

Telling Stories on Commoning with Design of Models and Simulations

Fachhochschule Nordwestschweiz
Hochschule für Gestaltung und Kunst

PROJECT PROCESS OUTPUT INSPIRATION DEUTSCH SHOW ALL!

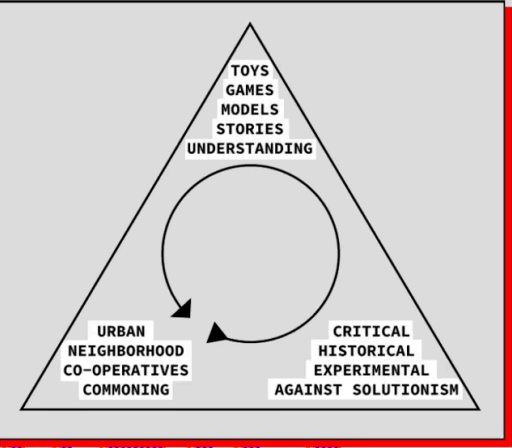
Thinking Toys (or Games) for Commoning

The sustainable use and the organisation of common resources is highly complex. With the focus on alternative, utopia-inspired urban neighbourhood initiatives in Switzerland this research project proposes experimental design and inquiry into media-based thinking tools which will help to better illustrate, demonstrate and negotiate the complexity of these sharing processes.

Commons are sustainably and collectively managed resources, such as food, or communication infrastructures, such as Wi-Fi. Commoning, then, is the activity of sharing these resources. The aspiration formulated throughout numerous alternative, utopia-inspired projects that seeks to design infrastructural aspects of urban everyday life in an alternative and autonomous way, through commoning, raises several questions. Since, based on the high level of complexity that (occasionally) comes with the shared use of resources, for the individual community member it is often difficult to estimate his or her own action and consequences to the very last detail. Especially when it comes to unpredictable, complex adaptive processes, he or she can no longer completely grasp them intuitively nor follow them without the help of media-based thinking tools – such as computer-based models or scenarios – which make those processes not only visible but also comprehensible.

For this reason, a mobile software application will be developed and tested in close collaboration with the members of three Swiss urban neighborhood projects: NeNa1 in Zurich, LeNa in Basel and Warmbächli in Bern. We will create playful simulations and design new thought-spaces for commoning. Our aim is to enable alternative and engaging ways for future social participation and transformation processes.

