

SHAPING NEW COMMONS

A collection of Generation Z essays

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Table of Contents

Preface	7
How to Read this Volume	11
Essay Contest – Call for participation Shaping New Commons Overcoming COVID-19 in Everyday Life	13
Essay Contest – Position Paper Shaping New Commons <i>Emile Aarts, Ronald de Jong, Margriet Sitskoorn, Ton Wilthagen</i>	17
1. “Why are we Texting if you are Next to me?” A Stranger’s Quote The Case for Digital Sustainability <i>Jinane Araqi</i>	39
2. A New Common Sense on Shaping Future Societies: The Minimalist Lifestyle as a Basis for Human Prosperity <i>Merijn Broos, Timo Warringa</i>	49
3. The New Commons: Education <i>George Michael Chirilaş</i>	59
4. More Than 360 Million: On how to Protect our Social Commons from Algorithmic Misery <i>Maciej Gadzala</i>	65
5. Resilience as Necessity: An Exploration of New Commons <i>Ebbe Tim Ottens, Sebastian Arthur Rostron</i>	77
6. A Post-Pandemic Solution for Universities: Moving Towards Hybrid Education <i>Nina van Rosmalen</i>	85

“The content of a book holds the power of education,

and it is with this power that we can shape our future and change lives.”

— Malala Yousafzai —

7. Renaissance	91
<i>Ombeline Siraudeau</i>	
8. Solidarity in Times of Climate Change	103
<i>Pranav Yadav, Defne Aksit</i>	
9. Transition Commons, a Paradigm Shift for Building the Future now	113
<i>Andreea-Daiana Zavate</i>	
10. Dealing with COVID-19 in Everyday Life	123
<i>Esra Zorer, Arjen Van de Walle, Corvin Illgner</i>	
Reflections	131
List of essayists	137

Preface

After the outbreak of the coronavirus in the city of Wuhan in China late 2019, the resulting COVID-19 disease spread all over the world to become pandemic. In early 2020, the first infections were reported in our very city of Tilburg as one of the first places in The Netherlands. It soon occurred to us that the pandemic was bound to have an enormous impact on all dimensions of society. None of us had ever experienced a crisis of this kind. It made us realize that our society would soon undergo profound changes, which would potentially be irreversible. Normal life, as we knew it, would cease to exist. The coming era, therefore, would not just mark a transition from the “current normal” to a “next normal.” The virus was here to stay, and we would all be challenged to find new ways of organizing our lives, both at an individual level and at a collective and community level, in order to learn to cope with the omnipresent COVID-19 effects on society.

Being scientists at a university whose mission is to “understand society,” we felt compelled to analyze, express, and share our views on how the pandemic could potentially transform society. We observed that the pandemic exposed the underlying vulnerabilities of society and stretched our current values, thus calling for New Common responsibilities. So, we assembled a group of academics at Tilburg University and started a book project on the possible transformations in society from “Old Commons” to “New Commons” as we called it, where we used the concept of “commons” in all its different meanings, including *a community at large, a public work for the common good, a common resource shared by more individuals, a familiar insight or widespread general knowledge, common sense, a piece of land in common use, a public space, or public open area.*

In general terms we refer to the common as the notion of “shared values, resources, and spaces, both in an abstract metaphorical sense and in a real-life physical sense.” Some fifty scientists presented their scientific views on topics related to the pandemic in a grand total of thirty-one chapters. Under the title *The New Common*, they presented their views from within their respective fields of scientific interest and expertise including (international) law, behavioral science, humanities, artificial intelligence, economics, theology, and management. The resulting book was completed in less than ten months and released as an open science publication by Springer, and up to now, it has received close to a hundred thousand downloads.

After the publication of *The New Common*, we started a follow-up project with the aim to shift the focus from the analysis of the concept of the commons to the synthesis of New Commons. In doing so, we realized ourselves that, over the past century, substantial progress was made in virtually all dimensions relevant to society, leading to an unprecedented level of wellbeing and prosperity. Examples are the increased worldwide access to

education and healthcare, the growing average income, and the increased life expectancy of individuals worldwide. At the same time, global poverty, and illiteracy decreased, and economic wealth and democracy increased substantially. This tremendous achievement was realized through the relentless efforts invested by five subsequent generations of the previous century, which is universally acknowledged. At the same time, we must admit that these generations almost completely overlooked the effect of global warming of the planet and that they failed to increase the amount of people living in democracies, worldwide. Nevertheless, there is a recent, new generation that on the one hand values these achievements but also challenges them because of the flaws and shortcomings that came with them. This generation is called Generation Z and their characteristics are markedly different from those of the previous generations.

The Oxford Dictionary describes Generation Z as “the generation born in the late 1990s or the early 21st century, perceived as being familiar with the use of digital technology, the internet, and social media from a very young age.” According to Wikipedia, members of Generation Z tend to be well-behaved, abstemious, and risk averse. They tend to live more slowly than their predecessors when they were their age; they have lower rates of teenage pregnancies; and consume alcohol less often. Generation Z teenagers are more concerned than older generations with academic performance and job prospects and are better at delaying gratification than their counterparts from the 1960s despite concerns to the contrary. The authoritative Pew Research Center specified 1997 as the starting birth year for Generation Z, choosing this date for “different formative experiences,” such as new technological and socioeconomic developments as well as growing up in a world after the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York. The element of growing up in a world that is troubled with major concerns, including pandemics, global warming, war, economic downturn, etc., sets this generation apart from the earlier ones as it lacks optimism, expansion potential, and positive perspectives. Pew has not specified an time span for Generation Z but used 2012 as a tentative endpoint. Generation Z is the first generation whose members have grown up with digital media and the Internet as of their birth. This is why they are also called “digital natives.” They do not experience negative effects of screen time as opposed to the adolescents belonging to the preceding Generation X; the millennials. So, digitalization “is in their blood” and they are the first generation ever to be equipped with the assets of a digital second nature. And as a last remark, The Economist describes it very well: Generation Z members are more educated, better behaved, more stressed, and more depressed compared to members of previous generations.

New Commons need to be Generation Z-proof in that they should facilitate and stimulate novel ways of social interaction that, in the future, enable Generation Z members to develop and educate themselves as resilient, responsible, and entrepreneurial young professionals. So, we decided that the follow-up project to *The New Common* should make the voices heard of Generation Z members. For this, we used the literary concept of essay writing in a contest setting. Students are quite familiar with this concept as it

is practiced in many of our courses. An essay is a remarkably powerful literary tool to present a statement, opinion, or critique in written form. It is a writing genre that takes a stance on an issue. The writers attempt to persuade readers to understand and support their points of view about a topic by stating the reasoning and providing evidence to back this up. It requires writers to investigate a topic; i.e. collect, generate, and evaluate evidence and establish a position on the topic in a concise manner.

The authors of the prize-winning essays, presented in this volume, are without exception members of the Generation Z population. They are all deeply concerned with the current status of society, and they live by the conviction that urgent action is required to convince us that “what brought us here will not get us there.” They reason that the challenges of our times are of a magnitude that humanity has not seen before; not only are we dealing with the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, but we are also facing a climate crisis and a biodiversity collapse; there is a growing inequality as well as rising demands for social justice and historically high levels of inflation. They perceive present society to be in a perfect storm, fueling concerns on the short and the long term regarding their livelihoods and—in fact—their very existence. They make the point that “old commons” will have to transition to New Commons in a variety of domains and that we might need “transition commons” in the interim.

When reflecting on the “tone of voice” of the essays, we observed the following characteristics. The presented views on the need to shape New Commons are centered around the need to reconsider existing paradigms and shape New Commons in a variety of fields such as, but not limited to, the global economy, education, social media, the environment, climate change, etc. Whilst creating a burning platform for transformational change, the essays often radiate hope that, in shaping New Commons, we find answers to the big challenges of our times and accelerate towards the realization of the sustainable development goals. In many cases they call for New Commons that are markedly different from the current old ones, thus substantiating this volume’s title *Shaping New Commons*.

The authors succeed in connecting with the reader at multiple levels; rational, emotional, and sometimes even spiritual. References are made to ancient history and philosophy. The point is repeatedly made that there are limitations to “the ratio” as a single source of thinking and reasoning when it comes to understanding the big issues of our times.

They make the claim that, in addition to rational thinking, we also need emotional and cognitive approaches to find a proper synthesis between soft and hard arguments, thus leading to the type of New Commons we need in order to address the current wicked issues and, ultimately, advance society. Many contributions are written from a very personal perspective, expressing deep concerns and calling for immediate action.

Most authors propose creative and innovative suggestions and ideas for New Commons that help to advance society in the spirit of the sustainable development goals of the United Nations. In that sense, many contributions express hope and optimism for a better future. These new beliefs and paradigms also potentially offer novel opportunities that can eventually lead to a cultural *renaissance* of our global civilization, “lifting humanity into a new collective and moral consciousness based on a shared sense of destiny.”

We wish you a lot of reading pleasure, constructive thoughts, new ideas, and potentially, some confusion.

*Emile Aarts, Ronald de Jong, Ton Wilthagen
Initiators and editors
September 20, 2022*

How to Read This Volume

This book contains the call for participation of the essay contest, the position paper presented to the participants, and 10 selected essays from the student contest.

The Call for Participation was used to solicit for contributions and to explain the contest rules including the timeline.

The position paper was made available to all contesters in order to provide background information on the COVID-19 pandemic at the time when the essay contest was open for submission, e.g., in the second half of the year 2021.

The chapters are not categorized but, maybe unexpectedly, listed in alphabetical order of first author. We decided not to introduce a structure in the order or presentation of the essays because we believe that any conceivable structure would not do justice to the versatility of the different main titles and the structure that might be important to you.

We invite you to decide for yourself how to read the book. The essays are all stand-alone, and you can start wherever you want and choose the order, in any way. The essays all have a meaning and significance of themselves, without being part of a structure.

We nevertheless feel that the combination of the essays contains most of the concerns that are currently raised by the Generation Z population within our university system, not only in Tilburg but also at a national and global level.

Essay Contest – Call for participation

An initiative of The New Common Team and the study Association Asset of Tilburg University

Shaping New Commons Overcoming COVID-19 in Everyday Life

August 2021

Many of us believe that the spread of the Corona virus and the resulting COVID-19 pandemic will not just disappear but will most likely be with us for a longer period of time in the near future. Consequently, we must find ways to cope with the restrictions of the resulting Corona measures, while at the same time moving ahead in society. In other words, we need to embark on a quest to shape “New Commons” that are more robust against global threats and that will strengthen our resilience at personal as well as collective levels. These New Commons should offer new rules of engagement and foundations for solidarity, so living conditions will be healthy, safe, and prosperous for all, whilst also taking better care of our planet and climate.

In our vision the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the different vulnerabilities of us all, individually and of the societal structures that are woven into our daily lives. We urgently need new structures and organizations that are more robust against global threats and that will strengthen our resilience at personal as well as collective levels. In other words, a New Common enhances health and wellbeing for humans and the planet at the same time. This provides a major challenge for our ability to find creative solutions to the issues we are faced with in order to develop a new daily lifestyle in relation to mobility, productivity, health and well-being, social welfare, jobs, fairness, sustainability, and democracy.

Most importantly, the New Commons need to be Gen Z proof, meaning that the novel way of social interaction within the New Commons should facilitate and stimulate the members of the future Generation Z to develop and educate themselves as resilient, responsible, and engaged young professionals. Therefore, we aim with this call for participation at members of the Generation Z to provide us with their insights and opinions on how we may shape the New Commons together.

If you are a university student or a young professional in the age between 18 and 30 years, you are invited to contribute an essay to the essay contest 'Shaping New Commons' on a topic of choice.

Contributions should:

- be self-contained;
- be limited to 3000 words;
- not have more than three co-authors;
- be clearly written and accessible to a broader audience.

Your essay will be assessed through a review process in which an independent jury of experts will select 10 essays that will be invited to a final contest May 2022. During this final, the nominated essays will be presented to a broader audience and the winners of the contest will be nominated. All essays will be published after review in a booklet containing all the views on the subject.

The submission deadline of your essay is November 15, 2021 (this was later extended to January 31, 2022).

If you are willing to accept this invitation, you are kindly requested to send in a provisional title and abstract of the chapter and a list of co-authors before September 30, 2021. Publication of the volume is scheduled for the second half of the year 2022.

We sincerely invite you to submit a contribution to our program on shaping the New Commons in view of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Shaping New Commons^{1,2}

Emile Aarts, Ronald de Jong, Margriet Sitskoorn, and Ton Wilthagen

In this position paper, we present a brief overview of recent worldwide developments related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on these facts and figures, we elaborate on the various ways the pandemic has affected society. We use the concept of The New Common to discuss novel societal arrangements. We conclude the paper with a set of statements that might direct our thinking of the way to shape a constructive future.

The onset of a pandemic

For almost two years now, COVID-19 is an ongoing global pandemic that is generally known as the coronavirus disease. It is caused by the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) first identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019. To handle the outbreak, China implemented a nationwide lockdown in Wuhan in December 2019, but this measure failed to contain the virus, and consequently, it spread to other parts of mainland China and, eventually, around the world. The virus that causes COVID-19 is a newly discovered virus closely related to already known coronaviruses that are most likely of zoonotic origin. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) declared the virus a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on January 30, 2020 and later a pandemic on March 11, 2020. Since 2021, mutations of the virus have resulted in several variants causing subsequent waves of outbreaks in several countries, with the Delta variant being the most virulent and presently dominating one (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 2021).

The actual figures on the COVID-19 pandemic, published by the WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard (2021), speak for themselves and are frightening at the same time:

As of August 1, 2021, more than 200 million cases have been confirmed, with over 4 million confirmed COVID-19 attributed deaths, making it one of the deadliest pandemics in history.

¹ The content of this position paper is based on information available in the open (science) domain, including Wikipedia <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19> and <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19.pandemic>. Furthermore, it builds on the book chapter: "The Dawn of a New Common" by Emile Aarts, Hein Fleuren, Margriet Sitskoorn, and Ton Wilthagen, published by Springer Nature in 2020, The Dawn of a New Common | SpringerLink.

² The authors greatly acknowledge the help of Riet Bettonviel in the proofreading of this manuscript.

Symptoms

The severity of COVID-19 symptoms is highly variable, ranging from unnoticeable to life threatening (US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021a). Severe illness is more likely in elderly patients, as well as those who have certain underlying medical conditions. COVID-19 transmits when people breathe in air contaminated by droplets and small airborne particles. The risk of inhaling these is highest when people are within close proximity of each other, but infection can also take place over longer distances, particularly indoors.

Infected persons remain contagious for up to 20 days and can spread the virus even if they do not develop any symptoms. Recommended preventive measures include social distancing, wearing face masks in public, ventilation and air filtering, hand washing, covering one's mouth when sneezing or coughing, disinfecting surfaces, and monitoring and self-isolation of people exposed or symptomatic. The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (2020) identifies three general clusters of symptoms: (i) the respiratory symptom cluster with cough, sputum, shortness of breath, and fever; (ii) the musculoskeletal symptom cluster with muscle and joint pain, headache, and fatigue; and (iii) a cluster of digestive symptoms with abdominal pain, vomiting, and diarrhea.

The severity of COVID-19 in infected persons varies. Mild cases typically recover within two weeks while those with severe or critical forms may take three to six weeks to recover. Among those who died, the time from symptom onset to death ranged from two to eight weeks. More than 95 per cent of the people who contract COVID-19 recover. Otherwise, the time between symptoms onset and death usually ranges from six to 41 days, typically about 14 days. According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2021b), persons at the greatest risk of mortality from COVID-19 tend to be those with underlying conditions, such as those with a weakened immune system, serious heart or lung problems, severe obesity, or the elderly.

