard is mutual respect, based on the fact “...that most people in the core group have some kind of history in group work of various sorts and so there is very little--there is no people shouting other people down or anything like that. And everybody has an opportunity to speak and are encouraged to tell something if they have been very silent...” (J. How, personal communication, February 19, 2016).

When looking into the future, TP will aim to create and include local Hub-groups while the core group will serve as a network organization for all the things happening in the area. This will include amongst others the elements of decentralization and delegation of active projects, events and other things to the local Hub-groups: “And we will just be like an umbrella for it, making connections between people, still have a website promoting things. But not trying to do everything from a dozen people who are drawn from all over.” (J. How, personal communication, February 19, 2016). In this scenario the core group will serve additionally to criticize, plan and review the local action.

Finally, an emergent category appears in the data which refers to criticism and weak points of TP. The first point in this regard is the lack of a broader strategy which guides and channels the activity of TP (J. How, personal communication, February 19, 2016). Secondly, there is a lack of interest in administration described in the interview which leads to less structured work approach and the demand for more clearly defined principles. Parts of these issues are explained by means of the problematic geographical situation located at the very margin of the country.

With regard to the sub-questions it can be said in a first step that the preconceived categories of commoning apply only partly to TP. This holds especially true with regard to the two preconceived basic ideas of commoning of which no instance was coded in the data. However, one emergent basic idea has been analyzed which considers TP as a social experiment with open results. Concerning the second preconceived category, the purpose of commoning, it has been analyzed that the establishment of transition concerning environmental and economic issues is most important. This purpose is analyzed as strongly connected to the purpose of preparing for the future and the establishing resilience. Yet, no instance of the preconceived purpose of establishing social justice has been coded. Thirdly, the social practices of commoning affiliate. In this regard, the preconceived element of strong collaboration applies especially when a focus lies on a particular event including a deadline. However, after such events had happened, effort and initiative of the participants usually declined for some time. While focusing on the elements of awareness raising and the encouragement and support of others in the district commoning, TP is organized through a culture of physical warmth and strong social relations. Finally, the analysis reveals some issues, criticized within the initiative. This criticism demands a more clearly defined structure as well as certain principles which organize the activity and approach.

4.4 Concluding Remarks on the Analysis

The analysis in the aforementioned paragraphs has demonstrated how diverse the activity of commoning can unfold, even though all three selected Transition Initiatives seemed to descend from a similar background in the first place. Thus, it can be concluded that the preconceived categories and definitions suggested by the theory apply very differently to the three cases. Whereas the first case of consideration, TCL, is analyzed to reflect the preconceived categories and codes of commoning very consistently, some major deviations are observed in the other two cases. These deviations can be traced back towards the differences in structure and approach applied. When summarizing the characteristics of the three cases it can be said in the first place, that commoning in TCL is focused on integrating and encouraging others to take part in the group. This is reflected in a welcoming and warmhearted approach applied to release the creative passion. On the other hand, commoning in TTL is much more focused on solving practical problems like the recent flood initiative and affordable housing projects. Thus, there is less space for socializing and group work on a regular basis. In TP, the third case of consideration, commoning is very much based on friendship and strong social relationship in the comparatively small core group. Attributable to the change in the structure of the initiative, practical projects are currently out of focus while networking and raising awareness appear to be the main practices of commoning. In the following chapter, a more detailed comparison and evaluation of the findings of the three cases is provided, including the answers to the main research question and the final conclusions.

5. Comparison of the Findings and Final Conclusion

This final chapter aims primarily at providing an answer to the main research question: “*What are the elements of commoning discernable in Transition City Lancaster, Transition Town Lewes and Transition Penwith?*” For this purpose, a comparison of the most important findings of each of the three considered cases is conducted in the first place. Thereby, the selection of the presented findings is based on the frequency and the level of insistence of the respective codes and patterns found in the data. While using the ideal type of commoning as a measuring rod, the comparison aims at identifying the most noticeable similarities and differences found between the three cases. Based on this analysis, conclusions are drawn and the most important elements of commoning are described. Finally, the chapter includes a section in which recently published literature is considered and in which outreach and consequences of this study are envisioned.