The four-year project, which combines

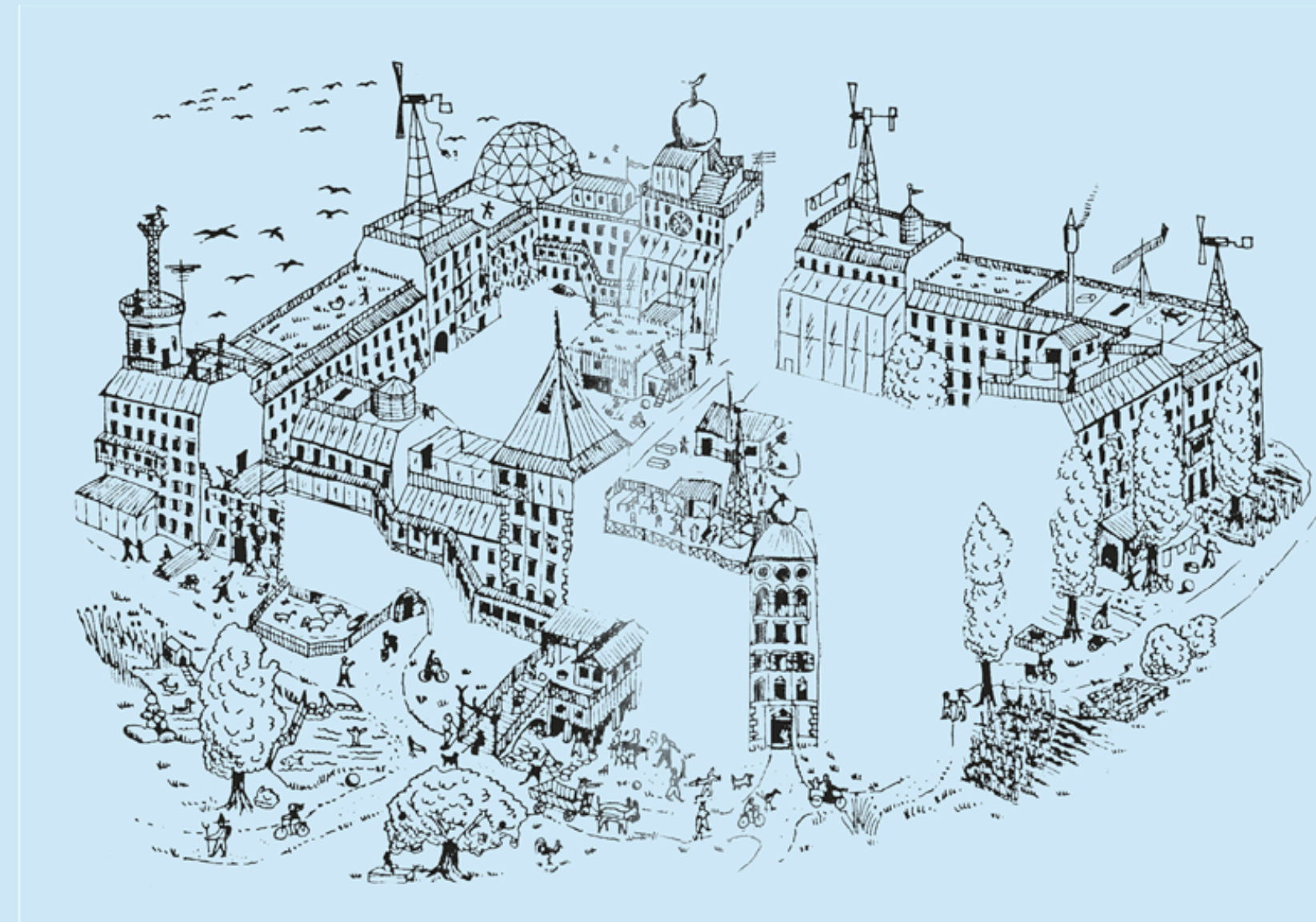


January 2020, Thinking Toys at Biennial of Design, Ljubljana, Slovenia

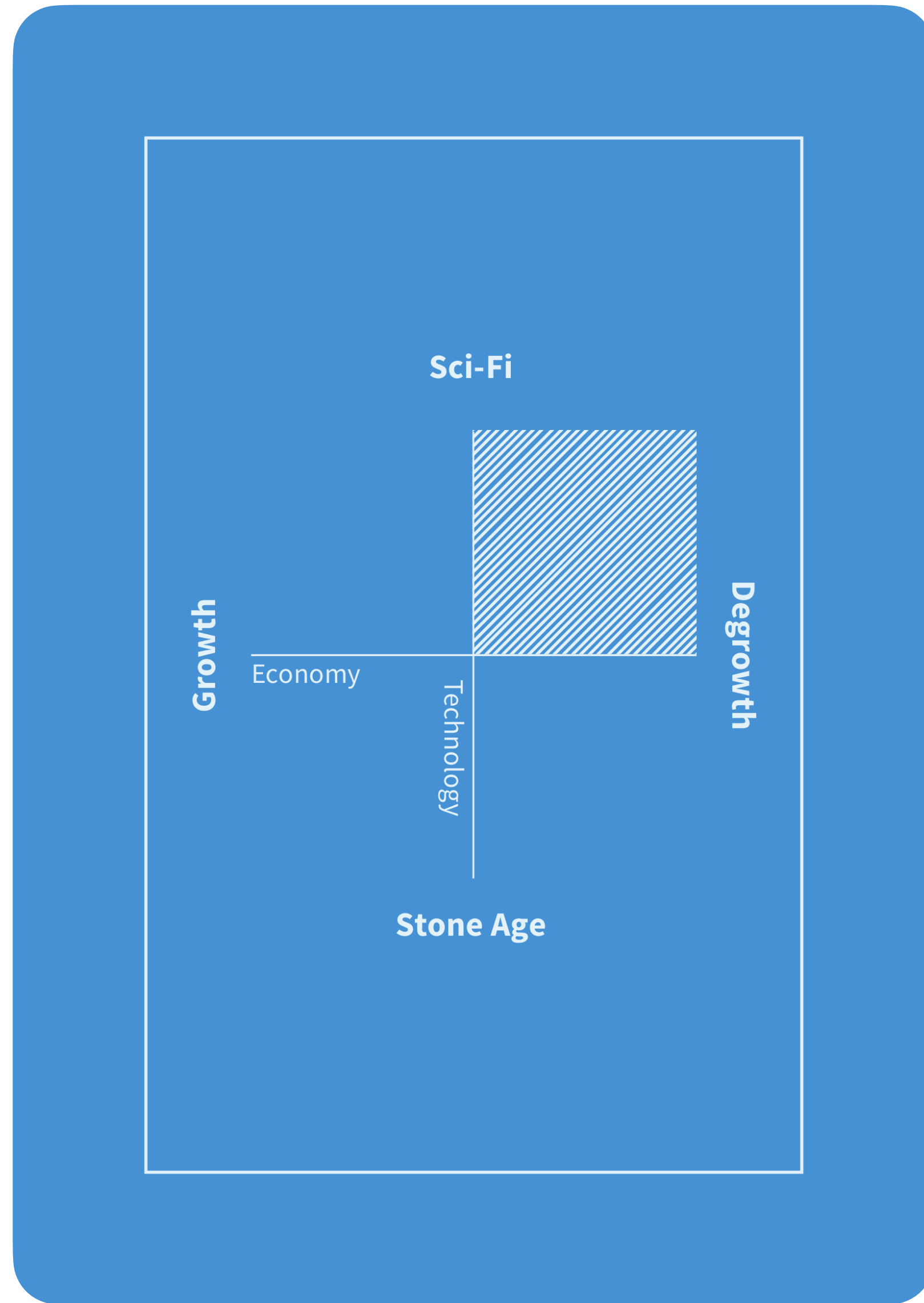
Funding SNSF No. 175913, runtime 01/2018 - 12/2021 IXDM / Critical Media Lab at FHNW Academy of Art and Design in Basel, Switzerland