Treatment

There is no specific, effective treatment or cure for COVID-19. Thus, the cornerstone of managing the disease is supportive care, which includes treatment to relieve symptoms, fluid therapy, oxygen support and prone positioning as needed, and medications or devices to support other affected vital organs. Most reported cases of COVID-19 are mild. In these cases, supportive care includes medication to relieve symptoms, such as fever, body aches, and cough. Good personal hygiene and a healthy diet are also recommended. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) recommend that those who suspect they are carrying the virus isolate themselves at home and wear a face mask. More severe cases may need treatment in hospital. In those with low oxygen levels, use of the glucocorticoid dexamethasone is strongly recommended as it can reduce the risk of death. Noninvasive ventilation and, ultimately, admission to an intensive care unit for mechanical ventilation may be required to support breathing in severely infected patients.

Managing the pandemic

Several authors argue that containment is generally the measure in the early stages of the outbreak and aims to trace and isolate those infected as well as introducing other measures to stop the disease from spreading (Maier & Brockmann, 2020). Mallapaty (2020) shows that when it is no longer possible to contain the disease, efforts should move to the mitigation stage where measures are taken to slow down mutation of the virus. Speed and scale are key to mitigation, due to the fat-tailed nature of the pandemic risk and the exponential growth of COVID-19 infections. For mitigation to be effective, chains of transmission must be broken as quickly as possible through screening and containment.

Part of managing an infectious disease outbreak is trying to delay and decrease the epidemic peak. This decreases the risk of health services being overwhelmed and provides more time for vaccines and treatments to be developed. Non-pharmaceutical interventions that may reduce the spread of the virus may include personal preventive measures such as hand hygiene, wearing face masks, and self-quarantine. At a community level, measures aim at physical distancing such as closing schools and cancelling mass gathering events. In addition, community measures may be taken that address behavioral engagement to maintain social distancing.

Contact tracing is an important method for health authorities to determine the source of infection and to prevent further transmission. The use of location data from mobile phones by governments for this purpose has prompted privacy concerns, with Amnesty International and more than a hundred other organizations issuing a statement calling for limits on this kind of surveillance. Several mobile apps have been implemented or proposed for voluntary use, and several expert groups have been working on privacy-friendly solutions, such as using Bluetooth to log a user's proximity to other cellphones. As an example, TechCrunch (2020) announced in April 2020 that Apple and Google are launching an open-source mobile app tracing tool.

Vaccination

Probably the only way to handle the pandemic spread of the virus is by large-scale and worldwide vaccination programs. COVID-19 vaccines aim at providing immunity against SARS-CoV-2 virus infections that cause COVID-19. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, an established body of knowledge existed about the structure and function of coronaviruses causing comparable diseases like SARS and MERS. On January 10, 2020, the SARSCoV-2 genetic sequence data was shared across the world, and the global pharmaceutical industry announced a major commitment to address COVID-19. This knowledge accelerated the development of a variety of vaccine technologies over 2020 (Li et al., 2020).

The currently available COVID-19 vaccines are widely credited for their role in reducing the spread, severity, and death caused by COVID-19. On December 21, 2020, the European Union approved the Pfizer BioNTech vaccine. Vaccinations began on December

27, 2020. The Moderna vaccine was authorized on January 6, 2021, and the AstraZeneca vaccine was authorized on January 29, 2021. Vaccination status overviews are presented by the World Health Organization (2021b) and Holder (2021).

Societal impact

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected millions of citizens worldwide. In a New York Times article, Julian Barnes (2021) cites a report by the American Intelligence Agencies stating: “Efforts to contain and manage the virus have reinforced nationalist trends globally, as some states turned inward to protect their citizens and sometimes cast blame on marginalized groups.”

Zoumpourlis et al. (2020) argue that the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus has spread panic among civilians and caused insecurity at all sociopolitical and economic levels, dramatically disrupting everyday life, the global economy, and international travel and trade. They link the resulting COVID-19 disease to the onset of depression in many individuals due to the extreme restriction measures that have been taken for the prevention of the rapid spread of COVID-19. They provide evidence for the consequences of the pandemic on all aspects of everyday life and unravel the role and the pursuits of national regimes during this unforeseen situation.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2021) presents its latest insights on the impact of COVID-19 on a range of social issues, including a number of recommendations and policy advice on how to *Build Back Better* for everyone. Special chapters address young people’s concerns during COVID-19, the long reach of COVID-19, gaps in safety nets, and COVID-19’s effect on children, worker security, and women at the core of the fight against COVID-19.

In general, terms, COVID-19 has inflamed partisanship and polarization around the world as bitter arguments explode over whom to scapegoat and whom to help first. The risks include further disruption of international trade and the formation of no-entry enclaves. Because of the outbreak, many countries and regions imposed quarantines, entry bans, or other restrictions, either for citizens, recent travelers to affected areas, or for all travelers nationwide. Combined with a decreased willingness to travel, this has a negative economic and social impact on the travel sector.

Below, we discuss the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on a number of societally relevant areas. We refer to the International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2021) for a more extensive overview of their findings with respect to the economic and societal impact of COVID-19.

Food production and supply

Probably the most direct and catastrophic effect of the pandemic is the disruption of global food supplies, threatening to trigger a new food crisis. COVID-19 hit at a time when hunger or undernourishment was once again on the rise in the world, with an estimated 690 million people already going hungry in 2019. Based on the latest UN estimates, the economic recession triggered by the pandemic may lead to another 83 million people, and possibly as many as 132 million, going hungry in 2020 and the years thereafter. This is mainly due to a lack of access to food, linked to falling incomes, lost remittances, and in some cases, a rise in food prices. In countries that already suffer from high levels of acute food insecurity, it is no longer an issue of access to food alone but increasingly also one of food production (FAO, 2020).

The pandemic, alongside lockdowns and travel restrictions, has prevented movement of aid and greatly affected food production. Several organizations and media forecast famines. The UN calls it a food crisis “of biblical proportions,” (ABC News, 2020) and The Guardian speaks of “a hunger pandemic” (Harvey, 2020). It is estimated that without intervention 30 million people may die of hunger, with Oxfam reporting, “12,000 people per day could die from COVID-19 linked hunger.”

This pandemic, in conjunction with already existing and ongoing armed conflicts, is predicted to form the worst series of famines since the Great Chinese Famine, affecting between 10 and 20 per cent of the global population in some way. Fifty-five countries are reported to be at risk, with three dozen succumbing to crisis-level famines or above in the worst-case scenario. 265 million people are forecast to be in famine conditions, an increase of 125 million due to the pandemic (Oxfam, 2020).

Economy

The outbreak is a major destabilizing threat to the global economy. In The Source, the economics expert Miller (2020) reported an estimate of over \$300 billion impact on the world’s supply chain that could last up to two years. Lloyd’s of London estimated that the global insurance industry will absorb losses of \$204 billion, exceeding the losses from the 2017 Atlantic hurricane season and September 11 attacks, suggesting the COVID-19 pandemic will likely go down in history as the costliest disaster ever in human history (Keown, 2020).

Tourism is one of the worst affected sectors due to travel bans, closing of public places including travel attractions, and advice of governments against travel. Numerous airlines have cancelled flights due to lower demand. Also, the retail sector has been impacted globally, with reductions in store hours or temporary closures. Visits to retailers in Europe and Latin America declined by 40 per cent. Shopping mall operators around the world imposed additional measures, such as increased sanitation, installation of thermal scanners to check the temperature of shoppers, and cancellation of events.

Ted Kemko (2020) of The Monitor warns that hundreds of millions of jobs could be lost globally and indeed more than 40 million Americans lost their jobs and filed unemployment insurance claims. The economic impact and mass unemployment caused by the pandemic has raised fears of a mass eviction crisis. According to a United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America estimate, the pandemic-induced recession could leave 14–22 million more people in extreme poverty in Latin America than would have been the case in that situation without the pandemic. The World Bank (2020) estimated that globally up to 100 million more people could fall into extreme poverty due to the shutdowns. The International Labor Organization (ILO) informed that the income generated in the first nine months of 2020 from work across the world dropped by 10.7 per cent, or \$3.5 trillion, amidst the COVID-19 outbreak.

At the upside, Digital Commerce (2021) reported that online retailers in the United States posted 791.70 billion dollars in sales in 2020, an increase of 32.4% from 598.02 billion dollars compared to the year before. The trend of home delivery orders has increased due to the pandemic, with indoor dining restaurants shutting down due to lockdown orders or low sales.

Culture

The performing arts and cultural heritage sectors have been profoundly affected by the pandemic, impacting organizations' operations as well as individuals globally. By mid-2020, across the world and to varying degrees, museums, libraries, performance venues, and other cultural institutions were closed for an indefinite period.

The pandemic has caused the most significant disruption to the worldwide sporting calendar since the Second World War. Most major sporting events have been cancelled or postponed, including the 2019-2020 UEFA Champions League, UEFA Euro 2020 and the 2020 Arctic Winter Games. The outbreak disrupted plans for the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, Japan, which were originally scheduled to start on July 24, 2020. After a year's delay, the games started on July 23, 2021, in the absence of spectators and under severe screening and testing conditions.

The entertainment industry has also been severely affected, with many music groups suspending or cancelling concert tours. The 2020 Eurovision Song Contest, which was due to be held in Rotterdam, the Netherlands in May, was cancelled; however, the Netherlands was retained as host for 2021. Many large theatres such as those on Broadway also suspended all performances.

Politics

The pandemic has affected the political systems of multiple countries, causing suspensions of legislative activities, isolations or even deaths of politicians, and rescheduling of elections due to fears of spreading the virus. In many countries, governments are advised by specialists in so-called outbreak management teams. Although broadly support-

ed among epidemiologists, social distancing measures have been politically controversial in many countries and are under constant scrutiny. Intellectual opposition to social distancing has come primarily from writers of other fields, including the social sciences. Political opposition often comes from social minorities.

Nations distrust each other, giving rise to renewed nationalism and protectionism. The government of China, for instance, has been criticized by the United States and the United Kingdom for its handling of the pandemic. They accused the Chinese government of holding back vital information or even of changing data and facts related to the Wuhan outbreak in 2019.

As another example of the lack of solidarity and support experienced at state level, we mention that early in March 2020, the Italian government criticized the European Union's lack of solidarity with coronavirus-affected Italy—Maurizio Massari, Italy's ambassador to the European Union, said “only China responded bilaterally,” not the European Union. In early April 2020, Ursula von der Leyen offered an official apology to Italy.

States take over control and leadership as they feel responsible for the faith of their citizens. Kleinfeld (2020) analyzed the worldwide difference between the approaches the various countries take to handle and fight the crisis. There are more or less authoritarian states that seem to be successful in their approach, such as China, Singapore, and South Korea. On the other hand, there are the democratic states but they also show different levels of success in their approaches. The United States, Brazil, and the United Kingdom fail as their measures are inadequate and late. Italy ran into problems very early and was overwhelmingly affected by the virus whereas Germany and New Zealand clearly seem to be successful. This brings us to the central observation that not only the type of government determines whether the approach is successful but also the trust citizens put in their governments and the measures taken.

Ivan Krastev (2020) presents an interesting and compelling overview of the political consequences the COVID-19 pandemic might have on the democratic systems worldwide. He stresses the differences between the current and previous pandemics due to the globalization of the world economy and politics, the big data policy of nations like China, the controversy among EU member states and the looming conflicts between generations.

Education

The pandemic has severely affected educational systems globally. Education worldwide has shifted from physical attendance to video conferencing apps such as Zoom as lockdown measures have resulted in schools being forced to shut down. As of September 2020, approximately a billion learners worldwide have been affected due to school closures in response to the pandemic. According to UNICEF (2021) over 100 countries had fully or partially closed schools, affecting over two-thirds of the world's student popula-

tion. School closures impact not only students, teachers, and families but have far-reaching economic and societal consequences. They shed light on social and economic issues, including student debt, digital learning, food insecurity, and homelessness, as well as access to childcare, health care, housing, internet, and disability services. The impact has been more severe for disadvantaged children and their families. Many students claimed that their mental health had worsened because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and accessibility of mental health services has declined. Even now in the summer of 2021, it is still unclear as to how and when “normality” will resume for students regarding their education and living situation.

Prejudice, xenophobia, and racism

Since the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, a marked increase of prejudice, xenophobia, and racism has been documented around the world, mostly geared toward people of Chinese and East Asian descent. Several reports appeared in the news, starting in February 2020 when most confirmed cases were still confined to China. These reports documented racist sentiments expressed in groups worldwide about Chinese people “deserving” the virus (Tavernise & Oppel, 2020; Burton, 2020; Korea Times, 2020). Kolachalam (2020) reports on discrimination against Muslims in India escalated after public health authorities identified an Islamic group gathering in New Delhi in early March 2020 as a source of spread. In April of the same year, Dodman (2020) reports that Paris had seen riots break out over police treatment of marginalized ethnic groups during the lockdown that was in place at that time. Similarly, Migrants Rights (2020) reports on racism and xenophobia towards southern and South East Asians increased in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. Also Korea’s LGBTQ community was blamed by some for the spread of COVID-19 in Seoul (Thoreson, 2020).

Silva et al. (2021) report extensively on age-based discrimination against older adults. They conclude that, while already present before the pandemic, it became more prevalent during the pandemic. They argue that this can be attributed to older adults’ perceived vulnerability to the virus and subsequent physical and social isolation measures, which, coupled with their already reduced social activity, has increased dependency on others. Similarly, limited digital literacy has left the elderly more vulnerable to the effects of isolation, depression, and loneliness.

Environment and climate

Recent studies of earth observation teams show a significant drop, e.g., up to 50% in local areas, in NO₂ pollution levels across the world when compared to levels from 2019 and early 2020 (Bauwens et al., 2020). Clearly, this is good news for the battle against global warming of the planet earth, but there are other positive effects due to pollution. Scientists have estimated that reductions in carbon and nitrogen oxides emissions may have saved several tens of thousands of lives over the past months (Venter et al., 2020).

As a response to the coronavirus pandemic, many countries around the world went into lockdown to control the spread of the COVID-19 disease. These worldwide measures brought about an unprecedented reduction in the mobility of humans with a severe effect on human–wildlife interactions. Rutz et al., (2020), based on anecdotal observations, argue that many animal species are enjoying the newly afforded peace and quietness while other animals seem to suffer from increased pressure. They also claim that the unique situation imposed by the lockdowns should be used by environmental scientist to study the effect of humans on wildlife.

Finally, we mention a positive effect of the coronavirus crisis on the national and international funds created to finance the buildup of society “after” the pandemic. The main concern here is to combine recovery efforts with activities to reduce global warming, stimulating the sustainable energy transition and other sustainable development goals related to environmental protection. Forbes’ Scott Carpenter (2020) reports, as an example, that the European Union’s seven-year €1 trillion budget proposal and €750 billion recovery plan “Next Generation EU” might be combined with the aim to reserve 25% of EU spending for climate-friendly expenditure.

The Concept of a Common

In our book *The New Common* (Aarts et al., 2020) we use the concept of the commons to explore how the COVID-19 pandemic is transforming society. We use the word “common” in all its different meanings as indicated by Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2020), including *a community at large, a public work for the common good, a common resource shared by more individuals, a familiar insight or widespread general knowledge, common sense, a piece of land in common use, a public space or public open area*. In general term, we refer to the common as the notion of “shared values, resources and spaces, both in an abstract metaphorical sense as in a real-life physical sense.”

Several authors have studied the concept of the commons. The American ecologist Garret Hardin (1968) wrote about the tragedy of the commons, arguing that individuals will always try to maximize their own gains even at the cost of the common good. He already indicated a typical human feature that would later on be called short-termism: the problem of balancing the needs of both the long term and the short term. Buck Cox (2006) criticized Hardin’s tragedy of the commons for its weak historical ground providing evidence that the common usage of land had been successful for many centuries, thus giving expression to her strong belief in the positive attitude of individuals to contribute to the common good.

Various philosophical, legal, and sociological approaches have tried to pin down the ideal of a community based on good values. A case in point is “communitarianism” as promoted by authors such as Etzioni (2003) that gained attention at the turn of the millennium by stating: “Communitarianism is a social philosophy that maintains that society should articulate what is good and that such articulations are both needed and legitimate.”

