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Commoning Xela: Negotiating collective spaces around a Central American intermediate city

Michiel Baud, Rutgerd Boelens, Fábio de Castro, Barbara Hogenboom, Christien Klaufus, Kees Koonings, Annelou Ypeij
CEDLA, University of Amsterdam

Abstract:

This exploration is based on joint fieldwork conducted by an interdisciplinary research team in the city of Quetzaltenango (Xela), Guatemala. It uses the notion of commoning as an analytic lens to understand social transformations in this intermediate city, and in contemporary Latin America at large. The interplay of commoning, de-commoning and re-commoning processes draws attention to the cocreation and collective production of tangible and intangible resources happening at different scales. The proposed commoning perspective further aims to critically assess the binary contrasts and presumed dualisms that inform academic and policy approaches to social change, in order to create a better understanding of the drivers, interactions and practices of transformation in intertwined rural-urban contexts. *Keywords*: Commoning, intermediate city, commons, collective space, urban-rural connections, Latin America.

Resumen: Comunizar Xela: Negociando espacios colectivos alrededor de una ciudad intermedia centroamericana

Esta exploración se basa en un trabajo de campo conjunto realizado por un equipo de investigación interdisciplinario en la ciudad de Quetzaltenango (Xela), Guatemala. Utiliza la noción de "comunizar" (*commoning*) como una lente analítica para comprender las transformaciones sociales en esta ciudad intermedia y en la América Latina contemporánea en general. La interacción de los procesos de comunizar, descomunizar y recomunizar llama la atención sobre la creación conjunta y la producción colectiva de recursos tangibles e intangibles que ocurren a diferentes escalas. La perspectiva de "comunizar" propuesta tiene como objetivo evaluar críticamente los contrastes binarios y los supuestos dualismos que informan los enfoques académicos y de política para el cambio social, a fin de crear una mejor comprensión de los impulsores, las interacciones y las prácticas de transformación en contextos rurales-urbanos entrelazados. *Palabras clave*: *Commoning*, ciudad intermedia, bienes comunes, espacio colectivo, conexiones urbano-rurales, América Latina.

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The commons debate and Latin America

The 'commons' as a term refers to an analytical concept that has received growing attention in many disciplines in the last decades. It has evolved from a narrow contextual focus on social dilemmas in social-ecological systems (McCay & Acheson, 1987) into an analytical perspective to address social change at large (Bollier & Helfrich, 2012). While the 'enclosure of the commons' by landed elites was already a fiercely debated theme since Thomas More's publication of *Utopia* in the early sixteenth century – with political-economic analyses by Marx and his followers in the ages that followed –, its current popularity stems from the academic debate around Hardin's seminal work 'The tragedy of the commons', published in 1968. Critics addressed the fallacies of Hardin's argument that natural resources are inherently prone to depletion unless state or private property rights are in place. They refuted Hardin's proposed solutions to natural resource overuse by providing empirical evidences of alternative logics and agency in resource governance based on collective action. Their insights drew attention to the erosion of such longstanding, well-functioning, collective governance systems, partly due to their invisibility to policy makers (Dietz et al., 2003). This critical perspective has crystalized in the work of one of the leading theorists on the commons, Nobel-prize winner Elinor Ostrom. She has proposed the concept of 'common-pool resources' (CPR) to overcome the classic public policy dichotomy of public and private goods (Ostrom, 1990).

This developed into a vibrant second wave of literature that has articulated a much larger range of commons, including the so called 'new commons' such as knowledge, urban public spaces, and digital spaces. In contrast with the CPR approach – defined in terms of categories of goods analysed through an institutional lens (Ostrom, 1990) – the new commons include intangible resources and expand the field to include processual dimensions of cocreation, sharing and social reproduction processes (Bertacchini et al., 2012). This new wave of commons research draws attention to collective initiatives across different social contexts as a counterforce to state-centric control and, in particular, neoliberal transformation processes. Gradually, the analytical focus shifted from a resource-oriented to a processes-oriented perspective and, in this way, to *commoning* rather than commons. Instead of asking 'how' existing commons have been governed, the question became how and under what circumstances common spaces and resources came into existence, who initiated the process, and how they evolved over time.