Considering the first case of the analysis, TCL, the findings suggest that the reality of commoning in the initiative resembles most consistently the categories and codes defined in the preconceived ideal type. As suggested by the literature (Helfrich, 2012) the basic ideas of interrelationality and cooperativeness take up an important position. This is reflected in the explicitly applied welcoming approach, and the frequently coded practices of integrating and encouraging others to take part in the activities of the group and to not become isolated. In TTL, the second case addressed in the analysis, a slightly different approach to commoning has been found. The purpose of commoning lies primarily on practical projects, due to recent issues requiring immediate practical solutions such as the severe flooding in Lewes, the refugee crisis and affordable housing issues. Additionally, commoning appears to proceed independently in the individual projects of the initiative. Subsequently, the third considered case Transition Penwith (TP) offers another approach to commoning. Compared with the other two cases the structure of TP is the most centrally organized, since TP is only comprised of what originally was a core group of a larger initiative. This core group is mainly concerned with organization and awareness raising in the area. Thus, commoning in TP focusses primarily on networking, community building and encouraging others to participate and collaborate with each other, but refrains from involvement in actual, practical projects. Thereby the work in the core group is very much resembling Esteva’s (2014) description of commoning emphasizing the role of strong social relationships and friendship as the underlying basis.

When looking at the specific findings of the three cases, certain elements and patterns appear in the data which are analyzed as the basis of commoning in all three cases. The first element in this regard is the mutual purpose to change the way in which relations towards nature and other people are handled. This aspect strongly reflects the theory and manifests in the cases mainly through the mutual intention to establish environmental sustainability through joint action. Secondly, an emergent element of commoning, found in all three cases is the shared purpose of preparing the local community for the

challenges of climate change and peak oil. In this regard the support and establishment of local solutions appears to be closely related. The third similarity concerns the social practices of commoning and strongly resembles the theory of Pór (2012) suggesting that commoning consists of creating and maintaining something collectively. With regard to this latter it can be concluded that commoning is based on the collective creation and maintenance of ideas, projects and events in all three cases, employed to establish the common purpose. The fourth and final main element, similarly found in all three cases, regards the organization which is conducted through mutual exchange of information as well as through frequent dialogue and discussion between the members of all three initiatives.

The comparison also reveals certain differences with regard to the elements of commoning discernable in the three initiatives. The first element in this regard concerns the focus of commoning. While commoning in TCL focusses primarily on establishing cohesion and strong company between the members, the activity in TTL is primarily focused on practical projects involving cooperation with experts to solve urgent issues. Due to the very different structure applied in TP, the third case of consideration, the focus of commoning is again different. This focus sets primarily on community building, networking and the delegation of practical projects in the area. This can be explained by the fact that the core group itself does not aim to specialize in a certain area but tends to be comprised of generalists with a broader focus. Secondly, the conduct of commoning in the three initiatives appears to be diverse. In TCL, training and frequent spaces for dialogue and discussion are employed in order to ensure that nobody becomes isolated or left out. In TTL on the other hand, the practical focus on specific areas in the individual groups does neither allow for frequent instances of socializing nor for meetings which involve all members of the initiative. Thus, it can be concluded, that commoning in TTL rather takes place within the specific groups and projects than within the initiative as a whole. Eventually, TP as the third case of consideration, applies an approach strongly resembling Esteva's (2014) description that friendship is the basis for many of the contemporary commons. Accordingly, in the core group of the initiative, strong social relationships and friendships are found to be the main elements defining the activity of commoning. Based on these findings it can be summarized that the differences in commoning analyzed between the three initiatives are strongly related to the differences in the general structure applied. Additionally, the comparison of the three cases brings to mind that the activity of commoning can hardly be reduced to a set of specific practices or arrangements. This conclusion strongly reflects various scholars suggesting differences in the conduct of commoning with regard to context and geographical position.

Finally, it can be concluded that this study provides a rich description of the diverse elements of commoning found in the three Transition Initiatives. The presented findings suggest that commoning generally involves strong collaboration between an active group of people who are willing to establish a common purpose. Additionally, specific social practices and features, adjusted to the particular context, are part of the concept. Thus, commoning can be regarded as a complex and flexible composition of various interrelated elements, very capable of adopting to local and regional

environments as well as to very different social settings and structures. However, at the same time commoning is not a complicated concept nor is it difficult to detect. In their latest book, Bollier and Helfrich (2015) explained this: “The process of *commoning* – of joint action, of creating things together, of cooperating to meet shared goals – is ubiquitous” (p.18). The latter is to be understood in that sense, that commoning is all around us in everyday life and can manifest in the simplicity of collaborating with friends to establish a shared purpose. Yet, the apparent intangibility of the concept is similarly the cause for its special appeal since “it calls on us to see the world from a fundamentally different perspective, acknowledging that the *self* emerges from relationships with others and can exist only through these relationships and as a result of them” (Bollier, 2015, p. 500). This study has been approached with the aim to make this idea of commoning more tangible, by providing a description and evaluation of the elements of commoning in three of the prime examples of modern commons¹³. Through the analysis of the three cases, and the subsequent comparison, a lot of new knowledge has been produced. This knowledge is very specific to the respective cases and does not allow for generalizations. However, it still provides the basis for a better understanding of the concept of commoning in reality and additionally entails valuable insights into the specific conduct of the three Transition Initiatives.