How COVID-19 Challenges the Old Common

We argue that the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed a number of shortcomings and cracks in the Old Common. Many people are currently concerned about their future. The introduction of lockdowns, social distancing measures, and massive testing and vaccination programs have introduced a new type of society. People are forced into a new way of living and the overall tendency is that citizens are generally resentful of this “new normal.” There is a growing feeling, however, that the physical requirements and limitations after the initial lockdown might remain in place for a long time, perhaps even permanently in some form, just like wearing a face mask on certain occasions. We conceptualize the pre-COVID-19 era as the “Old Common” and aim at exploring the possible transition to a “New Common,” i.e., an era with or without a coronavirus.

As to the shortcoming of the Old Common, we mention the following major ones.

- Our society lacks diversity and inclusion. Many groups are either under-represented or treated unequally or even discriminated against. This applies to women, people with a migrant background, disabled persons, and people with certain sexual orientations. A pandemic crisis is often seen as a great “equalizer” as everyone could fall ill. However, in practice, the burden of the consequences of a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic is not equally divided and, typically, falls on the weaker groups. It operates rather selectively. Even during the lockdown, groups of migrant workers were exposed to high risks of COVID-19 infections due to poor working conditions and the lack of options to stop working or to work from home, notwithstanding the government support to companies and workers. In the Netherlands and Germany, for example, this became painfully clear in the meat industry and slaughterhouses. Recently, after Spain had lifted large parts of the lockdown restrictions, the Ségria region near Barcelona with 200,000 inhabitants had to be closed off again due a new outbreak in sectors with many migrant workers.
- Our society appears generation biased. A sociological revolution is taking place, which already started before the coronavirus crisis, where, for the first time in history, new generations do not generally have better prospects than their parents or grandparents (Putnam, 2015). This applies to job security, debts, pensions, the ability to buy or rent a house, and as a consequence, the impact this all has on forming relationships and families. While the elderly were, without a doubt, hit hardest by COVID-19 in terms of health, morbidity, and loneliness, young people were severely affected by the restrictions regarding going out and getting together, the lockdown of their schools and education, and the economic developments. Unemployment among young workers in temporary contracts is increasing sharply as they are the first to be made redundant (Eurofound, 2020). Consequently, a “corona generation,” “Generation C,” or a cohort of “Coronials” might develop. During one of the crisis press conferences, the Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte strongly encouraged the young generation to speak up.

- Our global society is weak when it comes to international solidarity. According to UN-HCR, by the end of 2018, almost 70.8 million individuals have been forcibly displaced worldwide because of persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations, a record high. The most recent number on worldwide hunger shows an incredible number of 690 million people going to bed hungry every night (FAO, 2020a). Migrants are at the mercy of Western governments that act in an ambivalent, uncoordinated, and self-centered way. Often refugees become political playthings. In the coronavirus crisis, many countries and regions have insufficient means and too weak an infrastructure to be able to counteract the spread of the virus, especially among certain groups, including refugees. At the same time, Western countries cannot reach consensus on support measures and regulations and some try to buy up stocks of medical products and possible medicines and vaccines.
- Finally, the Old Common is to a high degree humankind-centered, bluntly ignoring the wider ecological system of the planet of which we humans are part. Since the commercial introduction of the first versions of the steam engine that could transmit continuous power to a machine in 1712 by Thomas Newcomen, humankind has entered the industrial era. In the following human-dominated Anthropocene, much has been achieved, but much has also been destroyed, wasted, and irreversibly damaged. The notions of “externalities” and ecological footprints of human behavior and the global system we have created are of recent origin and still weakly developed.

Based on these arguments, we conclude that the Old Common is extremely vulnerable despite all the knowledge that has been accumulated over the past century. COVID-19 appears a case of zoonotic diseases that start out in animals and jump to humans under certain circumstances. Various virologists have stated that a virus restores an ecosystem. In other words, the COVID-19 crisis represents a “systemic” crisis, underpinned by a capitalist, neo-classical economic system where, in the analysis of the economist Mazzucato (2019), everything that fetches a price is of value, whereas in classical economics everything that had value used to get a price.

Shaping a New Common

Can we envisage a New Common, particularly in these challenging times of a pandemic and major socio-economic crisis? What will it look like and how will we get there whilst preserving the best of the Old Common? Obviously, the New Common would and should be the positive mirror image of the Old Common. It would have to be more inclusive, more diverse, less selective, offer more leeway for the young generations, be based on the principles of precaution, leave no-one behind, and acknowledge the wider ecosystem we as humankind are inseparably part of.

One optimistic belief is that we as humans will draw lessons from this enormous shock, come to our senses, and change our ways of thinking and acting, having learned our lessons well. Many commentators are not that optimistic and allude to the previous financial crisis in the years 2008–2014, where some things were changed, but many things

remained unchanged. Nevertheless, the hopes are up for the scenario that the current crisis will give a strong push to developments that were already underway, such as the efforts for an energy transition.

So where should we place our bets when it comes to shaping a New Common and what are the game changers? Certainly, one of the interesting solution areas can be found in the potentials of the digital transformation. More than a decade ago, Benkler (2006) asserted in his book *The Wealth of Networks* that, with the rise of the Internet and the upcoming digitalization, a new economic system would emerge. This system deploys novel commons by using cheap computing power in conjunction with global communication networks, thus enabling users to produce valuable products through non-commercial processes of interaction: “as human beings and as social beings, rather than as market actors through the price system.”

In a recently published McKinsey report Sneader and Singhal (2020) outline the path to the next normal beyond the coronavirus crisis in the following five phases: resolve, resilience, return, re-imagination, and reform. Indeed, defining a New Common is no less than a long-term process of re-imagination and reform. It is not at all a slam-dunk case. Vested interests and power relations represent strong hurdles in taking the next steps. Clearly, being able to make this transition is a matter of resilience, which should not be merely understood as the capacity to “bounce back” to the original state but also the ability to anticipate changes and, in particular, to innovate (Wilthagen & Bongers, 2020).

Benkler coined the term “networked information economy” to refer to a “system of production, distribution, and consumption of information goods characterized by decentralized individual action carried out through widely distributed, nonmarket means that do not depend on market strategies.” He also introduced the term “commons-based peer production” for collaborative efforts based on sharing information. Current examples of commons-based peer productions are free and open source software platforms. We argue that the networked information economy will become the driver of the digital transformation in the New Common. The ubiquitous availability of data in combination with the unlimited power of smart algorithms creates the possibility to drive the development of a new and unprecedented form of artificial intelligence, which will shape the New Common.

The “Big Data Revolution” as described by Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier (2013) embodies a promise that may help us as humans to transcend our disabilities. We have severe limitations in observing gradual and longitudinal change, rather than sudden shocks. The inroads SARS and coronaviruses have been making represent an example. In addition, our capacity to consider and understand interaction effects among a huge number of variables is low, just like our speed of calculating. Watson, the IBM super computer, and the game computers Deep Blue and AlphaGo have made this painfully clear. Big data and smart technologies might help us to avoid the tragedy of the commons by

showing us real time, or even ex-ante, what the collective—say common—impact is of our individual preferences and actions, rather than the dramatic ex-post evaluations that we are making now.

We are rapidly developing a digital society by virtue of all the smart devices, applications, and platforms the digital technology enables. We work from home using collaborative working environments like MS Teams, Zoom, Skype, and what have you. Smart mobile apps are rolled out with tracking and tracing functionalities. Predictive analytics are used to predict local breakouts and forecast potential scenarios. Robots are currently positioned at airfields and hospitals to check people’s temperatures. Wearable devices are introduced to alert workers when they get too close to each other. Social media are applied to replace face-to-face and physical contact with novel ways to share our emotions and feelings with our beloved ones but also with a larger, often anonymous crowd. To put it in general terms, the coronavirus crisis is accelerating the digital transformation, at the level of individuals, at the level of our society, and even at the level of our planet. Harari (2017) convincingly argues in his book *Homo Deus* that the powers of big data and smart algorithms are currently at work and that they will shape the twenty-first century into an all-encompassing information society.

All these ideas of a New Common are compelling and frightening at the same time as the all-encompassing artificial superintelligence might not turn out to be a “blessing in device,” but could merely prove to be a “devil in device” (Wilthagen & Schoots, 2019). We have to ensure that the digital transformation serves our lives as much as possible by enhancing our well-being and welfare. In his seminal book, Bostrom (2014) elaborates on the dangers of this human-made superintelligence from an ethical, legal, and societal perspective in order to stimulate the debate on a human-centric artificial intelligence. An essential precondition for a New Common that will turn out better than the Old Common, even in a society that faces severe restrictions due to the current virus or new viruses, concerns the alignment of technology and human values, resulting in “responsible AI” (Dignum, 2019).

The final question for now is how to proceed from here? There is no readily available roadmap for the New Common, but we might want to use the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (2020) defined by the United Nations in 2015 as a benchmark and guideline. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face, including those related to poverty, hunger, water management, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice. They are all interconnected, and, in order to leave no one behind, it is important that we achieve them all by 2030. Evidently, these goals can serve the purpose of providing humankind with a meaningful pathway into the future. The indicators connected with the SDGs should be translated into strategic program and action perspectives for all relevant societal organizations to guarantee the possibility of a significant contribution to a New Common.

The SDGs can drive change and offer a narrative and an opportunity to all to speak in one language on sustainability in the broadest sense. By following the SDGs, opportunities abound for business and capital to unlock markets that offer endless potential for profit and prosperity while at the same time working towards a sustainable future. Hoek (2018) describes how this much needed “Trillion Dollar Shift” can be achieved. Vinuesa et al. (2020) discuss the critical role of human-centric artificial intelligence in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Other non-exhaustive strategies for the pathway to a New Common might include further stressing the role of the region in the political, economic, and social governance of society (“glocalisation”), taking the human measure and scale as the point of departure and recognizing that people are currently not well served by fragmented and non-integral systems. These systems ignore that a person performs different roles—being an inhabitant of a region, but also a worker, a parent, a patient, a consumer, et cetera—but is in essence indivisible (De Sousa Santos, 2002).

For universities, there is a special role with respect to Goal 17 “Partnerships for the goals” as they can play an excellent role as drivers of regional innovation ecosystems connecting local governments, industry, citizens, and knowledge institutions in so-called quadruple or multi-helix configurations (Etzkowitz & Zhou, 2013; Peris-Otiz, 2016). We see this as a new primary function of so-called “fourth generation universities” in addition to the existing three primary functions education, scientific research, and impact creation.

Seven Ways to Shape a New Common

In conclusion, we postulate the following seven statements to stimulate the discussion on the way a New Common can be shaped.

1. Accept that corona-like viruses will become an omnipresent phenomenon in our personal lives and find ways to deal with them on a daily basis. Individuals need to develop a kind of resilience toward social distancing measures and find ways to integrate these into personal daily routines and develop a kind of social control. Moreover, they need to assume a kind of social responsibility to educate others and hold them accountable, even publicly, in an easy-going, non-confrontational manner.
2. Manage and control research and development of coronavirus vaccines worldwide by public authorities in order to secure global access to medication at affordable prices. Coronaviruses constantly change their structure into new variants and new vaccines need to follow these developments to maintain the desired high immunity rates. This calls for a worldwide concerted action to reduce price competition and ensure access for all.
3. Mitigate the risk that current vaccination and testing strategies lead to a divide in society with a class of civilians that enjoy the freedom of movement versus those who are limited in their freedom of movement. If a majority enjoys freedom of movement

because they are provably protected by vaccination and/or have provably been tested negative, there will be also a minority of citizens that cannot exhibit these privileges. We need to find way to mitigate the differences between these classes of citizens.

4. Stimulate innovation programs using national and international recovery funds to support the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Governments worldwide are freeing tremendous amounts of money to finance the recovery of the economy after the early depressions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. These funds should be used to accelerate the transformation and the desired realization of any of the 17 SDGs without exception.
5. Introduce new social and behavioral structures that prevent pessimistic and depressive views of citizens thus preventing social deprivation. Many persons develop negative feelings and views of their personal lives or society at large, often resulting from misinformation or fake news spread by social media and influencers, leading to prejudice, xenophobia, and racism. Changes in social behavior and morality can change this attitude for the better.
6. Build on the views, ideas, and needs of Generation Z and leverage the power of multi-generation teams to find and implement creative innovations that shape the New Common. It is generally known from social studies that the novel Generation Z of youngsters assume markedly different views on what they find an acceptable and desirable future society. By integrating their views with those of the other generations that populate the world, a more inclusive society may be designed and built.
7. Accelerate the Digital Transformation to enhance everyday work and education with human-centric, data-heavy, and algorithm-savvy artificial intelligence solutions. The coronavirus crisis has brought about novel ways of using digital media at school and at work. More specifically, it has accelerated the proliferation of smart digital networked systems and services worldwide. Predictive and prescriptive analytics using massive amounts of data can improve decision-making and maximize the development of every person’s talent.

In our view, these statements can help to develop a New Common in which every person’s freedom, equality, and integrity is secured and respected.

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1. “Why are we Texting if you are Next to me?”

A Stranger’s Quote: The Case for Digital Sustainability

Jinane Araqi

Contemporary human beings spend considerable time on their screens. The time that people spend on their screens has skyrocketed during the corona crisis as lockdown measures grew stricter around the world which made screen use a logical coping mechanism in order to connect to the outside world while staying home (Pandya & Lodha, 2021). The already started digitalization process further increased after the lockdown measures as routine tasks of human life moved online. From working from home, to studying, or even sports, one of the big legacies of the pandemic is that people now can imagine their lives without their screens even less. This new lifestyle raises an issue of human/digital sustainability: as our dependence on our screens increases, the power they have over us also increases. The current literature on digital sustainability limits its scope to the sustainability of the data itself, not the sustainability of its impact over the users. The latter is the academic gap that this essay intends to cover.

It will hold that the unchecked power of big data over human beings is an urgent, yet, unheard of sustainability issue. The growing invasion of privacy and alteration of human autonomy makes the concept of digital sustainability of utmost relevance if we want to understand sustainability in a holistic way and preserve humanity in the era of big data and the Metaverse.

My goal with this essay is to convince my audience that digital sustainability should be integrated in our everyday understanding of sustainability and acted upon with radical means. By introducing Soshanna Zuboff’s idea of the age of surveillance capitalism, I will illustrate the deep economic significance of the business model of big data. Then, I will talk about the social implications of this economic system by using the lense of Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon. Finally, I will introduce the Metaverse. I will explain the nature of the invention, how the sanitary measures set the ideal ground for its growth since 2020 and demonstrate the legal rationale by which the Metaverse can be used to make the people benefit from the system.

Historical Retrospect to Understand Surveillance Capitalism and its Main Actors

In her comprehensive overview of what surveillance capitalism is, Harvard professor Soshanna Zuboff explains that it is the most important economical innovation since

Henry Ford's revolution of the production chain (2018). If the age of **industrial capitalism** started with the production of **Ford T**, the age of surveillance capitalism started with the production of the **iPod** (Zuboff, 2018, pp. 32-35). Ford started the era of mass consumption; Apple started the era of individualized consumption (Zuboff, 2018, p. 35).

Thanks to the iPod, **Apple** revolutionized the customer experience because it "bypassed the physical production of the product along with its packaging, inventory, storage, marketing, transportation, distribution, and physical retailing" (Zuboff, 2018, p. 34). Apple rewrote the social contract between a company and its users: "[it] implied trustworthy relationships of advocacy and reciprocity embedded in an alignment of commercial operations with consumers' genuine interests" (p. 50). Yet already in the early 21st century, Apple was already failing to comply with this contract as it had institutionalized tax evasion, lacked environmental stewardship, collided to depress wages, and the list is long (p. 50).

In the first decade of our century, the early rises of surveillance capitalism were made with the promise of an advocacy-gearred digital capitalism (p. 49). **Google and Facebook** rose as the actors who ambited to rescue information and people from the old institutional confines (p.49). However, their scanning of private information in order to sell predictions to advertisers signaled that the priority was to grow the companies by covering behind the acceptable story of seeking social interest.