<http://commoning.rocks>

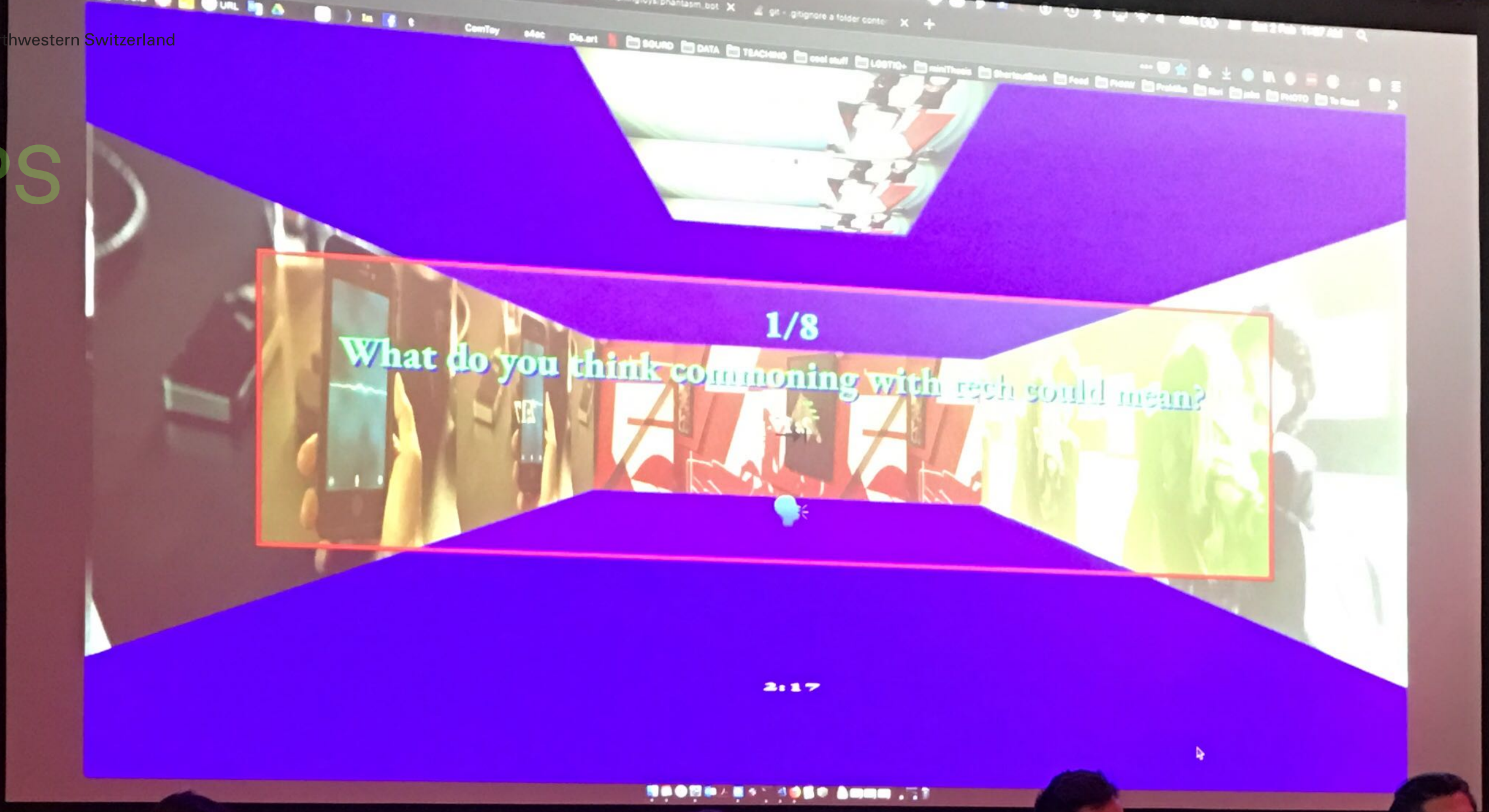
bolo' bolo



P.M. 1983



WORKSHOPS



**Phantasms of Decentralization? Conversations
about Commoning with Coming Media
With: Yann Martins, Michaela Büsse, Cade
Diehm, John Evans, Viktor Bedö, Selena Savić,
Shintaro Miyazaki**