Beyond the scope of this study, the main questions requiring further investigations concern the potential of commoning in general, and the potential of the Transition Initiatives in specific. Especially with regard to the issues brought about in the era of the Anthropocene, alternative approaches, such as the one described in this study, will be increasingly in demand. This can be explained by the fact that conventional political systems increasingly fail to deliver adequate solutions by which people feel represented. In this context it will be highly interesting to see if commoning, and particularly the approach pursued by the Transition Initiatives, can expand further and eventually may establish its transformative vision on a wider scale. The deciding factor in this regard will be the capacity to spread the positive vision and potential of collective creation and thus make people understand the appeal and simplicity of commoning.

¹³ Cf. (Helfrich, 2011); (Bollier & Weston, 2014); (Wessling, 2014).

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7. Appendix

7.1 Appendix I: Codebook

Commoning – Preconceived Categories and Codes

Category	Code	Indicator
Basic Ideas	Interrelationality	Stressing the interrelation between the individuals and the collective and the consequential, mutual reinforcement.
	Cooperativeness	Stressing that humans are primarily cooperative. Stressing the pursuit and need of humans for cooperation with others; Instances of willingness to act/work together for a common purpose; Instances of demonstrating willingness to cooperate, willingness to work with others.
Purpose	Initiate transition	Stressing the need/will of seeking for transition/change, beginning with criticism of status quo, stressing what goes wrong in the system and what needs to be adjusted. E.g. because of ecological issues or social injustice.
	Establishing sustainability	Stressing the need/will for establishing sustainable livelihoods in every area of human life. Especially environmental sustainability: biofouling, environmental pollution, carbon footprints, tackling climate change.
	Establishing social justice	Stressing the need/will to establishing non-hierarchical and socially just structures. Establishing equal rights and democratic administration.
Social Practices	Collective creation and maintenance	Instances of collective effort to produce and preserve common ideas, values, strategies, projects (material or immaterial).
	Cooperation/collaboration with others	Instances of cooperation or collaboration between individuals or multiple people of any kind in the group. Through activities, projects etc. which aim to establish the common purpose, aims, goals.
	Active participation	Instances of the active participation of individuals with the collective through dialogue/discussion of joint issues, interests and demands; active participation in creation and maintenance of projects, discussions, decision making, visioning.
	Sharing of knowledge and information	Instances of sharing of ideas, visions, skills, knowledge etc. between and with others/the collective.
Organization	Equitable access	Stressing that everybody who aims to serve a similar purpose is allowed to participate in the group, without discrimination.
	Space for dialogue and discussion	Establishment of regular spaces for dialogue and discussion of strategies, ideas, visions, methods etc. between the members.
	Bottom-up organization	Stressing of self-organization of the group from the bottom-up based on self-initiative, decentralized organization. E.g. creation of ideas, projects etc. through the people without instructions from a higher authority.

	Non-hierarchical structure	Stressing the equality of the commoners, the use of decentralized administration, collective decision making.
	Principle of consensus	Stressing the use of consensus in decision making. Instances of the use of consensus in decision making.
	Social norms and obligations	Instances of/application of social norms guiding any kind of activity in the group. Instances of mutual obligations applied by the participants.

7.2 Appendix II: Emergent Codes (and Category)

The Table comprises the most Important Emergent Codes According to Case and Category, accompanied by the respective Indicator. Apparently there is only one important emerging category analyzed in the data which can be found in the Last two rows of case three, Transition Penwith (TP). The majority of emergent codes appears to be related to the preconceived categories and is thus organized among these categories and the appropriate colors.