In 2004 Google launched Gmail, which enabled it to use private information in order to generate targeted ads (p. 51). Shortly after, Facebook joined the lucrative business of targeted advertising by launching Beacon, a system that gave them the ability to track users and reveal their purchases to their network without prior consent from the users (p. 51). Hence, 2007 is also the year that hosted the first wave of concerns over privacy issues on Facebook (Hall, 2021). The interesting thing is the shift in the attitude of the company itself over the issue. In fact, in distribute information. In contrast, in 2010, Mark Zuckerberg, 2007, Facebook's founder, openly declared that privacy was no longer a norm, making his extraction intentions rather explicit.

To put it simply, the surveillance capitalists' mission consists in dispossessing users from their data in order to use it as prediction material and sell it to third parties. In April 2010, Facebook introduced the Like button, a communication tool that enabled Zuckerberg to master the dispossession cycle as it was easier than ever for users to produce content and to make their preferences clear to the company (Zuboff, 2019, p. 155).

The Discovery of Behavioral Surplus

Surveillance capitalism begins with the discovery of behavioral surplus. More behavioral data are rendered than required for service improvements. This surplus feeds machine intelligence - the new means of production - that fabricates predictions of user behavior. These products are sold to business customers in new behavioral futures markets. The Behavioral Value Reinvestment Cycle is subordinated to this new logic.

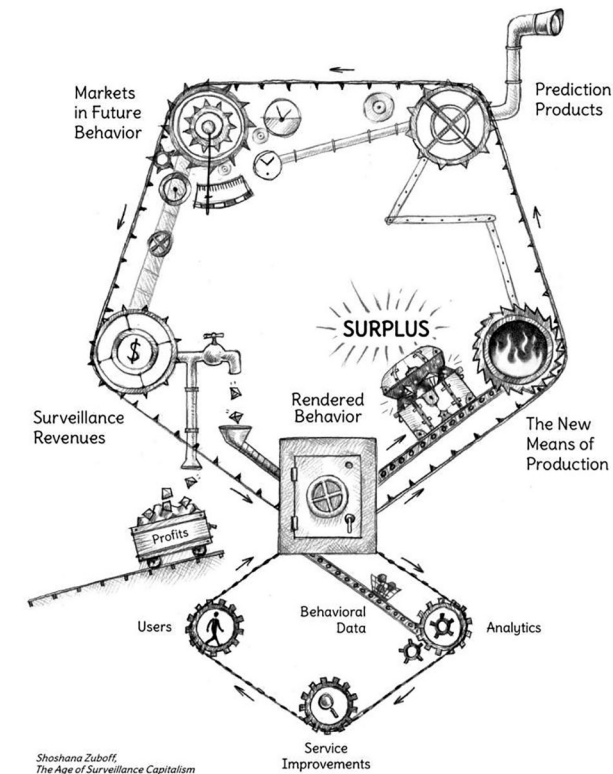


Figure 2: The Discovery of Behavioral Surplus

From (Zuboff, 2019, p. 97)

Taking this established pattern to the next level, Facebook announced in 2014 that it would track and surveil consumers' online behavior by relying on third party applications (Srinivasan, 2019, p. 70). This announcement comes after Facebook's CTO (Chief Technology Officer) declared in the wake of the like button's launching that the latter is not intended for tracking (Zuboff, 2019, p. 155). We can identify a pattern here of declaring that the product is non-harmful for society or even good for it, and after the concerns fade away, the surveillance capitalists embrace publicly their pursuit of the economic opportunities at hand.

In fact, the new economic order of big data makes humans the main raw resource of the economy, one that is seemingly infinite and economically lucrative. The cycle functions as follows. Raw data is extracted from users. After being analyzed, the data is turned into predictions that the company can sell to the highest bidder, which creates surveillance revenues. In the process and in order to keep the users loyal, the data is also used to improve the offered service.

The Social Implications: Understanding the Danger of Surveillance Capitalism

Now that I have shown how few actors have set up the new age of capitalism and are likely to control it unilaterally, I will talk about the social implications of such a system, explaining how it can be dangerous in the long run, therefore, justifying the inclusion of the concept of digital sustainability as a pillar of sustainable development science alongside the ecological social and economic pillars.

As we dive deeper into the 21st century, neoliberalism is shifting towards neoliberalism or surveillance capitalism (Whitehead, 2020). To put it simply, the ultimate resource under neoliberalism is data, the more precise and detailed the more valuable it is. The newly rated behavioral surplus market has put Google and Facebook at the powerful center of the political economy of communication (Graham & Luke, 2011), attributing the data giants unprecedented power over influencing global society, unconstrained by the existing legislative boundaries. In fact, the information technology industry has evolved so rapidly that no national jurisdiction kept the pace in legislative terms, resulting in a delicate case for freedom of expression, or freedom in general (McGoldrick, 2013).

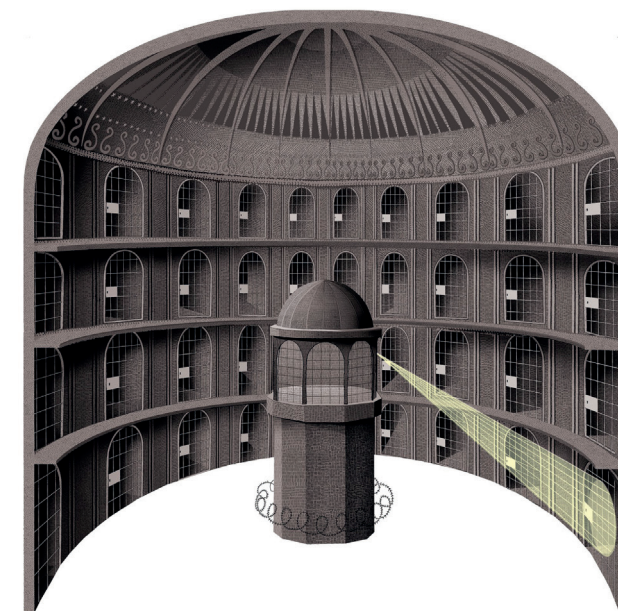
Mass production was mostly led by the states, whereas mass data is generated by users but appropriated by corporations. Yet, the two entities are effectively connected through their common interest in information and lobbying relationships. If we consider the level of detail that an information provider such as Facebook can give to the state, we can only begin to imagine the implications of such a system for human freedom under democratically compromised settings.

The information collected by SMPs is so detailed and personal that it makes the job of surveillance agencies significantly more efficient. If this is not a tangible threat to freedom in Europe yet, there are people around the world seeing their freedom of expression, arrests, leadership of their country and so on directly determined by SMPs. This is the case in Palestine (Araqi, 2020) and Myanmar (UN in Woodering, Kleinberg, Twahngmung & Thisar, 2020), for example. This is without mentioning the limitation that SMPs exercise on freedom through the echo chambers they put their users in and the effort deployed into making SMPs addictive, which are far less tangible but compose the nucleus of the threat posed by SMPs on **personal sovereignty**.

Building on the idea that personal sovereignty is the capacity to keep and save boundaries (Nartova-Bochaver, 2014), I suggest that personal sovereignty is an area of decisions that ought to be free from external interference. Using the wording of sovereignty is important because it is inspired from the concept of national sovereignty which stipulates that no external actor ought to interfere in the affairs of a state except for the state themselves, I believe that individuals deserve the same sovereignty over themselves, which surveillance capitalism poses a serious threat to.

Understanding the implications of surveillance capitalism for personal sovereignty is best done if we go back to Jeremy Bentham's good old panopticon lens. The panopticon is a surveillance and disciplinary system. Through its structure, the guard (in the middle tower) can look into any cell. Through their disposition, the surveilled are not able to see when the custodian looks at them specifically. By not knowing when the surveilled will be checked on, they internalize the desired behavior and it becomes second nature.

With big data, the "panopticon [is] to transcend their institutional architectures, moving the panopticon from the mere constraints of traditional disciplinary institutions like prisons, schools, factories, and hospitals to organizations through the installation of two-way digital communication systems to the full social ecosystem, including any human being outside organizations, like children, parents, employees, neighbors and even strangers. Furthermore, due to the extremely low cost of less than \$500 US per year (Dobson & Fisher, 2007), observation and surveillance become available to ordinary citizens."



Panopticon visualization. From: *Surveillance State*, Tom Shone

By englobing the full scope of society, the panopticon may have gone from being a utilitarian concept to an impolitic system considering the latest disclosures of governmental intelligence or internet giants like Google applying algorithm-based “dataveillance” (Haggerty & Ericson, 2000).

If we take that mechanism outside the confines of traditional disciplinary institutions, putting the surveillor at the center of our everyday lives through our smartphones, we will take the disciplinary power of the panopticon too far, posing a serious threat to our individual sovereignty: 1) by letting an unnatural device co-create our subjective experiences, 2) by being dispossessed from your own information, and how it may be used.

These dangers will inevitably be extrapolated in the era of the metaverse, which makes their potential vinity to society exponentially higher.

The Metaverse: Development, Dangers, and Opportunities

In October 2021, Facebook changed its name to Meta, thereby publicly embracing this decade-long project as the official trajectory of the institution. This section will look into what the metaverse is, how the corona crisis created its ideal conditions of development and how it can be explored as a partial solution to the problems of human autonomy and digital sustainability posed by the system of surveillance capitalism. I will hold that the Metaverse is the turbo to the already established system of surveillance capitalism. If big data collection already represented a threat to democracy and human autonomy, the Metaverse will take these already existing social tendencies to a greater extent.

Metaverse is a word that was first used in 1992 by Neal Stephenson to refer to a virtual reality-based successor to the Internet in his science fiction novel *Snow Crash*. Literally, it means beyond universe: it ambitions to create a world where the internet would exist all around us (Tech India, 2021). Big Data actors such as Facebook and Microsoft are heavily investing in it, and it is predicted that the metaverse will be worth \$2.5 trillion by 2030 (Tech India, 2021). The Metaverse is interactive, reflects our real-world environment closely, it is interoperable and it is a complete economy (Tech India, 2021). This means that the line between the physical and the digital realms will be blurred further and it will make people ever more dependent on the digital realm. This is problematic if the way the digital world is designed is treating people as a commodity (Zuboff, 2019, p. 97) rather than conscious agents.

The reason why this is problematic is that the Metaverse is developed in a way to extract value and data from the users when it would have not existed at the first place if it were not for user generated content: “User generated content will be a core building block [of the Metaverse] that gives it its personality, authenticity and scale” (Duff, 2021). In other words, the Metaverse would never exist if it were not for the time that people spend on their screens. That specific statistic was particularly on the high during the corona crisis because the only way to stay connected despite the social distancing was

the digital medium; the recorded increase fell somewhere in-between 50 to 70% more time on screens, 50% of that time being spent on social media (Pandya & Lodha, 2021). The exact time spent on a screen varied between 17,5h per day and 30h a week, with an average of 8.8h for young adults (Pandya & Lodha, 2021). This excessive use in itself is a breach of personal sovereignty. In fact, the platforms are tracking their success based on how much time the users spend on them and they do not lack creativity to keep users on the platform beyond the level that is healthy and useful for them. It comes as no surprise that there were severe health consequences. In fact, the over-use of digital devices was aggravated by the lock-down measures which paved the way for the increase of negative emotions such as anxiety, sadness, uncertainty, irritability, and aggression (Pandya & Lodha, 2021).

We see that in order to produce content, users have to compromise their health, which entitles them to damage compensation under civil law. Additionally, it is logical that these users should be entitled to the benefits of the structure that was created thanks to them. Governments should therefore explore the possibility of giving social media users an income by canalizing the income of the Metaverse for the benefit of the users.

Policy Recommendations

One of the greatest difficulties in taming the effects of social media on society resides in the fact that technology evolved at a much higher pace than the legislation surrounding it (McGoldrick, 2013). The development of the metaverse gives our global society the opportunity to learn from this mistake and develop a comprehensive framework to make this system flourish to the extent that is beneficial for the group it affects the most: the people. In order to protect the people from data abuses, governments can put the following systems in place:

1. Include digital health in public curriculums: educate kids from the youngest age about the system and teach them how to protect their personal sovereignty under that system.
2. Impose the inclusion of public psychologists in the design of the digital realm, the goal being to limit the use of the digital realm to what is beneficial to the users.
3. Make social media companies pay for the health expenses of suicide attempts among teenagers whose insecurities were extrapolated or created by social media.
4. Make Social media companies pay non-pecuniary damages to the victims of social media.
5. Create international lawyer teams to figure out how to hold those companies accountable
6. Create taxing schemes based on data holdings, not revenue. This will create an incentive to keep smaller amounts of data, and it will stop big data companies from recording as much data as they can.
7. Entitle citizens to the benefits of their own data under international human rights law.

Concluding Remarks

With technological developments such as the metaverse, digital sustainability can only gain relevance over the near future. In fact, it is an issue over which there is little awareness, but it has high impact on our lives. The information technology giants record things beyond our awareness, which means that the information technology can offer us insights over our own subconscious which can be an opening for the expansion of the conscious mind. But most importantly, it means that the technical consent that the users gave is invalid: if the information points recorded are beyond our awareness, they cannot be within our consent. Therefore, we have solid grounds to challenge the legitimacy of the new panopticon and use it to create a breakthrough society: one that no longer relies on discipline; one that relies on freedom.

We often frame climate change as an issue of the future, but it the issue of the present. The real issue of the future, i.e., where our social tendencies are taking us, is data sustainability. The abuses of big data are the biggest issue of our future. Surveillance capitalism will deplete human autonomy just the way industrial capitalism has depleted the planet. Talks about ecological sustainability are not complete without speaking of digital sustainability. It is our job to stop the big, unchecked powers behind climate change before they also deprive us from our own autonomy.

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2. A New Common Sense on Shaping Future Societies: The Minimalist Lifestyle as a Basis for Human Prosperity

Merijn Broos, Timo Warringa

Introduction

Food production is one of the main sectors that needs to implement significant changes to reduce the environmental impacts of the production process (Sonesson et al., 2010). Currently, in European countries there is about 280 – 300 kilograms of food wasted per person each year (Papargyropoulou et al., 2014). While a considerable amount (about 30 kilograms) is thrown away by the customer, most of the food waste takes place in the process of growing plants (or animals) and processing the food products. Because consumers demand a high quality of products, lots of products are thrown away that do not meet their standards. Although several initiatives are introduced for reducing food waste, as Jaworski and Weber (2011) argue, an additional problem is that most people still eat more than necessary.

The example described above reflects a much broader issue that is currently going on in society. Nowadays, consumerism (and thus our current lifestyle) significantly impacts the environment, since an enormous number of natural resources are needed to satisfy customer's needs (Orecchia & Zoppoli, 2007). Besides this, the customer needs are transformed to demanding luxury goods for market competitive prices (Stearns, 2006). Although sustainable production and marketing of sustainable products help to stimulate consumers on buying green products, it is necessary to reduce consumerism if we want to lower the environmental impact of products (Wymer & Polonsky, 2015). But as Curry (2011) states:

“The bedrock assumption of consumerism – what makes it a culture of denial – is that you can ultimately somehow buy and/or believe your way out of anything, maybe even that.”
(Curry, 2011, p.195)

While most people think that we can solve the climate crisis through buying products that are produced sustainably, there still exists the problem of buying more products

with limited resources. Therefore, a radical change is needed to reduce consumerism in order to reduce human impact on natural resources.

As a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, reasons for re-valuing our current lifestyle are triggered and a 'New Common' is needed to prevent such human-threatening events from happening. As described by Aarts et al. (2020), the 'New Common' can be described as a shared vision on how society needs to be changed such that all individuals take the responsibility for sustaining a healthy society. In general, a New Common sense is needed to shape resilient societies and make our lifestyle future proof. Based on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations, the purpose of the New Common is to create a better sustainable future for all.