WORKSHOPS

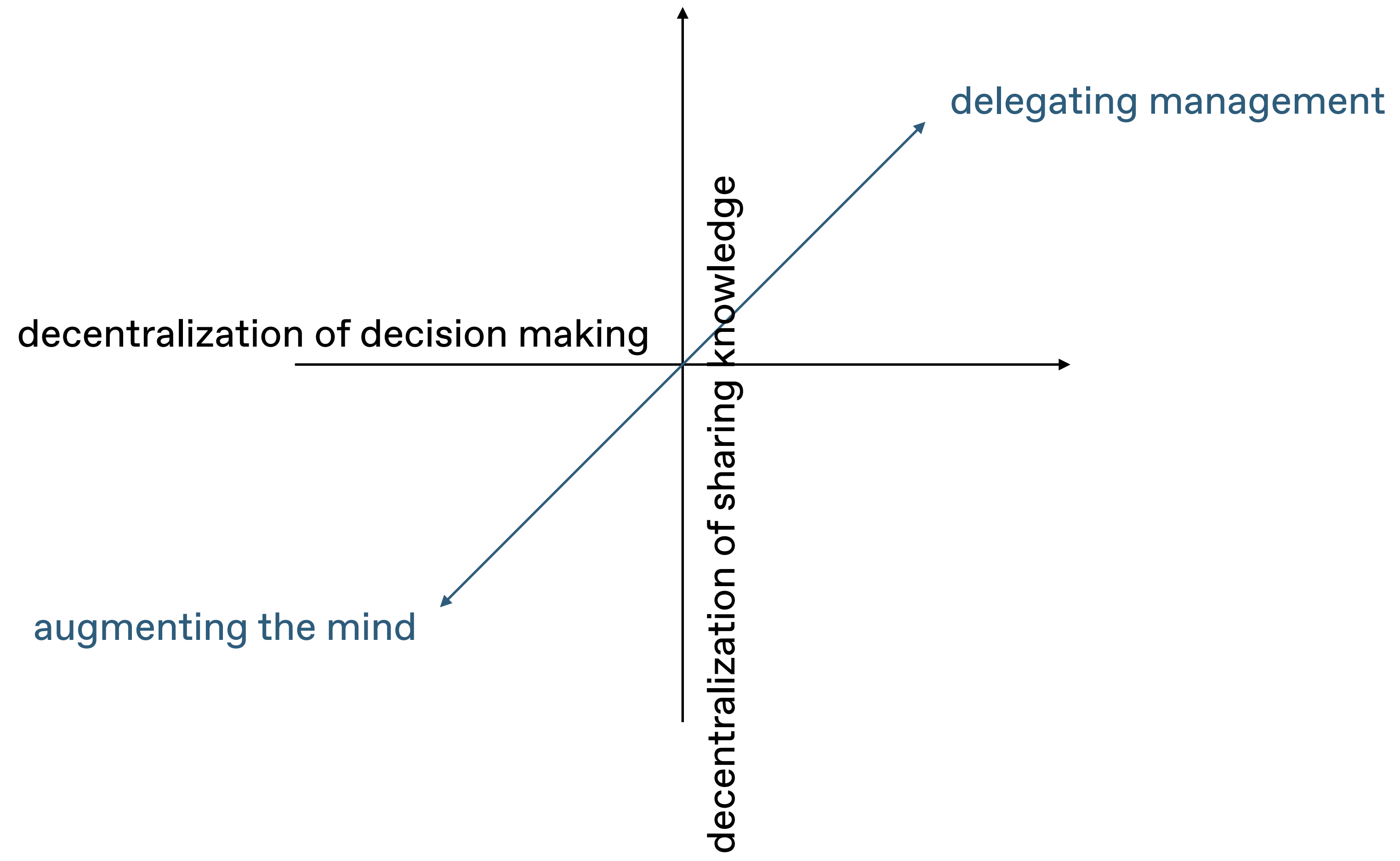


personal communication (email
-> wiki, chat platforms ->
commons app)

ubiquity and autonomy of
infrastructure
(telephone lines -> the internet
-> self-determined
autonomous networks)

cultural considerations
(dialogue -> chat groups ->
convergence of local and global
discussion)

WORKSHOPS



DOCUMENTING THE RELATIONSHIP

Savić, S. (2020). **Delegating management, augmenting the mind: What role for technology in commoning practices?** Proceedings of *free/libre Technologies, Arts and the Commons Unconference*, ISBN 978-9963-711-88-8

Delegating management, augmenting the mind: What could be the role for technology in commoning practices?