Case	Category	Code	Indicator
<i>TCL</i>	Basic Ideas	Egalitarianism	Descriptions/Indications that the action in the Initiative is based on egalitarian ideals.
<i>TCL</i>	Basic Ideas	Coming from the heart	Indications that the approach pursued in TCL is aimed at welcoming others and at acting warmhearted towards issues and problems of others.
<i>TCL</i>	Purpose	Establishing local solutions	Instances of the establishment of local solutions instead of other possible alternatives.
<i>TCL</i>	Purpose	Establishing resilience	Instances describing the will/action to establish a resistance and durable community.
<i>TCL</i>	Purpose	Preparation for the future	Instances of measures of all kind to prepare the community for the future.
<i>TCL</i>	Social Practices	Supporting local/regional structures	Instances of the selection, emphasis of local/regional offerings, events etc. over other possible alternatives.
<i>TCL</i>	Social Practices	Integration	Instances of integration of individual/groups etc. into the activities of the collective to make sure that nobody becomes isolated.
<i>TCL</i>	Social Practices	Mutual encouragement	Instances of any kind of motivating/encouraging others to take part in the activities of the initiative.
<i>TCL</i>	Social Practices	Dialogue and discussion	Instances of the practice of talking to each other in any context to sort out matters, agree on mutual strategies etc.
<i>TCL</i>	Organization	Transparency	Instances of public reporting of any kind. E.g. finance, strategies, plans etc.

TCL	Organization	Delegation	Instances of delegation of authority of any kind from the interest groups to the steering group.
TTL	Basic Ideas	Positive approach	Stressing the importance and general application of positive thinking of any kind.
TTL	Purpose	Establishing local solutions	Instances of the establishment of local solutions instead of other possible alternatives.
TTL	Purpose	Preparation for the future	Instances of measures of all kind to prepare the community for the future.
TTL	Social Practices	Collaboration with externals	Instances of the practice of working with external organizations, experts etc. of any kind to establish the desired purpose.
TTL	Social Practices	Supporting local/regional structures	Instances of the selection, emphasis of local/regional offerings, events etc. over other possible alternatives.
TTL	Social Practices	Mutual encouragement	Instances of any kind of motivating/encouraging others to take part in the activities of the initiative.
TTL	Social Practices	Encouraging diversity	Stressing the appreciation of different people approaches and ideas of any kind.
TTL	Social Practices	Compliance with TTL principles	Stressing the need of members to work and behave in accordance with the Principles defined by the initiative.
TTL	Social Practices	Self-accountability	Stressing the importance of self-accountability of individual members with regard to the public reputation and the principles of TT.
TTL	Social Practices	Mutual respect	Stressing the importance of the need to apply with mutual respect towards other individuals of any kind.
TP	Basic Idea	Social experiment	Instances of the assumption that TP is regarded as an experiment without preconceived answers provided.
TP	Purpose	Preparation for the future	Instances of measures of all kind to prepare the community for the future.
TP	Purpose	Establishing resilience	Instances describing the will/action to establish a resistance and durable community.
TP	Purpose	Raising awareness	Instances of privately and publicly drawing attention of any kind towards certain defined issues.
TP	Organization	Friendship/strong social relationships	Stressing the importance of Friendship/Strong Social Relationships of any kind for the cohesion and work in the group.
TP	Criticism/Weak Points	Lack of broader strategy	Stressing the lack of a broader strategy which can be applied for the purpose of channeling and focusing the activities of the initiative.

TP	Criticism/ Weak Points	Lack of interest in administration	Stressing the lack of interest in administration which would be important to reach out into a wider audience.
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7.3 Appendix III: Table of Documents used in the Analysis

#	Case	Title	Date Published	Content
1	TCL	About TCL	Aug. 14, 2014	Introduction to the Initiative
2	TCL	Groups	Aug. 14, 2014	Introduction to the Interest Groups.
3	TCL	Constitution for Transition City Lancaster	Oct. 17, 2014	Constitutional arrangements.
4	TCL	Deep Ecology	Aug. 14, 2014	Description of the Deep Ecology interest group's purpose and approach.
5	TCL	Food Group What We Are Doing And Why	Apr. 2, 2015	Description of the Food Group's purpose and approach.
6	TCL	Real Wealth and Livelihoods	Oct. 25, 2014	Description of purpose and practices of the Real Wealth and Livelihoods interest group.
7	TCL	Steering Group	Oct. 17, 2014	Description of approach and organization of the steering Group
8	TCL	The Sewing Cafe	Oct. 31, 2014	Description of basic ideas and social practices in the Sewing Cafe.
9	TCL	Transition Approaches To Death and Dying (TADD)	Oct. 31, 2014	Description of the purpose and social practices in the TADD interest group
10	TCL	Transcript Interview I	--	Interview with Tony Haslam. Insights into basic ideas, purpose, social practices and organization of Transition City Lancaster.
11	TTL	About Us	n/s	Introduction to the purpose of TTL.
12	TTL	Aims and Principles	Sep. 9, 2007	Explanation of the aims and core principles TTL pursues.
13	TTL	Guidelines for Starting and Running a Group	n/s	Explanation of the structure and conditions for the special interest groups.
14	TTL	Transition Town Lewes	n/s	Description of Administrative and constitutional arrangements of