One option to do this, is through promoting a minimalistic lifestyle wherein the person reconsiders the necessity of buying products. A minimalistic lifestyle is defined as a form of life with the possibility that the individual could live a more fulfilling and meaningful life by reducing their consumption and through focusing on intrinsic values (Hausen, 2019). In our contemporary western culture, it is often natural to think that the possessions (and therefore your prosperity) one owns, results in happiness. In other words, there exists the opinion that one cannot live a happy life without consuming luxury products. However, as Kang et al. (2021) describes, a minimalistic lifestyle can help decreasing depressions and promote human flourishing. There are thus many positive effects of minimalism, but consumers are not stimulated to adopt another lifestyle. Hence, more awareness needs to be created on the negative consequences of consumerism and more focus is needed on the opportunities of adopting a minimalist lifestyle.

In this essay, a utilitarian ethical approach is used to substantiate the incentives for adapting to a minimalistic lifestyle. This is done in order to show that a minimalistic lifestyle can help to substantiate a New Common sense of how to create a resilient and sustainable society. For this, it is assumed that the 'New Common' does change society, but always with the intend to promote happiness. Based on a utilitarian approach, it is argued that a materialistic lifestyle is not able to promote happiness. Then, although people are hesitant to cease their consumerism, the importance of social activities are used as an example to show different manners for leading a happy life. At last, the Dark Green ethical approach, as described by Curry (2011), is used as a foundation for the New Common sense, since it is the basis of human well-being and economic stability.

The Limitations of Materialism on Promoting Happiness

Using a utilitarianist approach as described by Curry (2011), which stands for choosing the actions that promote the greatest happiness, a minimalistic lifestyle on first sight, does not comply with our current materialistic (Western) culture. According to Aristotle, people tend to perform actions in order to find happiness and a flourishing life (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Nowadays, many people tend to perceive their products as a standard for their economic well-being and consequentially, the more products one possess, the

more happiness one experiences. However, Sirgy et al. (2021) found that materialism can influence life satisfaction both negatively and positively. When people evaluate their standard of living to fantasy-based standards (e.g., being a millionaire and buying all expensive products), it results in a negative feeling and dissatisfaction. Additionally, Wang et al. (2017) found that materialism increases depression and general well-being of the individual. Considering the findings of both authors, this means that a materialistic society does not necessary lead to promoting a happy life. On the contrary, if people follow a minimalistic lifestyle, there is the ability to lead a happier life compared to adopting a materialistic lifestyle. This can be illustrated through the distinction of instrumental and intrinsic value as described by Curry (2011).

Instrumental value is focused on someone or something that can be used as a means by someone else. Intrinsic value can be defined as when something has value as an end in itself. Based on this, in a materialistic society, products are bought since they tend to fulfill as a means for human happiness. This can be illustrated as can be seen in figure 1. As argued by Majfud (2021), individuals are shaped through brands that promote products, since they create the idea that these products would make you happy. However, since materialism potentially causes depression and decreases well-being, the instrumental value of products is not able to fulfill the intended end. Therefore, a shift to minimalism is necessary if people want to live a more happy life and would be favored to establish the New Common sense for a resilient and sustainable society.

The intrinsic value promoted through minimalism can also directly reduce the environmental impact caused by the production process of the product. To illustrate this, the animal product industry causes about 18% of the global greenhouse gasses (Sonesson et al., 2010).

At the same time, humans can live a healthy life without consuming these animal products when using a few nutritional supplements (Craig, 2009). Through intrinsically valuing animals, the life of the animal itself is valuable and therefore, humans would not use animals as a means for food production. The shift to a vegan lifestyle thus helps to reduce current emissions and harming animals.

Additionally, one can make the argument that if we adopt a minimalistic lifestyle, humans should also intrinsically value non-animal products. The example discussed in the introduction is concerned with these non-animal products (waste of the plant-based industry) that are currently wasted because they do not meet the standard of customers. However, the difference here is that humans cannot simply starve to death, because the intrinsic value of the non-animal products is more important than their lives. This is where Singer (1987) contributes to the discussion. Humans have the option to reduce the suffering of animals, and since animals are beings that are able to experience pain, society has the moral obligation to reduce this pain as far as possible. Since non-animal products, if they are produced in a sustainable manner, cannot suffer, the consequences



Figure 1: How society shapes our ideas of happiness (Majfud, 2021)

of eating vegetables do not weigh up against human suffering of starving to death by not eating them. As Van den Berg (2013) states:

“Singer’s approach can be compared to a lighthouse at night, with the lamp turning in the darkness. The rotating lamp is the preference utilitarianism that is being used to look for suffering.” He writes: “I approach each issue by seeking the solution that has the best consequences for all affected.” (Van den Berg, 2013, p.53)

A Social System to Promote Happiness

Another reason to promote a minimalistic lifestyle is because social activities are much more valuable to an individual’s life compared to owning physical products. As Paggi et al. (2016) describes, leisure activities were found to be of high importance to physical health and well-being. Additionally, research conducted by Sharif et al. (2018), who asks the question whether money can buy happiness, found that being rich does not lead to a significant difference in the individual’s perception of happiness, compared to people that are considered poor. This means that there is a reason to assume that other factors, such as social activities, contribute to being happy.

The core value of leading a minimalistic lifestyle is not merely focused on adopting an anti-consumerist life, but also stimulates the shift of using inter-personal sharing systems. For example, in a consumerist society, someone can buy a book to learn new knowledge, while a minimalist would favor to attend a book-club or lecture on the topic (without buying the book itself). Through this, buying less products results in the neces-

sity of collaboration and sharing. While the consumer-society is highly individualistic, the minimalist society is communal. Therefore, since social activities contribute to happiness, a minimalist society contributes to a happier life, compared to consumerism.

A New Common should fight against the current social problems (such as mental illnesses), which can be done through adopting minimalism. When people value social activities, the importance of a social system can help to overcome the problems of current individualism. When a minimalistic society is adopted, the value of social activities is promoted, since then a good human life is defined as a life with social welfare. As Van den Berg (2013) describes, in an open society, universal subjectivism can help to overcome injustice. Universal subjectivism is basically the ability to be able to replace yourself in the situation of another (non-)human being. Although this doctrine is not about promoting happiness, it’s certainly a condition for freedom:

“But it would not be accurate to say that happiness is unimportant. In life, happiness is what it is all about. But freedom is very nearly a precondition of happiness. A conclusion of Ruut Veenhoven’s sociological research into happiness is: the more freedom people have, the happier they are.” (Van den Berg, 2013, p.163).

However, freedom is not doing whatever you want to do, but it is instead limited to the actions that do not harm other individuals. Currently, through consumerism, modern western societies cause harm to individuals that experience negative effects (pollution, poverty, etc.) from this lifestyle. As Van den Berg (2013) states, since people are aware of these negative effects, they tend to be less happy. However, radical simplicity can help to prevent harming others in their freedom and therefore is able to increase the happiness of all human beings. This worldview is almost identical to minimalism, since both disciplines do not focus on being rich or economic prosperity. This means that, to promote happiness, a minimalistic lifestyle, that considers the effects upon other beings or nature (thus a social society), is a necessary condition.

Minimalism as Basis for Well-Being and Economic Stability

The minimalistic approach does entail a decrease of consumption and thus has a significant impact on the economy. One can question whether these negative consequences on the economy weigh up against the benefits of human well-being and happiness caused by the minimalistic lifestyle. But through taking a long-term view of the economy, as well as through adopting a Dark Green ecological stance on economical prosperity, the value of well-being should always be placed above the economy in the New Common.

As mentioned in the introduction, a minimalistic lifestyle does also concern the shift from valuing physical objects as a means in an end towards valuing the intrinsic value of these objects in itself. This is directly related to the Dark Green Ethical theory as suggested by Curry (2011). This theory is defined as a movement towards ecocentrism (in which humans and nature are equal) and thus does not focus on merely the necessities

to maintain the life of human beings. Such a worldview should be able to recognize the value of non-human places and organisms, also known as a holistic worldview. Using such an ethical worldview also includes that human interest should be allowed to be subjected to the interest of e.g., nature. Considering the scale of Zweers, who created a scale of different human attitudes towards nature, humans should take the role of a participant. This role reflects that humans are part of a bigger whole and not special (and thus should not use nature as a means for their own ends). The adoption of this role and of Dark Green Ethics is essential for a minimalistic life and the New Common, since it does stimulate people to intrinsically value nature and therefore disapprove the materialistic society that leads to negative consequences for the environment. As Palafox (2020) found, this intrinsic value leads to more human happiness and well-being and could be a motivation to create a New Common sense on how to value life.

Nonetheless, in current political systems, the transformation of legislation and considering the rights of nature, is not seen as a priority (Pecharroman, 2018). This is basically because most politicians do not want to trade the value of nature against the economic prosperity of human beings (Daily & Ellison, 2012). However, shifting to intrinsic value and giving rights to nature does not necessarily lead to a decrease of human welfare. As stated by Meissner (2019), a minimalist approach does have positive effects on the welfare of human beings. In addition to that, Palafox (2020) found that on the long term, minimalism is the key for our new economy since consumerism cannot uphold when natural resources are finite. The paradox here is that most people consider the economy as reflecting their welfare, while an ever-growing economy can have negative consequences on an individual's well-being. Therefore, politics should decide to shift to a minimalistic economy, since in the long run, this will create a stronger economy.

Conclusion

The shift of our moral attitude towards nature and the necessity of shifting our lifestyle where less products will be consumed is still underexposed in current societies. This is mainly due to the idea that a minimalistic lifestyle cannot comply with living a happy life and promoting economic welfare. Both media and politics create the idea that humans need physical products for their well-being and that a consumeristic society is able to create the New Common through producing human needs in a sustainable manner.

While the sustainable production of products is a step in the right direction, the New Common asks us to radically change our lifestyle. This can be done through adopting a minimalistic lifestyle, which helps to promote a happier life. In general, consumerism is not able to fulfill the needs for humans to live a happy life. To be clear on this, it is not stated that in a consumerist society, people cannot lead a happy life. However, minimalism does have the potential an increased life, compared to a consumer society. This is because buying more products (and materialism in general) does not lead to increased happiness and can even raise the chance on depression. On the contrary, social interac-

tions that is promoted through minimalism, do promote happiness to a higher extend than purchasing products. Finally, creating a political environment is in the long run more beneficial to stimulate a joyful society.

It must be said that the New Common is not merely buying less products and minimalism is therefore not able to solve the environmental crisis on its own. Besides consuming less, a minimalist should consider the environmental impact of products that are necessary for sustaining a healthy life (don't eat food or buy products with intense production methods) and take actions to make society more aware of the problem (through actively engaging in politics and through approaching other people). The COVID-19 pandemic makes society aware of the urgency to create a New Common sense on adopting a sustainable lifestyle.

The different arguments provided in this essay are rather anthropocentric, since they all focus on how human beings are able to live a happier life. However, a minimalist can possibly value the environment to a higher extend and therefore can shift more easily to an ecocentric (Dark Green) worldview. While this shift was not touched upon, a more general approach shows that an ecocentric lifestyle does not only lower human environmental impact but is also able to create a New Common that leads to a happier life.

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3. The New Commons: Education

George Michael Chirilaş

Introduction

The year 2020 represents a time of change and adaptation regarding every aspect of life and society, due to the emergence of a pandemic. This global threat is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus and is internationally known as the coronavirus. People who are infected with this illness will generally experience respiratory problems, fever, loss of taste and smell, and tiredness, due to a weak immune system. The coronavirus proves to be far more serious for individuals with underlying medical conditions like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, or cancer, or for individuals who are at an older age. If an infected person spits while communicating, coughs or sneezes towards another person, the coronavirus will spread through small liquid particles, making it highly transmissible (WHO, n.d.). From the beginning of 2020 until the beginning of 2022, there were 314.207.645 coronavirus cases and 5.521.807 deaths caused by this illness (WorldOMeter, 2022).

Institutions have tried to limit the spreading of the disease by restricting human contact, hence moving almost everything to an online format. While some sectors of society adapted easily to these changes, others suffered tremendous losses due to the difficult transition to an online format. One of these cases is the educational system and its institutions. The transition and adaptation to the new conditions were difficult for this sector of society because even before the pandemic, educational systems were considered outdated. This outbreak revealed numerous flaws and forced major changes, that were implemented slowly and inefficiently. Numerous students lost the first semester of 2020 entirely due to the incapability of educational institutions. So, education must change to fit in the 21st century, which brings us to the thesis of this essay regarding education after the pandemic. Post-pandemic education should be an open-minded system that promotes the understanding of the surrounding environment and different cultures while focusing on looking ahead.

Body

The educational system in many countries is outdated and inefficient due to the overwhelming amount of theoretical information and the closed mindset promoted in these institutions. Good examples of this kind of system are the Eastern European countries, where the curriculum is preserved for over 50 years. Even though the teaching method has improved over this period, banning various punishments that were done to students

in that time, the mindset within the system has remained the same. Mistakes are seen as a bad thing, competition between students is encouraged, and numerous teachers tell off the modern opinions of students. The school subjects are often based on outdated information, carelessly ignoring recent discoveries and realizations. Another outdated factor of educational institutions is the teaching method used by educators. Students generally go to school, listen to their teachers without having a discussion or a conversation, go home and learn, and repeat this process for years until they get their degree, accumulating knowledge without understanding why. Many students ultimately state that it was a waste of time, and its only use was getting the degree. Not all educational institutions face all these problems, especially the ones in Western Europe, but it is safe to say that education must evolve and adapt to the new era of information. Nowadays it is more important to know where to find certain information, rather than knowing it by heart, because of events, experiments, and discoveries happening at a rapid pace, making almost any information from yesterday outdated.

The sudden outbreak of the pandemic has forced immediate changes in education, changing forms and methods of teaching, and transferring the whole system to an online format. This change has revealed how outdated and inefficient the system truly was. During the first half of 2020, educational institutions had a very difficult time adapting to the new conditions, practically losing a semester of education. The past education was based in its entirety on human contact. The absence of it has proven to have major effects on the attitudes of students as well as teachers. Absenteeism was very high and cheating during tests has become a common practice, making the grades an unreliable representation of students' knowledge. Many teachers are unable to operate a laptop or a computer properly, leading to lessons being very difficult, even impossible to follow. Another major flaw detected during the first half of 2020 was the incapability of institutions to provide information to all students. They did not consider that some students do not have access to Wi-Fi, electricity, or a laptop or computer. These students were cut off from education completely, until the second semester when the educational institutions offered low-quality tablets for the online lessons. But perhaps the biggest flaw that emerged during the coronavirus was the spreading of false information and the promoting of outdated ideas. Numerous teachers, but if not all, presented their theories regarding the pandemic to students, creating false beliefs in the minds of the future generation of adults. Nobody could call out these incorrect statements because nobody had proper information about the disease at that time. And instead of acknowledging new reports and information about the illness and correcting their false theories, a large group of narrow-minded teachers ignored the news, wrote it off, and maintained their beliefs while presenting their opinion to the students. These people transferred their distrust of organizations and the government onto the students. This leads to having students who disregard any new information regarding a subject on which they already formed a, possibly incorrect, opinion. Another mistake that was caused by teachers during 2020 is creating the belief that "before everything was better". This statement discourages change and encourages people to focus on the past instead of the future. Society, tech-

nology, and knowledge nowadays can be described as ever-changing due to discoveries and important events happening daily. With the presence of various online platforms and the internet, information is easily accessible and transfers very fast between individuals. It is wrong to discourage change in a world that is ever-changing when we should concentrate on the future. The information within the first two paragraphs of the body was based on the personal experience of the author who lived and studied in Germany and Romania and could compare, analyze, and identify flaws within both educational systems. Most information describes the educational institutions from Romania because that is where he was during the outbreak of the coronavirus. The next paragraph presents possible solutions and changes to the educational system.