Selena Savić

Introduction

In 1974, French feminist writer Françoise D'Eaubonne identified two threats to humanity: the destruction of the environment and overpopulation (D'Eaubonne, 1974). "Feminism or death", she proclaimed alarmingly. The oil crisis of the 1970s heightened the awareness of the finiteness of resources (even though their scarcity was artificially generated in this particular case) and fueled a plethora of thoughts about alternatives to the capitalist economic system that was perceived as consumptive of the very energy and human resources it attempted to manage. Even though such counterculture ideas did not gain mainstream recognition, and precisely because they failed to cause deeper changes to the system, similar claims are being made today. The Global Footprint Network estimates that the pace of using resources is alarmingly faster than their regeneration capacity:¹ in eight months we use twelve months' worth of resources. Climate change activists as young as teenagers address political and business leaders at World Economic Forums.²

Commons-based economy and commoning are proposed by many as more stable, resilient forms of governance (Gibson-Graham, Cameron, & Healy, 2013; Bollier & Helfrich, 2015). It is not a surprise that Elinor Ostrom was given Nobel Prize in Economics for her work on the governing the commons (Ostrom, 1990) right after the biggest financial crisis we experience in recent times (2008). This discourse is often characterized by inflammatory statements. With the current text, I propose to think calmly about burning topics such as resource sharing, collective decision making and the role of technology in these processes.

The relationship between commoning and technology is explored here in the scope of the research project *Thinking Toys for Commoning*,³ looking into the ways media-based tools, such as computer-based models, can make complex commoning processes not only visible but also comprehensible. The multidisciplinary team gathers around questions raised by both lived experiences of commoning in a community of individuals, and the experimental approach to computer modeling. We explore, expose and make explicit different phenomena related to common living. We collaborate with three Swiss housing cooperatives, probing organizational and communication challenges they face.

Technocracy, degrowth: What alternative visions?

The cooperatives we work with: *NeNA1* from Zurich, *LeNa* from Basel and *Warmbächli* from Bern, are part of a wider movement *Neustart Schweiz*, which promotes sustainable living. Inspired by utopian fiction novel *Bolo'bolo* (P. M., 1983), these

¹ Global Footprint Network identifies this as the Earth Overshoot Day: a day in a given year when humanity's use of ecological resources exceeds what Earth can regenerate in that year <https://www.footprintnetwork.org/our-work/earth-overshoot-day/>

² The most recent talk given by teen activist Greta Thunberg in January 2019 at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, urges the global elite to act on climate change with the statement "World is on Fire". The complete, edited transcript is available here: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jan/25/our-house-is-on-fire-greta-thunberg16-urges-leaders-to-act-on-climate>

³ *Thinking Toys for Commoning* project explores sustainable use and the organisation of common resources with the focus on alternative, utopia-inspired urban neighbourhood initiatives in Switzerland. The team is made of Shintaro Miyazaki (project lead), Michaela Büsse, Victor Bedó, Selena Savić and Yann Patrick Martins. More information about the process and project outputs can be found on the project website: <http://commoning.rocks>

DOCUMENTING THE RELATIONSHIP

Savić, S., Bedö, V., Büsse, M.,
Martins, Y., & Miyazaki, S.
(2020). **Toys for Conviviality.
Situating Commoning,
Computation and Modelling.**
Open Cultural Studies, 4(1),
[https://doi.org/10.1515/
culture-2020-0015](https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2020-0015)

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Open Cultural Studies 2020; 1: 143-153



Research Article

Selena Savic, Viktor Bedö, Michaela Büsse, Yann Martins, Shintaro Miyazaki*

Toys for Conviviality. Situating Commoning, Computation and Modelling

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Abstract: This article explores the use of agent-based modelling as a critical and playful form of engagement with cooperative housing organizations. Because of its inherent complexities vis-à-vis decision-making, commoning is a well-suited field of study to explore the potential of humanities-driven experimental design (media) research to provoke critical reflection, problem-finding and productive complication. By introducing two different agent-based models, the interdisciplinary research team discusses their experience with setting up parameters for modelling, their implications, and the possibilities and limits of employing modelling techniques as a basis for decision-making. While it shows that modelling can be helpful in detecting long-term results of decisions or testing out effects of unlikely yet challenging events, modelling might act as a discursive practice uncovering hidden assumptions inherent in the model setup and generating an increase of scientific uncertainty. The project "ThinkingToys for Commoning" thus argues for a critical modelling practice and culture, in which models act as toys for probing alternative modes of living together and exploring the constructedness of methods. In countering late forms of capitalism, the resulting situated and critical practice provides avenues for enabling more self-determined forms of governance.