Commoning, thus, refers to processes of sharing experiences of cocreation, self-governance and reproduction of natural and social resources. The commons can be understood as the product of commoning, processes of co-production, sharing and governing tangible and intangible resources by a group of families or individuals. Embraced by international (neo)liberal and new-institutionalist development institutes and approaches, the commons and com-

munity-based management became buzzwords in policy circles and corporative governance. At the same time, the commons narrative also became an instrument of counter-hegemonic movements (e.g., Bollier, 2014; Haiven, 2014; Stavrides, 2016). Among others because of this ambivalent background, understanding and application, some authors warn us not to read too much politics or power-critical positioning in commoning processes or to assume commoning projects as being inherently counter-hegemonic and anti-capitalist (e.g., Velicu & García-López, 2018, p. 5-7). Moreover, this shift from academic to policy and activism circles has led to some confusion about the limits of the commons as an analytical tool as it became politicized and ingrained with strong normative views.

Many agree that a more critical perspective to the commons is needed to develop an integrative analytical concept. Processes of commoning, de-commoning (and enclosure) and re-commoning may range from everyday life experiences up to highly politically charged situations, in which resources and (cultural) practices are contested in the context of multiple interests and asymmetric relations. They can generate material and non-material cultural change, and may involve the accommodation or transformation of power structures. Ida Susser (2017, p. 1-2) defines commoning in general terms as "a grassroots project to build a new form of consensus that highlights the importance of sharing, economic security, and horizontalism across thresholds of difference". She notices that participants often refuse formalistic or institutionalized political goals and rather see themselves as actors transforming social relations from the bottom up. The analytical power of this perspective lays in the identification of multiple drivers, interactions, relationships and (historical) practices that characterize forms of collaboration and mutual support in societal change processes.

Despite a growing academic interest, the use of a commons perspective in Latin America has been limited mainly to natural resources and rural transformations (cf. Svampa, 2015; Castro, 2016; Delgado-Serrano et al., 2016) while the analysis of new commons in urban settings is in its infancy (Harvey, 2012; Zapata & Campos, 2015). Despite a rich body of literature that addresses the transformations in contemporary Latin American societies, disciplinary, thematic and scalar divides impede us to see clear connection across different social processes. We contend that the 'commoning' perspective can help to investigate these processes in Latin America taking into account the tensions between enclosure and de-commoning, at the one hand, and sharing and re-commoning, at the other. The commoning perspective may provide an analytical bridge to connect different processes to understand Latin American societal transformations at different scales (e.g. Baud et al., 2019).

In this article we present a combined conceptual analysis of a varying range of commoning experiences in a Central American intermediate city – Quetzaltenango, popularly known as Xela – in Guatemala. The research entails a co-production of researchers in an interdisciplinary research group. We collabo-

rated closely and intensively to assess our particular disciplinary assumptions and to evaluate our research outcomes in an integrated way. We selected an intermediate city that presents the opportunities and challenges of any urban environment while the city and its rural vicinities are also strongly interdependent. Contrary to the capital city, intermediate cities are not located in the national centre of political power, yet they do play a central role in the surrounding region. This way, the research design included urban and rural manifestations of resources use, cultural change, as well as rural-urban interfaces and interconnecting flows of people and goods. The manageable scale of intermediate cities allows researchers to navigate the full extent of the research territory while also obtaining a general overview.