The pandemic has caused changes in the educational system that are irreversible, even if the pandemic disappears completely. It will never return entirely to the usual practices that occurred before 2020. But change is not a negative circumstance. This change gives people the chance to improve education for future generations. It won't be easy, but it is necessary. So first, before changing the curriculum or the teaching method or different parts of the institution itself, educational systems should adopt a different mindset that is open-minded and tries to learn from mistakes. Students should be encouraged to learn from their mistakes and understand, why they are wrong, instead of being punished. This way pupils can grow from their own mistakes. Another aspect of the mindset within educational systems that should be changed is focusing solely on the individual students. Future education should promote teamwork and shall test the efficiency of teams in various circumstances. By modifying these two aspects of the mindset, schools can create students who are socially more active and who would not be afraid to try and maybe fail.

The next step towards a better system should be adjusting the curriculum. Various professionals from different sectors of the society may revise the content taught in schools and identify, what is part of common knowledge and must be known, and what part of history, art, and literature is needed to preserve the culture of a nation for future generations. The new system should focus on showing students where to find certain information and how to evaluate its content and validity. These skills are far more important in the 21st century than learning facts by heart. The content within the new curriculum should also clearly state why this knowledge is important and how it can be used in the future. This way students commit to the curriculum due to the purpose behind it. Lastly, regarding the curriculum, educational institutions should offer objective information about other cultures, religions, philosophies, and countries to broaden the knowledge and the acceptance towards other people. The subjects will be focused on looking ahead by analyzing recent news and occurrences, to help students understand the world around them. Even though in most Western European countries, schools promote extracurricular activities, in other countries it is absent. The new educational system must strongly support and offer extracurricular activities to students to find and cultivate their passions and skills.

A major aspect that was completely ignored in the past educational system is the professional development of the staff within an educational institution. An article from the website “Business Roundtable” states that “A successful system insists on meaningful preparation and continuous learning for teachers and administrators that drives improved teaching, learning, and school management.” (Essential Components of a Successful Education System, n.d.). The adults in an educational institution could be role models for the students, showing them how to effectively learn and understand information.

The educational system is based, like any other system, on numerous rules and policies that assure the normal functioning of an establishment. New rules of post-pandemic education should be based on the nine ideas presented by the UNESCO International Commission on the Futures of Education. The first idea is to “Commit to strengthen education as a common good.” (International Commission on the Futures of Education, 2020) which focuses on a widespread education for everybody, seen as a common asset. Other ideas are to “Expand the definition of the right to education so that it addresses the importance of connectivity and access to knowledge and information.”, “Value the teaching profession and teacher collaboration.”, “Promote student, youth, and children’s participation and rights.”, “Protect the social spaces provided by schools as we transform education.”, “Make free and open-source technologies available to teachers and students.”, “Ensure scientific literacy within the curriculum.”, “Protect domestic and international financing of public education.” and “Advance global solidarity to end current levels of inequality.” (International Commission on the Futures of Education, 2020). These ideas reinforce some ideas of this paragraph, as well as promote the right to education for everybody, while also teaching students about inequalities to advance global solidarity. Another aspect that is emphasized by these ideas is the assistance of teaching staff and educational institutions to aid them with all the resources needed to produce an efficient education. The application of the beforementioned ideas, as well as the changes of the mindset within an educational establishment, the adjustments of the curriculum, and the organization within the institution, should lead to an efficient education, which is fit for the 21st century. The future generations and the future world would benefit from these modifications that are not easy to integrate but are necessary.

Conclusion

The outbreak of the coronavirus has tested the capabilities of the whole world on how to cope with new conditions. Even though the start of the pandemic revealed numerous flaws in society, in the economy, as well as in education, the human mind can overcome the obstacle and adapt to the changing environment. We do not know how long this disease will persist to limit our lives, so we do not have any choice other than to evolve and to readjust our routines. Regarding education, it was already outdated before the pandemic. The past educational systems were not made for the 21st century, where there is an overwhelming amount of fast accessible information and rapid global digitalization. The events of 2020 forced an inevitable change. We as a population need to reform

education for it to fit in this modern age. This essay stated numerous flaws with the educational system and presented various options to improve it, to form an open-minded, future generation of students, which will possibly save humanity and this planet. Post-pandemic education will surely be an innovation compared to any other form of education so far, and I strongly believe that we as humans will achieve this efficient system of teaching. A modern system that encourages thinking, teamwork, open-mindedness, and free speech, giving every person the right and the resources for practical and effective education.

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4. More Than 360 Million: On how to Protect our Social Commons from Algorithmic Misery

Majiec Gadzala

“No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals, or, if neither, mechanised petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance.”

Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, 1905.

The pandemic and its subsequent lockdown thrust us into the confines of our bedrooms and desks, subjecting us to isolation—but not seclusion. We remained connected: posting statuses on Facebook, photos to Instagram, exchanging texts and gossip on Messenger and WhatsApp, attending meetings on Zoom, even occasionally having drinks there, too. But as millions of new hours were poured into social media,² the consequences manifested themselves rather quickly: middle-aged soccer moms in the US took to the #SaveTheChildren hashtag claiming that the pandemic sparked a child sex trafficking epidemic³, QAnon conspiracy theory found new believers all over Europe⁴, and thousands of people took to touting alternative remedies for COVID-19, such as Ivermectin or Amantadine.

This was quite unprecedented, as we have never experienced such a quick turn of multitudes of people to fringe, extreme, and anti-scientific views. It would not happen without the algorithms, designed to maximise engagement with the content—which led to serving users anything, as long as they clicked and watched it. Those mechanisms of behavioural

¹ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 2001), 124.

² Nicole Fullerton, “Instagram vs. Reality: The Pandemic’s Impact on Social Media and Mental Health,” pennmedicine.org, April 29, 2021. <https://www.pennmedicine.org/news/news-blog/2021/april/instagram-vs-reality-the-pandemics-impact-on-social-media-and-mental-health>.

³ Anna North, “How #SaveTheChildren Is Pulling American Moms into QAnon,” Vox, September 18, 2020. <https://www.vox.com/21436671/save-our-children-hashtag-qanon-pizzagate/>

⁴ “Conspiracy Epidemic, Born in US, Spreads in Europe,” France 24, May 17, 2021. <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210517-conspiracy-epidemic-born-in-us-spreads-in-europe/>

reinforcement subjected the global society to an operation of privatisation of our attention for the profit of corporations like Meta, in which these companies took none of the losses and shouldered them onto governments and society at large. This paper argues there is a way out of the situation where technological companies are free to abuse our mental sphere and turn our time into data. We can demarcate the line between showing ads for-profit and engineering the behaviour of billions of users to ensure that—while we still are free to use the platforms—our social commons of mental privacy and agency are protected. Neurorights, a set of rights designed to safeguard both privacy and agency, can provide those badly needed new rules of engagement between us and technology—rules that can help us stop the unwanted advances on our brains and act as a defence against the surveillance and behaviour-shaping powers of technological corporations.

This essay is entirely dedicated to making a case for the adoption of Neurorights. It will do so by presenting a case study of Facebook, in which we will delve into the history of Facebook's development as an instrument of the capture of data. That will give us a solid foundation, which can be used to understand how the company engineered its engagement mechanisms to the detriment of its users—as well as how that might extend into the future with Meta's⁵ new products, especially if we consider the corporation's goals through Max Weber's theory of bureaucracy. Finally, the essay will elaborate on Neurorights—what they are, as well as how they could address the problems mentioned in the previous paragraphs. The paper aims to prove one point: that Neurorights are a major part of the solution to the harmful influence social media algorithms have on global society.

The revolutionary year of 2009

“Senator, we run ads”

Mark Zuckerberg, 2018.⁶

The original Facebook—TheFacebook—was launched at Harvard in 2004, but it only became the platform as we know it today in 2009. That was the year that saw the introduction of a wide range of changes inspired by the efforts of Sheryl Sandberg. A Google transplant who worked on the monetization of the search engine, and thanks to which Facebook found its own strategy of monetization: ads.⁷ Sandberg's efforts focused on recasting the platform from a simple database of profiles to a true social medium centred around having users make new connections,⁸ and to that end, Facebook took a number

of significant steps. The most important one was its new privacy policy, which altered the default settings of users' information. What previously used to be treated as a setting they set themselves—of whether, for example, someone wanted others to see which pages they liked—was now treated as public information, freely available to everyone. The change affected not only the users' liked pages but also their name, gender, profile picture, the city they live in and the networks they were a member of.⁹ It was also the year Facebook changed its flagship feature: instead of LiveFeed, users were now subjected to NewsFeed, which offered a more curated experience of browsing the platform. In place of a feed based on the chronology of their friend's activities, Facebook users were now presented with a feed that prioritised posts based on popularity, engagement, and an overall factor of appeal to the user, with the more appealing posts appearing first.¹⁰ The year was concluded by the introduction of Facebook's 'Like' button, which—in the next three months—was introduced to more than 350,000 thousand websites other than the platform.¹¹ All of those modifications and new features succeeded—visible in the fact that 2009 was also the year in which Facebook finally became profitable.

Sandberg's transformation of Facebook testifies to the direction that the company was moving in establishing itself as a profitable enterprise. To do that it had to do two things. First, it had to upgrade its infrastructure—so that users spend considerable time on the platform generating clicks for data. Second, it had to make sharing, liking, 'poking' a cultural norm, a thing which everybody does—what Mark Zuckerberg, in his 2010 Time Person of the Year interview, described as an internet where “the default is social”,¹² with social here being understood as Facebook.

To spread the “default” and achieve its first objective, Facebook introduced the “Like” button in February of 2009. From that point on it did not matter whether you were on its platform or not—the button spied on its users on other sites by sending their IP address and web browsing activity (where they clicked, how they moved their mouse) directly to its servers.¹³ The button also signalled to Facebook what users liked, which became helpful in September that year, when it introduced NewsFeed. The feed, which in the new model arranged content algorithmically instead of displaying it chronologically, was geared towards incentivising users to interact with the platform: offering users the most engaging, reaction-provoking content first to have them comment, like or share it—in turn producing even more content. With the introduction of these features, Facebook secured more clicks for itself.

⁵ With regards to the name of the corporations in question – the essay uses the name Facebook when describing anything it did prior to 28 October 2021, when it changed its name to Meta. It uses the name Meta to signify the company's actions after its rebranding.

⁶ Mark Zuckerberg's answer to the question from Senator Orrin Hatch about Facebook's business model during his testimony to the Senate's Commerce and Judiciary committees regarding the Cambridge Analytica scandal in 2018. “Transcript of Mark Zuckerberg's Senate Hearing,” *The Washington Post*, April 11, 2018. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2018/04/10/transcript-of-mark-zuckerbergs-senate-hearing/>

⁷ Shoshana Zuboff, “Opinion | You Are the Object of a Secret Extraction Operation,” *The New York Times*, November 12, 2021, sec. Opinion. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/12/opinion/facebook-privacy.html/>

⁸ José Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). 54.

⁹ “Facebook Unveils Privacy Changes - CNN.com,” *www.cnn.com*, December 10, 2009. <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/TECH/12/10/facebook.privacy/index.html/>

¹⁰ “New Views for Your Home Page | Facebook,” *web.archive.org*, October 25, 2009. <https://web.archive.org/web/20091025070805/http://blog.facebook.com/blog.php?post=162536657130/>

¹¹ José Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). 49.

¹² As reported by José Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). 45. Direct source: “Mark Zuckerberg, Person of the Year,” *time.com*, December 10, 2010. http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/printout/0,29239,2036683_2037183_2037185,00.html/

¹³ José Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). 49.

And to achieve the second objective, Facebook rolled out its new privacy policy in December of 2009 to compel users to make them. By making that move, Facebook changed the imperative of the norm of privacy and made it normal for users that their data is publicly available on the platform—and specifically aimed at making it be the place where they can naturally further exchange, rather than limit or guard, this type of information. After all, to perform all the liking, sharing and commenting that the platform wanted them to do, users had to be comfortable with it—making it a norm was the best way to achieve that.

Here we can see the shot and the chaser¹⁴—when Facebook set up its sprawling empire of data collection and geared its platform to automatically increase user engagement, it then normalised publicly sharing information thereby making Facebook a social norm. Users were caught like flies in a web—once they thought that Facebook was the norm and started sharing things there, they were leaving a resource the platform wanted to capture: data. Facebook could use it to tailor posts better, as well as create cutting edge advertising profiles to show ads more effectively—creating a self-perfecting feedback loop, in which more engagement meant more data and ad revenue, which meant better prediction models for ads and NewsFeed, which then led to more engagement. What Facebook thus set out to do was to perpetually fine-tune this mechanism, so that it would generate the greatest amount of money it could. To do that, all the mechanism needed was more of itself: users, data, and engagement.

Engineering a bureaucracy

“Google and Facebook know how to utilise negative emotions, leading to the new system-wide goal: find personalised ways to make you feel bad.”

Geert Lovink, *Sad by Design*, 2019.¹⁵

Facebook did not have to worry about the first two, as users were flowing in¹⁶—and with them, more data. The company went on to perfect engagement—the algorithms, which shaped users’ behaviour and were ultimately responsible for how much data they left to the platform. Those were easily changeable—an old model could be swapped for a newer, more effective one, making for a perpetual arms race that Facebook effectively found itself in.

In 2015 the platform introduced the second version of the algorithm: optimised towards making users spend more time on Facebook, as this was identified as a more profitable mode of consumption. It resulted in a change of what became predominant on the NewsFeed: professionally produced content, or rather content that appeared to be professionally-produced, since the feed did not visibly discern articles from *The New York*

Times from the likes of *The New York Evening*—which falsely claimed that Malia Obama has been expelled from Harvard.¹⁷ This culminated in the infamous fake news epidemic—leading Facebook to augment the algorithm again in 2018 due to the fallout they caused. The new iteration was heralded as promoting “meaningful social interactions”, which would emphasise posts from friends and family rather than sensational articles.¹⁸ Behind the press releases, however, the internal documents paint a different story: in 2017 Facebook’s engagement rate started to decrease, and as users liked and shared less than in the previous years the 2018 algorithm change was introduced to boost the numbers.¹⁹ The new model did so, but this time it preferred negative, divisive, and sensationalist content that engaged people in making comments and shares – producing the desired effect of more data from users, while at the same time making these users more miserable. An internal study conducted by Facebook in 2019 claimed that 360 million people using it—12,5 % of all the platform’s base—had problems due to the engagement mechanisms baked into its algorithms.²⁰ Surveyed users reported loss of productivity, degradation of in-person relationships and sleep deprivation—all due to the overstimulation that Facebook induced.²¹

Facebook’s dedication to making us feel bad is relentless, and its rebranding to Meta has not led to a change in the goal of perfecting its war machine in the arms race for our attention. With the move into Metaverse—a fully interactive, immersive virtual reality environment—Meta rather wants to expand the frontier of data extraction and escape the problems experienced with Facebook. In this quest, Meta wants to create Metaverse so that not only cursor movements or likes are its model’s data points, but also bodily movement—from eye-tracking in the headsets to the movement of limbs registered by the cameras that translate your gestures to the avatar—and, with more equipment, even brain activity. To this end, the company recently acquired CTRL Labs, a startup which created a wristband capable of decoding user’s neural activity and translating it into device instructions²²—but further down the road, Meta is also developing the “Brain to Text” project: a non-invasive brain-computer interface which would allow the platform to decode its users’ thoughts.²³ With that in mind, we can clearly see what its goals are.

¹⁷ Joshua Gillin, “PolitiFact - Fake Story Wrong about Malia Obama Being Expelled from Harvard for Marijuana Use,” *politifact.com*, April 19, 2017. <https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2017/apr/19/blog-posting/fake-story-wrong-about-malia-obama-being-expelled/>

¹⁸ Will Oremus et al., “How Facebook Shapes Your Feed,” *Washington Post*, October 26, 2021. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/interactive/2021/how-facebook-algorithm-works/>

¹⁹ Keach Hagey and Jeff Horowitz, “Facebook Tried to Make Its Platform a Healthier Place. It Got Angrier Instead.,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 15, 2021, sec. Tech. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-algorithm-change-zuckerberg-11631654215/>

²⁰ Georgia Wells, Deepa Seetharman, and Jeff Horowitz, “Is Facebook Bad for You? It Is for about 360 Million Users, Company Surveys Suggest,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 5, 2021, sec. Tech. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-bad-for-you-360-million-users-say-yes-company-documents-facebook-files-11636124681/>

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Salvador Rodriguez, “Facebook Agrees to Acquire Brain-Computing Start-up CTRL-Labs,” *CNBC* (CNBC, September 23, 2019). <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/09/23/facebook-announces-acquisition-of-brain-computing-start-up-ctrl-labs.html/>

²³ “Imagining a New Interface: Hands-Free Communication without Saying a Word,” *Tech at Meta*, March 30, 2020. <https://tech.fb.com/ar-vr/2020/03/imagining-a-new-interface-hands-free-communication-without-saying-a-word/>.