Keywords: Commoning; Modelling; Conviviality; (media) design research; Housing cooperatives

It was no surprise when Elinor Ostrom was awarded the 2009 Nobel prize in economics for her work on governing the commons merely one year after the financial crisis of 2008. During the decade that followed we witnessed the rise of powerful conglomerates of information technology companies such as Amazon, Google, Facebook and Apple solidifying the formation of neoliberal techno-capitalism, a development which Marxist media studies scholar McKenzie Wark called "something worse" (13). Others have, in parallel lines and often inspired by Ostrom, conceptualized and popularized alternatives to the latest forms of capitalism: commons-based economy and commoning as more self-determined, sometimes feminist, often resilient forms of governance (Gibson-Graham et al. 138; Bollier and Helfrich 27; Federici, *Re-Enchanting the World* 86). Arguing from a similar, alternative, standpoint, this article wants to address the following question: How to conceptualize and rethink practices using (media) technology, specifically computation and modelling, so that they benefit community organisation, commoning and open up pathways to an increase in self-determination? On the side of community interests, one might assume that self-organization is made easier, in part, by the availability of 'free' communication services such as chat apps (e.g. WhatsApp, Viber, Signal, Telegram, etc.) or shared online collaborative spreadsheets (e.g. Google Sheet). These are again mostly offered by profit-oriented companies and don't allow for self-determined change, adaptation or development in terms of commoning. Furthermore, studies of the gig economy have confirmed that technologies such as managerial apps often deprive its users, who are also workers, from self-organizing resistance and unionization (Gandini 1051). These developments demonstrate how easily technical

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DOCUMENTING THE RELATIONSHIP

Savić, S., Miyazaki, S.,
**Articulating Politics with
Design and Technology, Panel
presentation: *Hegemony,
counter-hegemony and
ontological politics*
EASST/4S Prague
August 2020**

Articulating Alternatives

“[t]he knowledge of simulations is always furnished with a hypothetical index, and because various people model and simulate the same problem in various ways, what eventually emerges – instead of certainty – is an uncircumventable spectrum of opinions and interpretations. And it is to this degree that simulations contain an element of sophistry and take sides. Description, explanation and fiction come together in an experimental compound.”

Pias, Claus. „On the Epistemology of Computer Simulation“. Zeitschrift für Medien- und Kulturforschung 2011, Nr. 1 (May 2011): 29–54, here 52.