Commoning research in Xela

Like other intermediary cities in Latin America, Xela underwent an intense urban transformation since the 1980s, when a social and political conflict dramatically exposed the country's social and ethnic divisions. After the peace agreements of 1996, Guatemalan society embarked on a complex process of rebuilding society. In Xela, this was accompanied by a strong regional consciousness and a concerted effort to repair and 're-order' society, in a social and racial as well as political and territorial sense. In the 1990s and 2000s, Xela was defined by its strong indigenous social and political organizations. The population even elected a Mayan mayor for two subsequent terms. Nevertheless, the deepening of citizenship rights remained limited, and especially indigenous citizens in rural areas continued to be excluded (Rasch 2011a; 2011b).

More recently, modernization and territorial ordering have been central on the local agenda. The voluminous report 'Xelajú Sostenible' sponsored by the IDB in 2014, and the municipal Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial (POT) approved in 2017 testify to this modernization attempt. Although we were not directly interested in the implementation of these policy documents, they presented an excellent backdrop to understand the nature of transformation of the city and its surroundings in the twenty-first century. It allowed us to focus on the contradictory interaction between an ambitious local government and a vibrant and diverse civil society that in different ways tries to protect or coproduce collective activities. At the same time, the development plans helped us to concretize our interdisciplinary perspective, in which class, gender, racial and spatial relations and politics intersected in various ways.

Our two-week fieldwork period in July 2018 can be best characterized as a collective 'rapid qualitative appraisal'. The project was designed on the basis of intense collaboration, both in the preparatory phase as well as during fieldwork and subsequent analysis of findings. A selection of themes was made on a wide variety of commoning processes according to established interests and areas of expertise of each member of our team (Table 1). This procedure ensured the research to be grounded in our fairly well-established conceptual and

thematic knowledge and research experience. The case studies covered three main thematic focuses: first, territorial issues and governmentality, such as the POT's territorial ordering endeavours, and rural-urban socio-spatial connections around mining extractivism; second, state-society relations with a focus on the formal and informal governance structures in the case of cemeteries, markets and security provisioning; and third, local initiatives on material and immaterial issues, such as agroecological movements and cultural tourism. Identification of interlinkages between seemingly diverse research topics already in the initial phase of the project was the first indication of the potential of the commons as an integrative perspective to analyse social transformations in Xela.

Table 1. Overview of Xela case studies (some cases were carried out by more than one researcher; all cases were supported by other team members)

Commoning Process	Thematic Focus	Leading researcher
Commoning contentions: state and community views	Territory and Governmentality	Rutgerd Boelens
Mining and urban-rural commoning	Territory and Governmentality	Barbara Hogenboom
Markets as commons	State-Society Relations	Michiel Baud
Cemetery as commons	State-Society Relations	Christien Klaufus
Identity and memory as commons	Local Initiatives	Annelou Ypeij
Public security as commons	Local Initiatives	Kees Koonings
Agroecology as commons	Local Initiatives	Fabio de Castro

Our methods were mainly qualitative and explorative with a central role for mixed methods such as open interviews, (participant) observation, informal conversations, focus group discussions, ethnographic observations and content analysis of a variety of textual and statistical sources. Our snowball sampling method proved very effective. During the two weeks of intensive fieldwork in the urban, peri-urban and rural areas of Xela, we talked to more than eighty participants, including farmers, community leaders, market vendors, activists, members of collectives and committees, police officers, municipal civil servants, academics, journalists, and local entrepreneurs. We conducted joint activities (interviews, site visits, or participation in events) whenever possible to stimulate a sharing of experiences and understanding within the team as well as to reflect on eventual linkages across cases. Informally on a daily basis, and in a more structured form halfway through the fieldwork and at the end of the research period we jointly discussed progress, findings, and the evolution of our ideas. It is tempting to claim that in this way, we practiced 'research commoning'.

We were able to present our ideas and plans at a kick off *conversatorio* at CUNOC's Department of Architecture which became a brainstorm occasion. Two weeks later, we organized a second session to present and discuss our findings during a 'stakeholders' seminar facilitated by CUNOC where many of

the interviewees from all case studies were present. The first meeting yielded invaluable insights and leads whereas the second one allowed us to systematize our incipient lines of analysis and put them up for scrutiny.