		Constitution		TTL.
15	TTL	Energy, the Economy & the Environment	n/s	Description of the three main areas of interest of Transition.
16	TTL	TTL Steering Group Constitution	n/s	Description of the functions and principles of the steering group.
17	TTL	L&OVE	n/s	Description of the L&OVE group of TTL.
18	TTL	Health in Transition	n/s	Description of functions and structure of the Health Group.
19	TTL	About Us	n/s	Description of the functions and purpose of the Lewes Food Market.
20	TTL	What It Is	n/s	Description of the function and purpose of the Lewes Pound.
21	TTL	What Is A Neighborhood Plan	n/s	Description and Introduction to the Neighborhood Plan.
22	TTL	Our Vision	n/s	Description of the future vision of the OVESCO.
23	TTL	Why Are We Doing It?	n/s	Explanation of the purpose of the OVESCO.
24	TTL	Transcript Interview II	--	Interview with Sue Fleming. Insights into basic ideas, purpose, social practices and organization of Transition Town Lewes.
25	TP	What is Peak Oil?	n/s	Description/Explanation of the one purpose of commoning in TP.
26	TP	Raising Awareness and empowering Penwith	n/s	Description of the main aims and ways to establish these.
27	TP	Constitution of Transition Penwith	Jan. 20, 2009	Constitutional arrangements including Vision, Aim, Objectives, Activities, Powers etc.
28	TP	Transition Penwith Disclaimer	n/s	Description of the approach and participants.
29	TP	News from the Hayle Transition Hub	n/s	Explanation of the founding event of the Hayle Transition Hub.
30	TP	Leaflet	2010	Short introduction into activities and purposes of TP.
31	TP	Re-thinking our Economic	2015	Description of the REconomy Project as part of the 2015 Transition

		Future		Roadshow.
32	TP	Transcript Interview III	--	Interview with Jonathan How. Insights into basic ideas, purpose, social practices and organization of Transition Penwith

7.4 Appendix IV: Explanation of the Interview Transcriptions

For the purpose of this research philological aspects of the interviews are regarded as irrelevant. The content of the interviews is of first priority. Thus, the following transcription guidelines are applied:

1. Content produced by the interviewee are denoted with an “I” and content produced by the participants are denoted with a “P”.
2. Transcription is done literally. This implies that repetitive and discontinued words and sentences are also transcribed.
3. Language is smoothened and converged to written English.
4. Em-dashes (--) are used to indicate instances in which words or sentences are discontinued.
5. Affirmative or approving utterances such as “mh” or “ah” are omitted as long as the flow of speech is not disrupted.
6. Incomprehensible passages in the recording are marked with the related time designation according to the recording in the transcript e.g. (inaudible-17:04).
7. Personal data including names is anonymized.
8. Nonverbal communication such as laughing is identified in brackets e.g. [laughing].

7.5 Appendix V: Short Summaries of the Interviews

Short summary interview I: Transition City Lancaster (TCL)

Date: 15.02.2016; 04:15 p.m. CET.

Participant (P): Interlocutor is Tony Haslam: Member of the steering group and communications coordinator for Transition City Lancaster (TCL).

Interviewer (I): Author of this research.

Location Participant: Lancaster, Lancashire, United Kingdom.

Location Interviewer: Kiel, Schleswig-Holstein, Germany.

Medium of communication: Skype™.

Medium of documentation: Audio file (Length: 32:05).

Objective: The main objective of Interview I was to gather specific information about the social structures and practices in Transition City Lancaster. Thus, nine pre-defined open-questions have been posed with the aim to elicit rich descriptions of activities and processes in TCL. Additionally, six emergent probe-questions have been interspersed in order to extend the descriptions given or to gather more specific and detailed information.

Central Aspects: A central aspect in the first interview is that collaboration between the members and between the interest groups of TCL takes a key role in establishing the joint purpose. Additionally, collaboration with other actors in the area which pursue the same interests is regarded as very important. This collaboration in TCL is organized through a non-hierarchical, bottom up approach. This implies that ideas for projects, activities etc. typically arise within the various interest groups and are not prescribed by the steering group. The work within the groups as well as dialogue and discussion between the members is guided by norms of mutual recognition and trust. Thereby, special emphasis is put on the norm that everybody is given the right to speak and is listened to. This is achieved through specific training and certain techniques such as the application of talking sticks and decentralized work in small groups. Furthermore, social relationships between the members play a key role in the social practices within TCL. These social relationships are established and strengthened through joint walks and excursions, regular celebrations and other opportunities for socializing between the members of the initiative.