¹⁴ “Shot, Chaser,” *Know Your Meme*, accessed January 15, 2022. <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/shot-chaser/>

¹⁵ Geert Lovink, “Sad by Design,” *www.eurozine.com*, January 10, 2019. <https://www.eurozine.com/sad-by-design/>

¹⁶ From 100 million in 2010 to 1,71 billion in 2016, a 17-fold rise in just 6 years. Mansoor Iqbal, “Facebook Revenue and Usage Statistics (2018),” *Business of Apps*, August 8, 2017. <https://www.businessofapps.com/data/facebook-statistics/>

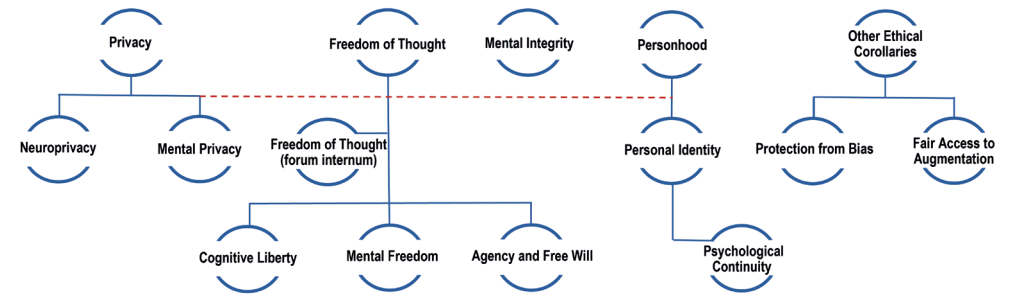
The aim is to create what Max Weber would call a “bureaucracy of the mind”. In his essay “*Technical Advantages of Bureaucratic Organisation*” Weber opens with a passage that explains why Meta was able to capture our attention on such a mass scale:

“The decisive reason for the advance of the bureaucratic organisation has always been its purely technical superiority over any other form of organisation. The fully developed bureaucratic mechanism compares with other organisations exactly as does the machine.”²⁴

The organic ability of individuals to resist mechanisms created to abuse their mental control over behaviour lines up exactly with what was described by the German sociologist—the mechanism is technically superior to our capacities of resisting it. Currently, our static, un-upgradeable minds are far behind in the race with the upgradeable algorithmic instruments, which do not care about the means through which they will achieve their ends of having us produce data and watch ads. As this technical superiority allows the algorithms to spread like mycelium across the social body of every society on earth that has access to the internet, they end up creating a systemic effect of misery—which affects far more than 360 million people.²⁵ Those are just the users of one platform who become unfunctional due to its use—but beyond them, there are millions of people who are dealt a daily dose of personalised, negative impulses meant to keep their attention on the screen just a little bit longer. The people from Facebook’s report are just the symptom of a greater illness of incapacitation that the platforms have induced on us, a symptom which we must treat seriously and for which we must devise an antidote.

Norms against misery

Neurorights, first posited around the early ’00s in response to the advances made in neuroimaging and mind reading at that time, could help us stop the unwanted advances on our brains.²⁶ Defined as a set of various principles pertaining to a mental and cerebral domain, they aim to set normative rules for “the protection and preservation for the human brain and mind”²⁷ and can be distinguished into a wide taxonomy:



28

Although Neurorights are considered to be only applicable in the case of use of a brain-computer interface (BCI), the areas specified to be protected by the Neurorights—such as our mental integrity, right to agency, right to mental privacy—are being infringed upon even without the use of BCIs, and as protection from algorithmic bias is also one of the domains that Neurorights seek to address, they are thus perfectly positioned to be a solution to the problem of algorithmic abuse. Especially that within the discourse of ethical implications of brain-computer interfaces, the issues raised back in the 1960s and ‘70s called for a robust institutional response to the consequences of control of behaviour that the BCIs made possible²⁹—and as nowadays we do not have the sliver of protections that were called for back then to the problems that at present are incomparably bigger—it is only contingent that we address them with the solutions that stem from this discourse. Considering that in order to interpret our brain activity companies do not need to access our brains—a bracelet is enough—and that these types of devices are in commercial development to be in use by the millions of people in a few years; even a minimalist position that only accepts Neurorights as pertaining to BCI devices is tenable with regards to what the paper is proposing. The main position is to address the root problem, not its effect.

And how do we address it? Well, for starters, we could regulate which mechanisms would be excluded from implementation—like algorithms proven to engage users by overpromoting negative content. These could also be excluded on the basis of neuro-discrimination,³⁰ as none of the algorithms currently discern between neurotypical and neurodivergent users, leading the latter to harm. One aspect of regulation could be limiting the potential problematic data points which companies can track, such as sexuality or the likelihood of pregnancy, as there is a sound basis for objecting to those within the right to mental privacy. Lastly, we could also regulate user engagement itself, establishing limits on how much content algorithms can compel users to consume on the basis of age (with special protections for minors) or any other desirable metric.

²⁴ Max Weber et al., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (Oxford University Press, 1958). 214.

²⁵ Not to mention that the study was limited to Facebook and does not take into account Meta’s other widely used platform, Instagram, which was reported to also have devastating effects on some of its users – especially teenage girls. See: Georgia Wells, Jeff Horwitz, and Deepa Seetharaman, “Facebook Knows Instagram Is Toxic for Teen Girls, Company Documents Show,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 14, 2021, sec. Tech. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-knows-instagram-is-toxic-for-teen-girls-company-documents-show-11631620739/>

²⁶ Marcello Lenca, “On Neurorights,” *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 15 (September 24, 2021). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2021.701258.1/>

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Marcello Lenca, “On Neurorights,” *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 15 (September 24, 2021). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2021.701258.6/>

²⁹ Stephan Schleim, “Neurorights in History: A Contemporary Review of José M. R. Delgado’s ‘Physical Control of the Mind’ (1969) and Elliot S. Valenstein’s ‘Brain Control’ (1973),” *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 15 (October 27, 2021). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2021.703308/>

³⁰ Marcello Lenca, “On Neurorights,” *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 15 (September 24, 2021). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2021.701258.5/>

It is really up to us how to use Neurorights and where to draw the line between people and technology. Chile and Spain have already done that and adopted Neurorights legislation in their respective legal systems,³¹ and a new report by the European Parliament calls for a Neurorights legislation on an EU wide level.³² Furthermore, even since the first draft of this essay to its final edits, the European Parliament has made great strides in addressing the problem—it has passed the Digital Services Act,³³ which makes refusing consent for ad tracking easier and bans dark patterns which so far had made it harder for users to, and Digital Markets Act, which targets the big ‘gatekeeper platforms’ responsible for much of the abuses outlined above.³⁴ Even the US Congress has made steps in zeroing on the platforms, as very recently a bill has been introduced which addresses targeted internet advertising.³⁵ Those efforts do not lie far from instituting solutions described above – what is needed rather is the political will to carry them out.³⁶

Breaking the cage of the future

“The corporation that is Facebook may change its name or its leaders, but it will not voluntarily change its economics”³⁷

Shoshanna Zuboff, *You Are The Object of a Secret Extraction Operation*, 2021

And we will need lots of it, as establishing Neurorights would result in upending platforms’ entire business model, and since their investments are aimed at extending the model even further—into our bodies—their future. This means that the earlier we do adopt a solution to the algorithmic misery, the more people we can help—and urgency here is paramount, as the latest example of teens developing tic-like symptoms from watching TikTok³⁸ only proves the glaring need for the protections against these mechanisms. The high time is now to make even greater advances in that direction, especially that now, with the recent tour of a Facebook whistleblower—Frances Haugen—to various European parliaments,³⁹ and the newfound courage of the European Parliament—which responded “please do” to Meta’s threat of pulling out from the European mar-

³¹ Rafael Yuste, Jared Genser, and Stephanie Herrmann, “It’s Time for Neuro-Rights,” *Horizons*, no. 18 (2021): 161.

³² Christine Wendehorst and Yannic Duller, “Biometric Recognition and Behavioural Detection” (Brussels: European Parliament, August 2021).

³³ Morgan Meaker, “The EU Has a Plan to Fix Internet Privacy: Be More like Apple,” *Wired*, January 25, 2022. <https://www.wired.com/story/eu-digital-services-act-apple/>

³⁴ European Commission, “The Digital Services Act Package | Shaping Europe’s Digital Future,” [digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu](https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/digital-services-act-package/), July 5, 2022. <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/digital-services-act-package/>

³⁵ Klein Moynihan Turco, “Congress Considers New Targeted Advertising Law,” *Lexology*, January 21, 2022. <https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=494c0a73-0e06-49b2-8074-60ac3c3dbde59/>

³⁶ Not to mention great advocacy efforts (which resulted in the Chilean and Spanish legislation) by prof. Rafael Yuste and his Neurorights Institute (affiliated with Columbia University). In the *It’s Time for Neuro-Rights* article, he and his colleagues are calling for a UN level agenda on Neurorights – which would be quite transformative. See: Rafael Yuste, Jared Genser, and Stephanie Herrmann, “It’s Time for Neuro-Rights,” *Horizons*, no. 18 (2021).

³⁷ Shoshana Zuboff, “Opinion | You Are the Object of a Secret Extraction Operation,” *The New York Times*, November 12, 2021, sec. Opinion. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/12/opinion/facebook-privacy.html>

³⁸ Eleanor Cummins, “TikTok Tics Are a Symptom of a Much Bigger Problem,” *The Verge*, November 12, 2021. <https://www.theverge.com/2021/11/12/22772157/tiktok-tics-suggestible-distress-teens/>

³⁹ Mark Scott, “Why Facebook Is More Worried about Europe than the U.S.,” *POLITICO*, February 11, 2022. <https://www.politico.com/news/agenda/2021/11/02/facebook-europe-privacy-content-laws-518514/>

ket⁴⁰—the odds are turning in our favour. If we do not act now, we might find ourselves in what Max Weber—in the first quotation of the essay—called the “cage of the future”, where the “mechanised petrification” would measure, offer and sell all of our attention. While Neurorights are not a silver bullet that will solve all our problems stemming from algorithmic misery, they are a necessary step in dealing with it—and are essential in dismantling the cage before its built.

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5. Resilience as necessity: An Exploration of a New Common

Ebbe Tim Ottens, Sebastian Arthur Rostron

Introduction

We are at the verge of a paradigm shift, if it can even be simplified to that level, all that we are experiencing is unprecedented and ambushes every expectation we could historically anticipate. This generation could be categorized as one suffering from an ever-looming presence of danger, a sense of impending doom. The polar caps are melting, the effects of the climate crisis are all around us, all of this' whilst we are in the middle of a pandemic. This is the backdrop that contrasts our lives and has become an irreplaceable part of who we are. We are a 'resilient generation', many of us having heard since we were young that we would be the ones that would need to change the world for the better. Don't for a minute think it's out of choice that we are so resilient, it is out of necessity. We are taught to be resilient in all aspects of our lives, with increasingly demanding educational standards, highly competitive job markets with stagnating wages and the outsourcing of labor that has even begun to extend into technical fields. In order to deal with what being alive at this point in history confronts us with, every single possible situation we find ourselves in requires this *resolve mentality*. We would like to argue that we should take a step back and analyze the situation. What is happening to our generation, what developments play a role in our current situation, and to what extent are we part of the problem?

First, however, we must introduce you to someone, please meet: Jack. Jack is a 19-year-old man, he is a fictional character, but he could be any one of us, through his eyes we hope to show what our time looks like and what New Commons could look like. We'll follow Jack through the years to get an insight into what it is like to live, as a young individual in this day and age.

We'll get back to him. In this essay we'll be delving into how we transform into a New Common in a way that we deem sustainable and healthy for its inhabitants. We'll pass by multiple issues we've identified with the world as is and, where possible, we will attempt to offer insights into these issues, hopefully even contributing to some meaningful change.

On the Issue of Economics as a Model of the World

Let's meet Jack at 17, it's now 2019, and he's just been accepted at Tilburg University where he'll be studying International Business Administration. He's chosen this study because he believes it will reward him with a well-paying job after he's graduated. He has also always had a keen interest in economics and is hoping to further develop his knowledge on the field.

Economics is a wonderful tool; it does a lot of good for this world. It's even considered a science by many; a definition modern philosophers of science would probably even agree with. Economics, however, isn't a hard science. It's in the realm of the social sciences, it's socially constructed.¹ Economics deals with models of reality, often rather helpful ones at that. The problem, however, is that these models are in their core, a tool. They are not the same thing as reality, they merely attempt to capture it. All this is perfectly fine, as long as we keep perceiving these models as tools and not as a true depiction of the world.

One organization dealing with these issues is Rethinking Economics which is composed of a wide range of academics who argue for economic education to be transformed. Their Dutch department recently found that over 85% of all economic education within The Netherlands is within the Neoclassical economic tradition. One of the universities that is the worst offender of this is our own Tilburg University.²

So why is this a problem, and how is it linked to the New Commons? The Neoclassical economic model argues that everyone is financially restrained and therefore has to make decisions based on their needs. They will then, rationally, make the choice that will give them the most 'utility'. Econometrics is a study concerned finding the relationship between economic values. A friend of ours, studying econometrics at Tilburg, a study where they only apply Neoclassical models, summarized it as such: "you maximize utility functions, remove everything that isn't rational from the model, apply some mathematics and you are done, easy as pie." Human behavior however isn't purely rational. Behavioral economics has taught us that there are many more factors that come into play when making decisions than achieving maximum utility.³ So we have a model that doesn't accurately represent reality, which is currently immensely popular.

Furthermore, this Neoclassical model has been radically accepted in all facets of human life. Many decisions for the futures of persons are summarized and optimized into rational components leaving less space for what a person potentially wants and using this inaccurate model to project what they 'must do'. Large ideas or paradigms of thought

which were created to bolster human production and organize the masses to make them productive have seeped into the alluvium of our collective human existence. We are not arguing against capitalism or the value of economics, all that needs to be done is to take a step back and reevaluate whether economics has truly only been used as a tool or whether it has become a virus that has overtaken human thought. Some theorists have observed economic thinking being utilized to quantify the value of human life, balancing them in relation to the bodily worth of the masses.⁴ The consequences of this stretch far beyond what the initial goal of economics is as a mode of efficient allocation of resources.

On the Pressures of Daily Life

Economics is a popular tool used to understand the world. For example, we determine whether doing something is 'worth' our time, balancing costs and benefits to concoct some sort of meaning relative to what we know. All the while 'worth' is central to all decisions we make as our time and capabilities become fleeting resources. We look at economics when making decisions about 'worth', putting our faith in what seems rational and what will maximize productivity for our ends. And whilst we'll be the first to advocate for economics when in need of the optimal exchange of resources, we are left with a feeling of unease when using economics to weigh decisions about what happens outside of our productivity. Let us first ask this question: why do we use economics to make decisions? We'd argue that it's because we seek happiness, and many of us believe having more productivity gets us to some widely understood happiness. Why does our generation go to school? Because we'd like a good job that pays for a nice house, ensures our quality of life, and personal mobility. However, it is important to ask: why do you need these things for our happiness? We've been shown throughout all of our lives that having a certain lifestyle leads to happiness and anything outside of it is not optimal. Brands and companies have weaponized psychology, turning it into marketing, to trick us into working to afford a lifestyle that you've been told you require to be happy. In the words of Sean Parker, the former president of Facebook, "[Facebook is] exploiting vulnerability in human psychology."⁵

When looking at economic thinking in this light, it becomes apparent to us that it might not be the rational mode of thinking it is often deemed to be in this context. Everything within our lives has been worked into the framework of economic thinking to an extent that no longer takes into account more abstract and personal concepts such as purpose, meaning or satisfaction. Markets have become increasingly competitive, and with long term job stability disappearing workers have to market themselves to get a job. So it has become increasingly important to sell yourself, and to increase your personal value.