Xela commons: Transversal themes and connections

While commoning research normally emphasizes citizen-driven shared experiences to overcome constraints imposed by the state or market forces, our research reveals that processes of commoning today cannot be properly grasped without also taking into account other sets of collective production. We single out two: first, the formalized policies and guidelines set out by institutes and corporations which connect to discourses of collective action and commoning practices; and second, the everyday practices that (re)shape identity and cultural values through coproduction and sharing of memory and imagining. It is the interaction between these different practices and ideologies, both 'old' and 'new', which make the concept of commoning productive and exciting (Gago, 2015). In this section we will use the individual research projects (Table 1) by elaborating on three 'transversal themes' related to the commons – Commons and Politics, Commons and Space, and Commons and Imagination.

Commons and politics: Ordering and contestation

The Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial has in many ways provided a framework for municipal policies meant to organize and order Xela society: "los patrones actuales de crecimiento del municipio de Quetzaltenango están caracterizados por una fuerte expansión de su superficie urbanizada y la ocupación de superficies no aptas para urbanizar, lo que incide negativamente en la calidad de vida de sus habitantes, amenazando de esa manera su desarrollo sostenible, por lo que se hace necesario establecer normas claras de ordenamiento territorial que propicien el bienestar y la convivencia armónica entre los vecinos" (Municipalidad de Quetzaltenango, 2017, p. 2). In the POT different frames and experiences of ordering meet and collide, moving from spatial and material resources to the ordering of institutions and contestation. The POT (as well as the IDB study 'Xela Sostenible') seeks to connect with the vocabulary of the commons in their proposal to reinvent Xela's urban and rural space and related economic, environmental, and institutional arrangements and practices. Despite some collectivizing and participatory vocabulary, the POT demonstrates a clearly technocratic bias geared towards 'modernizing' society and limiting and controlling all kinds of local and indigenous commoning arrangements. Many city officials look down on peri-urban and rural claims ("they don't understand good norms" and "they have no soil management plan nor education for this"). But old binaries between urban and rural, or authoritarian and democratic, are losing their appeal, and new struggles on the enactment and meaning of commoning practices emerge. The rural mayor of Pacajá, one of the peri-urban

communities of the city, for example, stressed how the inhabitants feel compelled to resist some of the claims laid out in the POT. Both in peri-urban and rural zones of Xela, communities demand recognition of communal authorities, customary rules, rights and ways of life, and favour a more autonomous local development. Obviously, such demands and customary rights claims cannot be romanticized. They reflect the harsh rural conditions and form a dynamic, case-specific mixture of personal interests and collective, territorial struggles.

Interestingly, most community leaders did not in principle oppose the POT but demanded its adaptation. They share the wish to improve basic services for local actors but hope to do so without losing their (semi)autonomous status. This is leading to diverse fields of contention and at the same time new practices and new formal or informal alliances are created between institutional and non-institutional actors. We encountered examples where rural leaders tried to curb formal territorial regulation and planning in such a way that it would enhance shared rural-urban defence against mining, or foster collective rural-urban action for improved health services and public security. This way, forms of protest combined with efforts to organize collective control over spatial resources.

The problem of extractivism and related hazards is a case in point. Large-scale gravel mining is economically exclusionary as it eats into communal or private forest and farmland. In addition, the externalities of mining are not remediated or compensated. Some citizens and local leaders are aware of the environmental risks posed by this kind of extractivism: deforestation, flooding, noise, air pollution and heavy traffic. Whereas the POT as a formal and state-centric ordering proposition largely ignores these problems, a common ground between residents and agents of the municipal state is sometimes found. A municipality official explained how rural communities and private companies – each with their own interests to protect their own non-official rules – are the ones fiercely protesting against the POT. However, in the case of mining, municipal authorities and communities join: “Mining devours rural communities and micro-watersheds: there we join hands”.