 Thinking Toys (or Games) for Commoning, <http://commoning.rocks>


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Articulating Alternatives

counter-raving: a metaphor suggestive of ways to inhabit and occupy urban spaces

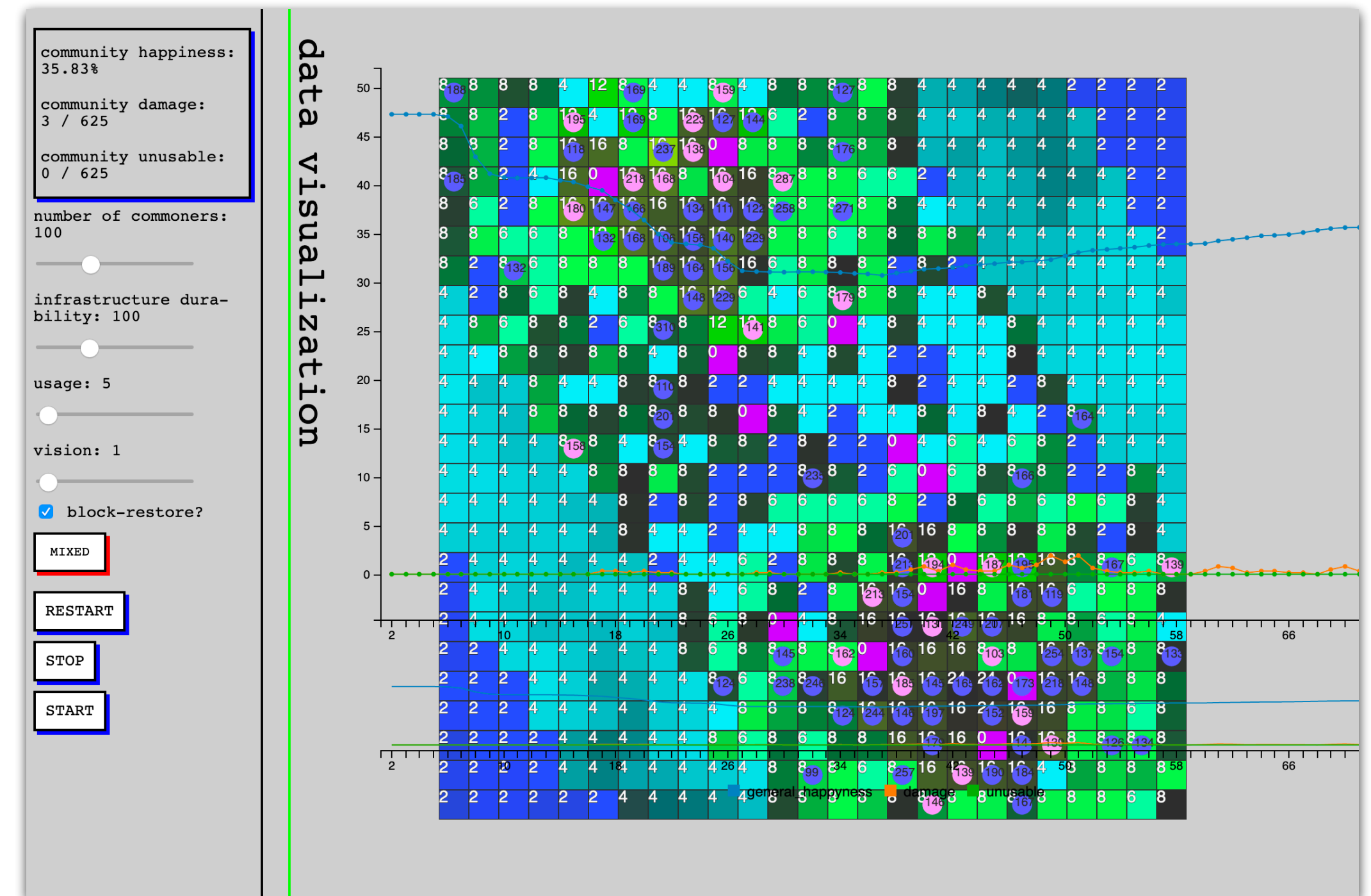
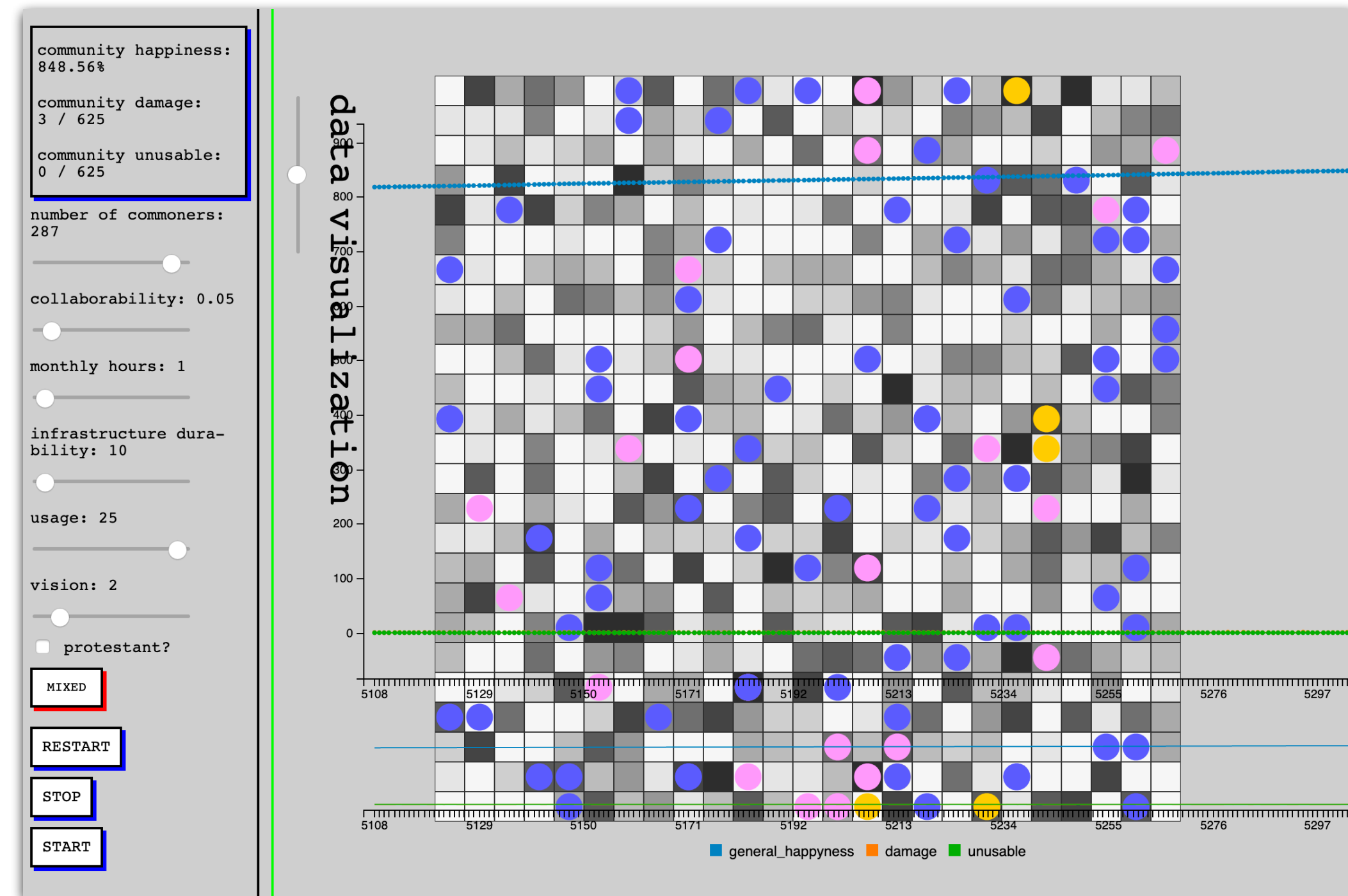
direct engagement with the negotiation process of commoning by affirming the possibility to use and perform technologies critically and playfully