Key finding: Compared with the two other selected cases TCL is following the most centralized and structured approach. However, this goes hand in hand with a non-hierarchical power structure and a culture of openness and mutual respect.

Short summary interview II: Transition Town Lewes (TTL)

Date: 17.02.2016; 03:30 p.m. CET.

Participant (P): Interlocutor is Ms. Sue Fleming; member of the steering group of Transition Town Lewes (TTL) and representative of the Heart and Soul Interest Group.

Interviewer (I): Author of this research.

Location Participant: Lewes, East Sussex, United Kingdom.

Location Interviewer: Kiel, Schleswig-Holstein, Germany.

Medium of communication: Skype™.

Medium of documentation: Audio file (Length: 36:27 minutes).

Objective: The main objective of Interview II was to gather specific information about the social structures and the scope of the actions in Transition City Lancaster. Thus, eight predefined open-questions have been posed with the aim to elicit rich descriptions of activities and processes in Transition Town Lewes. Additionally, seven emergent probe-questions have been interspersed in order to extend the descriptions given or to broach the subject again.

Central Aspects: Since the foundation in 2007 TTL has steadily broadened its interest and perspective to various areas. In this regard the question of how everything is connected seems to have evoked interests and involvement in various different projects and issues in the town. Flood resistance and sustainable housing seem to be the most important issues in that regard. However, social aspects and interconnectedness plays a key role. The positive and practical approach which not only theorizes about issues but tackles them through grassroots initiative is characterized as the difference to other groups focusing on similar interests. Moreover, it is emphasized that respect for each other as well as tolerance and calmness towards others is vital for effective collaboration in the groups. All work and action in TTL is organized without a leader and on a non-hierarchical basis, resembling the importance of respect and tolerance in TTL. Overall TTL is described as being a very friendly and comfortable group with various connections to different institutions and organizations in the town.

Key finding: Transition Town Lewes is not only focusing on establishing transition to a sustainable and socially just future but applies a more diverse approach. Involved in various practical projects to support and strengthen local and regional structures collaboration in TTL is based on mutual respect for each other as well as norms of tolerance and calmness.

Short summary interview III: Transition Penwith (TP)

Date: 19.02.2016; 04:00 p.m. CET.

Participant (P): Interlocutor is Mr. Jonathan How; member of Transition Penwith (TTP) since 2009 and member of the Core group since 2010.

Interviewer (I): Author of this research.

Location Participant: Cornwall, United Kingdom.

Location Interviewer: Kiel, Schleswig-Holstein, Germany.

Medium of communication: Skype™.

Medium of documentation: Audio file (Length: 49:20 minutes).

Objective: The main objective of Interview III was to gather specific information about the organization as well as the social structures and the scope of Transition Penwith. Moreover, due to the rather limited amount of specific data provided through the website of TTP Interview III is the longest and most detailed of the three. For this purpose, eight predefined open questions are applied in order to elicit rich descriptions of activities and processes in Transition Penwith. Additionally, 11 emergent probe-questions are used to gather more specific and detailed answers from the participant.

Central Aspects: Initiated in 2006 as one of the first Transition Initiatives TP has experienced some changes in its recent history. A structural break in 2010 segregated the special interest groups from the core group and created a new structure resting upon the activities of the core group. The latter serves as an umbrella organization guiding the activities in the area of Penwith and is mainly concerned with giving advice and raising awareness of the changes and challenges of the future. The core group is based on strong social relationships and mutual respect. Activities of TP are established among five core pillars: 1) Transitioning down to more sustainable livelihoods 2) Networking with other groups pursuing the same interest 3) Community building 4) Rebuilding the local economy 5) Inner Transition to a more interrelated understanding. While aiming to establish self-reliance of the community another aim of the core group is to establish so called local HUB-groups in the area which care more about the practical aspects of the Transition approach.

Key finding: Transition Penwith is different to the other two selected Transition Initiatives since it covers a whole area and serves as an umbrella organization connecting different projects and activities in the area. Thus, main practices concern networking and community building in the area. This implies practical aspects such as rebuilding of the local economy as well as an inner transition.