Peasants and other rural citizens were the first to experience that mining and flooding are two sides of the same coin. However, mining also started to aggravated the problems of flooding in the city centre during rainy season. Similarly, the heavy trucks transporting gravel affect both the periphery and centre of Xela. These problems connected urbanites and rural inhabitants in their search for solutions. In several instances they were supported by municipal officials who shared their concerns. In a reaction to the de-commoning processes driven by mining activities, collective efforts combining citizens and authorities of the rural and urban areas are emerging as a re-commoning process aimed at maintaining control over resources. In contrast to the relatively more symmetric and localized commoning processes described in the literature, such a multi-sited, multi-actor network may bring new challenges to reach common interests.

Commons and space: Territory and place-making

Commoning tends to be closely related to territorial issues and elements of (local) place-making. Spatiality lies at the heart of the commoning debate as the fight for the commons is conceptualized as a counterhegemonic strategy to counter enclosure (Jeffrey et al., 2012; Harvey, 2012). Access, coproduction, and sharing of natural, cultural and political resources are usually tied up with particular spatialized claims. Thus, the spatial domain in which commoning experiences emerge is equally defined by the intangible, symbolic layers of meaning. This explains the collective resistance against threats and hazards that are perceived to undermine the existing space use. The threats often boil down to mechanisms of expropriation and destruction that deeply affect urban and rural lives (Harvey, 2012). Yet, our research shows that it is not only in acts of resistance, in which these processes express itself. The ways in which social agents transform space express how communal resilience and empowerment work in daily practice. Housing and farming are the key functions of space use in the urban periphery. In these areas, local residents often construct the basic infrastructure collectively, with their own hands, through community participation in working groups.

We can distinguish three ways in which commoning is connected to space with different social motivations and implications. First, the defence of existing or 'traditional' forms of using and governing territories. The resistance to mining can certainly be seen as a defence of agricultural practices in the city's peripheries, but new initiatives also emerge. The Colectivo Orgánico in Xela, a solidarity economy network of agroecological projects in Xela, helps to connect spaces of rural food producers and urban consumers thereby promoting urban-rural connections, agroecological consciousness, and food sovereignty. Created as part of national governmental policy for certifying export crops in 2007, this collective has been appropriated by grassroots initiatives to promote agroecology and it became a platform that brings together microentrepreneurs (e.g. stores, restaurants, hotels), consumers who look for healthy food, and urban and rural farmers.

Secondly, the spatial element of commoning is visible in some clearly demarcated spaces, such as the city's cemetery and markets. Although these spaces directly fall under municipal control, all kinds of common cultural and social practices are coproduced by the people making use of them. The General Cemetery has always offered space for the enactment of rituals and popular culture. Especially in the 'unorganized' distant parts of the large terrain, people have appropriated space to reproduce their relationship with the dead, and with death in an ontological sense. Citizens have for instance coproduced a cult of spiritual relieve rooted in the assumed powers of a mythical folk saint buried in the cemetery (cf. Graziano, 2007; Klaufus, 2019). However, the cemetery has also turned into a place where past and present generations meet and perform their lives in very mundane ways such as playing soccer amidst the graves. As

local residents nowadays often visit the cemetery to bury the remains of a repatriated transnational migrant relative, the cemetery has also turned into a place where transnational family histories are enacted and literally 'given a place' for commemoration.

The public market, La Minerva, located in between the city centre and an upper middle-class neighbourhood (*zonas* 1 and 3), is another public space where diverse and often contradictory forms of commoning are played out. The vendors have organized the place in a lacework of private and collective arrangements in which a hierarchy of preferential and peripheral spots for stalls and vendors has emerged. Although the market space in this way has been clearly divided in privatized spaces, the constant struggle with the municipal authorities and neighbouring entrepreneurs has imbued the market vendors with a shared identity that has helped their resilient independence. It facilitated a strong, self-imposed, collective informal order, which however is based on asymmetric access to resources and persistent clientelist relations in the market place (cf. Gago, 2015; Goldstein, 2016).