→ **self-organised and technically-literate communities**

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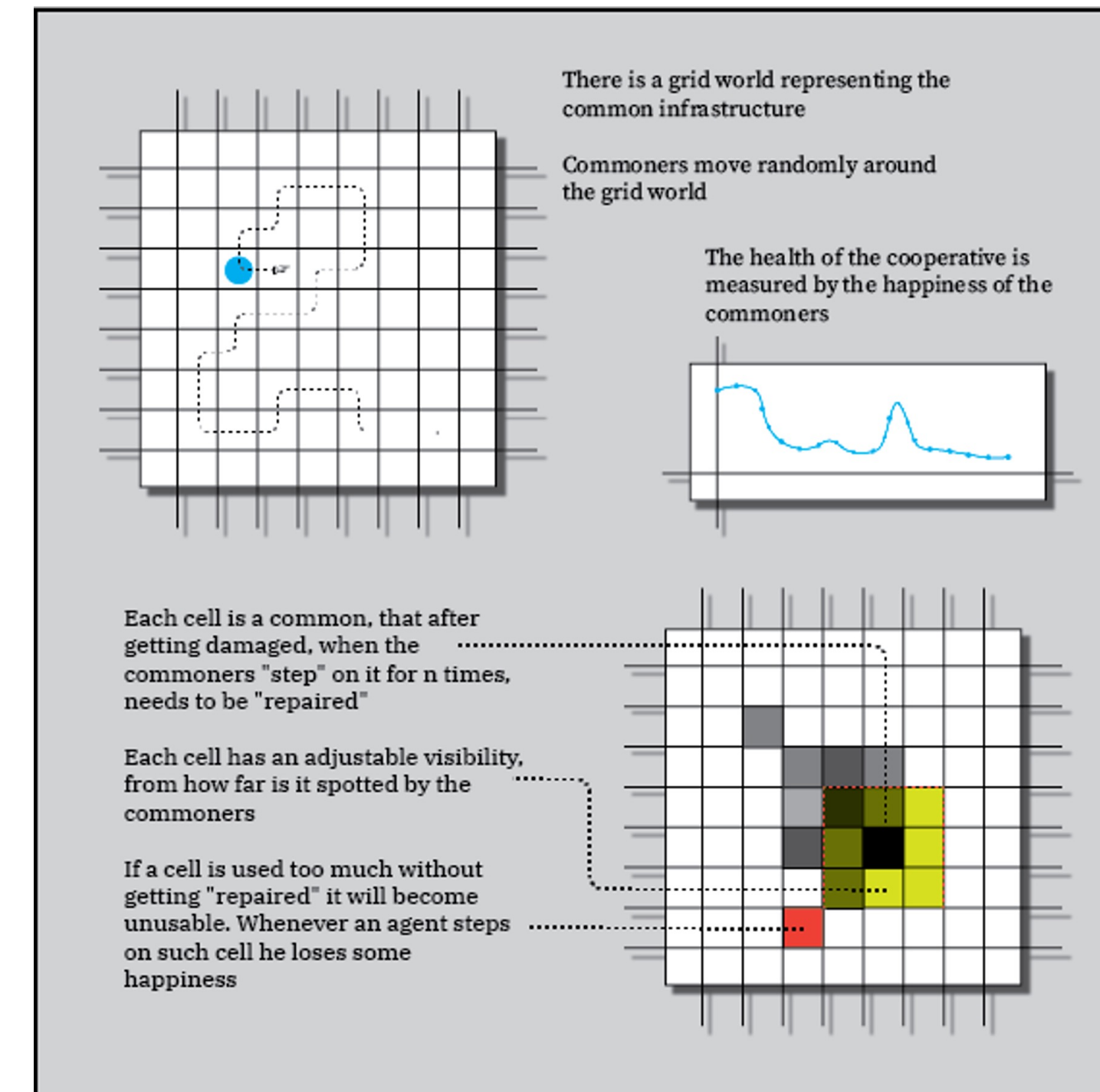
ABM MODELS



STORIES OF COMMONING

Exploring the entanglements of labour with value extraction in commoning activities, addressed through stories :

- *From Tragedy to Comedy*
- *The Disruptive Power of Value*



STORIES OF COMMONING

imagining rules organizing the imaginary

thank you