Thirdly, we found examples in which new common practices generate new spatial meanings and uses. These were especially evident in the context of a changing urban environment where pollution, danger and insecurity are increasingly felt to threaten existing forms of conviviality. Urban residents create security initiatives through spatial regimes, such as organizing grassroots vigilance, or, for example, by setting up the *¿Xela Cómo Vamos?* observatory, and by petitioning for the improvement of the urban environment and infrastructure. The spatial frames associated to public insecurity and criminal violence territorialize the threat of gangs: they are generally perceived to organize in the urban peripheries (symbolically polluted through collective stigmatization) and enter the 'decent' city centre to extort 'good citizens'. Certain parts of the urban space are symbolically marked as 'on alert'. Menacing banners are put up across the streets announcing immediate armed response to incursions of criminals (not by the police, but by the local vigilance committee). This defence of spatial safety against new intruders can be seen as the construction of new common collectivities but also as a form of perverse commoning in which stigmatized groups are excluded from a collectively enclosed urban space (cf. Glebbeek & Koonings, 2016). This demonstrates that commoning can lead to new forms of inclusion and exclusion.

Commons and imagination: Memory and identity

In line with current views, our fieldwork clearly indicated how processes of commoning are strongly connected to intangible resources and processes of remembering and imagining through the reclaiming of collective identity. For example, in the mobilization against large-scale mining, local residents call upon the ILO Convention 169 by alleging that "It states that indigenous communities have to be consulted, that has not happened here, [so] we will force

compliance". Similar claims are used to build rural-urban alliances as highlighted by an urban neighbourhood leader: "We need the rural area communities as partners to enforce Convention 169. Because our rural brothers and sisters are more easily recognized as indigenous". The Colectivo Orgánico in Xela is another example of how imaginings of this network bridge the urban-rural divides. In this case, the commoning process is shaped around narratives that emphasize traditional and sustainable farming practices through the concept of agroecology. Although the platform is predominantly urban the narrative that informs and promotes the platform's activities has roots in the narrative of food sovereignty proposed by Latin American peasant social movements, like Via Campesina. More research is needed to clearly assess the strength and sustainability of these alliances. The increasing interaction between different group and the reproduction of emancipatory discourses present a clear change in regional society, but it is not clear yet if they will lead to longer-term solidarity and collective action.

The clearest dimension where memory and cultural dynamics lead to processes of collective action in Xela concerns initiatives by and with indigenous groups. As Guatemala's armed conflict (1960-1996) hit the Maya population particularly hard, there still is a strong need for solace, consolation and recuperation. The recreation of Maya imaginings and identity can be seen as an expression of this process. Shared Maya values and ideas about the past can be perceived as intangible resources which become transformative through their firm embeddedness in tangible items and practices. For example, the Museum Ixkik' is a place for the performance and transmission of 'traditional' cultural materiality and meaning. The (female) owner of the Museum Ixkik' promotes and reappreciates Mayan values and history through the collection of antique and contemporary Maya clothing. Furthermore, several textile associations of Maya women intend to revive Mayan culture through the selling of weavings and teaching the weaving art, mostly to international tourists. Together, these women form mnemonic communities that create material expressions and icons to keep alive and recreate common memory, to feel connected through shared identities and to integrate the past with the present (Ouweneel, 2018). The collective of indigenous women weavers of Trama Textiles have set up a place of working and teaching in the city centre which is connected to a wide network of indigenous weavers and offers an interface with tourists and volunteers through weaving classes.

However, the recreation of Maya imaginings and identity is not uncontested. Some groups in Xela see collective Maya initiatives as a confirmation of the continuing ethnic division of its society. Others criticize the museum for offering a culturally static and temporally frozen narrative of 'Mayan' material culture. This points to the understudied aspect of the dynamics of commoning which, on the one hand, shows the need of an overarching narrative of solidarity while at the same time manifesting different experiences and internal divi-

sions. These are unavoidable tensions generated by the constant (co)creation of intangible and tangible resources.

The added value of a commoning approach to societal transformation

This exploratory research note is an attempt to conceptualize the commons as an integrative analytical approach that goes beyond dichotomies such as urban-rural, citizen-state and material-immaterial. It has attempted to provide a robust analytical lens that crosses not only disciplinary and spatial boundaries, but also unpacks dualist views. It is our contention that conceptualizing social transformations in Latin America as an interplay of commoning and de-commoning will allow us to devise conceptual tools to compare a large range of complex processes. Using a commoning lens allows for a better understanding of the transformation of society in rural and in urban contexts – especially in intermediate cities where these two contexts are closely intertwined – for three reasons.

Firstly, it allows us to understand the creation, existence and possible disappearance of practices of collectivities as dynamic processes. Secondly, it draws attention to the multiple drivers of social change at different scales, from local initiatives to networks of solidarity and cooperation among local residents and to large-scale social movements. Thirdly, a commoning perspective asks crucial questions as to the contrasts and dualism that are often informing both academic and policy approaches to social change. In our research we have seen, for example, that analytically and empirically the contrast between state and civil society actors is far from evident. On the one hand differences exist both within the municipal authorities and the civil society actors, while on the other hand frequently visible and invisible alliances come about between individual and collective actors.

Another crucial conclusion concerns the shifting nature of commoning processes. For a long time, academics and activists have presented commons as an almost isolated phenomenon, separated from, or opposed to the state and private sector actors. Indeed, there are strong counter-hegemonic, autonomous commoning initiatives in the region, rooted in social capital and local knowledge. These bottom-up initiatives are accompanied by recent strategic efforts by the state, private companies and NGOs to create ‘communities’ and to foster ‘collective actions’. This shows that in today’s Latin American societies one-dimensional perspectives on commons are untenable. This article has presented several examples in which commoning processes occurred in close connection and sometimes even in collaboration with local state policies. In the rapidly changing Latin American context, the simple (neo-institutionalist) dichotomy between ‘collective’ forms of collaboration, and private and public governance models is challenged by hybrid alliances in which private, public and collective spheres co-exist, compete and occasionally also connect in dynamic processes of co-production.

Finally, processes of commoning in Latin America need to be studied and understood from an interdisciplinary perspective. For too long, commoning has been seen exclusively as instruments to govern natural resources. Despite the growing literature on the urban commons in the Global North, we have tried to demonstrate that the region has major potential to contribute to a much greater variety of social fields and to develop a more critical perspective to the commons research. Commons are as much imagined as they are material, and we can only understand commoning processes if we are prepared to see them for what they are: multi-layered and multi-actor responses to rapidly changing context which ultimately drive societal transformation.

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All authors work at the Centre of Latin American Research and Documentation (CEDLA) of the University of Amsterdam. The interdisciplinary CEDLA Xela team includes seven senior researchers with various fields of expertise: Professor Michiel Baud (historian working on state-society relations and knowledge production), Professor Rutgerd Boelens (water engineer and rural sociologist working on water justice and hidro-social territories, who also works at Wageningen University), Dr Fábio de Castro (political ecologist working on environmental governance and conservation), Professor Barbara Hogenboom (political scientist working on political economy and natural resource use), Dr Christien Klaufus (anthropologist and architect working on cities and deathscapes), Professor Kees Koonings (anthropologist working on cities and violence, who also works at Utrecht University), and Dr Annelou Ypeij (anthropologist working on gender and tourism).
Address: CEDLA, Roetersstraat 33, 1018 WB Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
Email: f.decastro@cedla.nl

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