¹ It could of course also be argued that the 'hard' sciences are also constructed, this is not the point we're making.

² Max van Geuns, "De studie economie gaat maar moeizaam mee met de tijd" [The study of economics has trouble catching up to the modern day], NRC Handlebar, last modified September 5, 2021, accessed January 15, 2022. <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2021/09/05/de-studie-economie-gaat-maar-moeizaam-mee-met-de-tijd-a4057137/>

³ Joshua C. Teitelbaum and Kathryn Zeiler, *Research Handbook on Behavioral Law and Economics*, paperback edition. ed. (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2019).

⁴ See further the legacy of Michiel Foucault's theories on biopower and such as the "necropolitics" observed by Achille Mbembe.

⁵ "Sean Parker - Facebook Exploits Human Vulnerability (We Are Dopamine Addicts)," video, 2:19, YouTube, posted by Ewafa, November 11, 2017, accessed January 15, 2022. <https://youtu.be/R7jar4KgKxs/>

We as a society are invested in the ideals of meritocracy, this idea that those who have the best ideas and work the hardest should be rewarded the most. However contemporary economists such as Thomas Piketty show us that in this day and age how you are born often matters far more than how you perform throughout your life.⁶ The issue with a meritocratic system is then that whilst it tells people that success is dependent on hard work and good ideas, which are of course important in production, a lack of success is also the consequence of a lack of hard work and good ideas. This lack of success when measured against that of persons more fortunate puts immense pressure on individuals that believe in these ideas of productivity being tied to personal satisfaction and happiness.

If you combine these two ideas, it's necessary to market yourself and if you fail it is because you don't work hard enough. This self-determination is an impossible personal standard. One could argue that all success is derived from failure, however the only outcome possible in this kind of paradigm is perpetual dissatisfaction. Everything in your life has become important to your success, life now has problems looming around every corner with no satisfying end in sight.

Let's get back to Jack. He's an ambitious young man, a firm believer of meritocracy, he's also working hard as a bartender to help pay for his studies. Half a year into his first year however, COVID-19 hits. He loses his job, his income disappears but his courses keep going at the same pace. Jack attempts to be resilient as this, in his own calculations, is his only way 'forward', he finds a job delivering take-out and tries to keep up with his online courses. COVID however, doesn't leave, and over the years, Jack feels more and more out of touch with his studies, he hasn't been in a physical classroom with his fellow students for two years and his studying has been reduced to collecting credits. Initially he enrolled as he had interest in the field and also saw it as a way to increase his personal value and become capable of entering the workforce. However, as he has become more disconnected from his peers and professors, he has started to see his study as menial labor. This disconnect extends to how he exists in society as his social circle shrinks and he continues to attempt to match the pace of 'how things should be'. The thing that increases his personal value isn't in the online courses he has had to take. It's within his bachelor diploma which he'll get if he collects 180 ECTS. Jack, the economic thinker that he is, has then optimized passing his courses in as little time as possible, also since he's been having to work extra hours because his current job doesn't pay that well. He's becoming increasingly depressed and faced with hardship after hardship his attempts at resilience have only made him feel worse. After all, he feels like he's doing everything he can, but he's still inevitably failing as he pushes himself, his only rational explanation being simply that he is not resilient enough.

⁶ Daniel Markovits, *The Meritocracy Trap: How America's Foundational Myth Feeds Inequality, Dismantles the Middle Class, and Devours the Elite* (New York: Penguin Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2020).

It's this overtly economic thinking that has pushed many of us into an uncomfortable perpetual migraine, constantly attempting to fight against systemic problems whilst looking at ourselves for impossible solutions.

On the Essential Character of the Arts, High and Low

Maxim Februari is a Dutch jurist, public intellectual and artist. He argues that one of the many victims of both COVID-19 and this ever-growing economic thinking is the arts. Now, let's get this out of the way, when we refer to the arts, this isn't an elitist notion, he says: "Art must be viewed in the broadest possible sense, singing, dancing, telling stories! All of it is art. It is a necessity of our lifeform; it is part of what makes us human." Now, he says, "the economy should facilitate the arts," and we'd agree.⁷ The economy should facilitate that which we find to be important in life, be it art, practicing sports or having the opportunity to go out for a walk in a park. Now, unfortunately, the arts often have to facilitate the economy, projects have to be economically viable. We would even argue that it isn't just the arts that facilitate the economy. Within this country we have repeatedly seen calls from politicians to 'save the economy', relieving it from COVID-19 measures. Does the economy enable politics, or does our political system serve the economy? In his first year, Jack often went to the pub with his friends, talking, boasting with extravagant stories or dancing deep into the night. COVID measures have taken this away from him and he's growing increasingly frustrated with himself and with life. He feels as if he doesn't have any way to relax and bond with friends after another hard day of work like he used to.

The arts are an essential need for us humans! Why isn't it treated like one? The human species have developed not just in terms of economic growth, we are cultural, hypersocial, curious beings. We tell stories, we shape our surroundings with them, we express our love and our comradery through dance, we marvel at cinema. So much of life's depth and beauty can be found in the arts, high and low. As a result of this economic thinking the arts have become subservient to the economy, starving us from its fruits.

Where to go From Here?

So what is happening, and where do we go from here? Let's check in with Jack.

Jack, once an ambitious, motivated, and happy student has seen himself change into an entity of production. His worldview has changed to the point where he believes his lack of success is purely a consequence of his own lack of action, he's evaluating all his actions in the light of efficiency. Jack, like many of us, isn't doing well psychologically.⁸ He's

⁷ "Zomerradio: filosoof en schrijver Maxim Februari," July 2021, in Brainwash, podcast, audio, 46:15, accessed January 15, 2022. <https://open.spotify.com/episode/2K2PW87A1Xf98fEi4GLeHX?si=0454843c146e4212/>

⁸ "Mentale gezondheid in eerste helft 2021 op dieptepunt" [Mental health at a low point in the first half of 2021], Centraal Bureau van Statistiek, last modified September 3, 2021, accessed January 15, 2022. <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2021/35/mentale-gezondheid-in-eerste-helft-2021-op-dieptepunt/>

the consequence of committing to an unhealthy ideology in a time that makes all of us more vulnerable. Whilst what he knows and expects collapses his future becomes even more uncertain, he cannot cling to simple and personal pleasures and must put himself at risk of burning out or worse. The current societal stance towards resilience must be individually assessed to avoid personal collapse as we become more alienated from what we wish our lives to be like.

We've internalized an economic mentality, not just as individuals but as a society, that has completely taken over our lives. Our generation has to be better than the generations before it, our futures depend on it. It's within our education, it's within our perception of self, it's within our culture. It is completely inescapable because we've internalized these issues, because we've been taught to blame ourselves, it's completely inescapable because we've gotten out of touch with why we live life in the first place. COVID-19 has enabled us to reflect upon the world, to improve the world for the better but instead we have kept going at the very same pace. We are writing towards New Commons that will help release us from the toxic hold of Neoliberal thinking.

For healthy New Commons to have any chance of success we must reevaluate our relationship with education. Education should not just be a way to increase your personal value, education should be about growing your knowledge so you can spend your time on matters that give you purpose. We should reevaluate our relation to purpose itself, and it should be disconnected from lifestyles. Purpose comes from a sense of need, from a necessity. We should ask ourselves, 'what do I want to do in between waking up and going to bed?' Because, ultimately, that is all that life comes down to and it's our job to go and find something meaningful to do in between. We should reevaluate our relationship with art, understanding it's necessity in life, taking it out of the economic domain. And perhaps most importantly, we should reevaluate our relationship with ourselves. We are not products. We are not numbers in a model. We are not rational.

Spending a lot of time on his own after being burned out by his life, Jack starts looking back at the past couple of years and starts wondering what changed. Where has his passion gone, his motivation, his purpose? Then, it hits him. He sees a tragedy unfold in front of his eyes as he starts realizing that it was his perception of resilience that broke him.

He realizes it's his obsession with efficiency that cost him his longevity. He realizes that it's his focus on credits that has cost him his passion for his work.

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6. A Post-Pandemic Solution for Universities: Moving Towards Hybrid Education

Nina van Rosmalen

The COVID-19 virus emerged in China in late 2019; a global pandemic ensued. Countries all over the world took precautions to stop the spread of COVID-19, some of which had immense impacts on society. Universities were forced to stop any and all on-campus activities (Cicha et al., 2021). This called for a fast and flexible solution: online teaching. Zoom, a large platform used to hold meetings, saw its' profits rise more than 300% in 2020 compared to 2019, partially due to its' usage in online education (BBC, 2021). After two years of universities almost solely offering online education, it is clear that it has had its effects on students. Approximately half of higher education students experienced more study-related stress than before the pandemic, even more so than teenagers (CBS, 2022). Still, I argue that this period of online education has proven helpful in shaping future education.

The last two or so years have been characterised by restrictions on our daily lives. Working from home, online education, and closed malls and restaurants are amongst those restrictions. It is no surprise that young adults perceive the last few years negatively (CBS, 2022). They miss their daily activities, such as going out or practicing sports. These kind of activities have been found to increase psychological well-being and decrease stress (Luis et al., 2021). Yet, they are the exact kind of activities that have become inaccessible due to many governments' COVID-19 restrictions.

Students in particular struggle during this time. Their social lives have come to a halt, and they are left to fend for themselves with regards to education. After all, online education provides lesser opportunities for social interactions, quiet study places, and lacks structure (Cicha et al., 2021). Chakraborty et al. (2021) found that students globally report mental health issues, lack of motivation, and trouble concentrating in online settings. For instance, the increased workload experienced during online courses caused extra stress (Cicha et al., 2021). Some students may feel obliged to put in the extra work, while others were unable to work on school and incurred student debts and delays as a

result. Research further suggests that academic performances have lowered as a result of online education (Hendriksen et al., 2021).

However, there are some important aspects to take into consideration regarding these findings. Students of lower socio-economic status, or living in remote areas with subpar internet connections, may have greater trouble attending online classes (Chakraborty et al., 2021). International students were advised by their universities to return home, though many were already forced to do so after losing their income due to the lockdown (Cicha et al., 2021). This undoubtedly affected their lives—in terms of work, study and social life. It seems, then, that online education may disproportionately affect students from less fortunate backgrounds, as well as international or exchange students.

Still, online education does not always negatively affect students. In fact, many studies present contradictory results regarding students' academic performance, anxiety, and stress (Hendriksen et al., 2021). This means that the impact of online education may vary. Take for example students with social anxiety. Social anxiety makes persons fearful of interacting with others, often avoiding interactions altogether for a fear of being rejected or made fun of (Khan et al., 2021). This means that, with online education, their interactions are limited even further. It may halt their treatment process if they are not exposed to fearful situations that can help them learn how to deal with their social anxiety. Moreover, online education may contribute to the use of safety behaviours—that is, certain behaviours that help them in difficult situations, which may include turning off the camera or not talking in online classes. Though this may decrease anxious feelings, it usually does not last long, and is generally considered unhealthy if used frequently (Khan et al., 2021). Resuming on-campus education may then be too much exposure to fearful situations at once and cause increased stress. Yet, online education may also be beneficial for students with social anxiety. Take Zoom sessions for instance. The chat function makes it easy to relatively anonymously ask questions compared to on-campus teaching. Further, it may be easier to attend online classes because it does not require any social contact, which could redirect their focus on academic achievement instead of worrying about social aspects (Khan et al., 2021). The scope of effects seems to depend heavily on individual characteristics.

Next to negative or ambiguous consequences of online education, it may also have a positive impact on students. For example, it prevents large expenses for travel and residence (Maatuk et al., 2021). Moreover, it makes following classes alongside a job or raising children more accessible, because lectures can be viewed at one's own pace (Maatuk et al., 2021). This increases academic chances for lifelong and adult students (Raes et al., 2020).

Of course, students are not the only ones affected by the switch to online education. Though it has been in use for more than 20 years, the extent of its' usage during the pandemic was new for students and professors alike. Professors at Twente University

were given just a week to prepare for online teaching following the first lockdown (de Boer, 2021). Not only was there an incredibly short period of time to switch to online teaching, not all professors were digitally apt enough to provide such education (Cicha et al., 2021). Even so, universities were adamant on upholding their high educational quality throughout the pandemic. Although De Boer (2021) found that educational quality lacked behind during the first few months of the lockdown, most professors were able to adjust quickly and improve their digital abilities (Cicha et al., 2021). Still, developing such skills while simultaneously preparing classes and dealing with a global pandemic proved difficult. Recording lectures for students to watch online, something many professors implemented, took considerably more time than on-campus lectures (Cicha et al., 2021). Those opting for real-time virtual lectures were unable to observe students' responses like they were used to. They, too, miss the interaction on-campus education provides (Cicha et al., 2021).

Though the pandemic has demonstrated just how resilient students and professors are, the disadvantages of online education appear to be quite large. It seems, then, that online education is not here to stay. However, one of the largest shortcomings of online education is its' lack of social interactions (Maatuk et al., 2021). These few years have shown more than ever how much face-to-face interactions matter in our daily lives. Luis et al. (2021) reported that self-care activities, including community and leisure activities, are most important in regulating stress. These are the exact kind of activities that students do not have access to due to COVID-19 restrictions. It appears then that much of the stress experienced during times of online education may diminish once restrictions disappear.

Even if restrictions lessen, online education alone may not uphold people's expectations of being a student, nor expected quality of education. Nonetheless, online education would not have been implemented so broadly without such restrictions. While it caused a (perhaps too) fast implementation that left some things to be desired, and its' sole use left students further socially isolated in times where social contact was already limited, it seems that some lessons can be taken from this experience. Online education in its' current form does not seem to provide adequate opportunities—both social and academic—for students. Yet, a hybrid form of education, combining online and on-campus education, may prove effective. Raes et al. (2020) argue for synchronous education. Hereby, students can follow classes in real-time, both on-campus and online. This keeps social interactions between students and professors in place, which is beneficial particularly for students unable to come to campus. For example, students struggling with illness or those joining classes from abroad. Moreover, when a student does not feel well enough to come to campus, following a class online may be helpful in order to avoid missing important information (Raes et al., 2020). This makes education available to a broader population and offers the flexibility that many need in the current situation. Though such changes to the educational approach would be more demanding for professors, the current pandemic has shown that digital abilities improve quickly with practice (de Boer,

2021; Raes et al., 2020). Besides off-campus participation, professors would still be able to give lectures as they were used to before COVID-19, which is a vast improvement from the black squares they are lecturing to right now. Still, other ways to implement hybrid education exist. From small-scale break-out rooms, widely used in Zoom settings, to recordings of lectures which may later be discussed on-campus (Raes et al., 2020), the latter of which particularly suitable for working students and lifelong students. Further research and implementation may show which approaches are most beneficial.

It is clear that hybrid education has the potential to increase opportunities for diverse groups of people to follow education. Without COVID-19, online education may not have been seen as an alternative to on-campus education. It proved promising for lifelong, working, and chronically ill students, but lacks a critical social component. On-campus education, on the contrary, contributes positively to social interactions, but does not provide the flexibility required in a fast-changing society. Perhaps, hybrid education can be a viable alternative to both approaches: the best of both worlds, in a post-COVID world.

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7. Renaissance

Ombeline Siraudeau

She lies in a sea of darkness, a dim light shining over her round face. She's burning. The pack of ice placed on her forehead to cool her down is melting. Her once colorful cheeks have now turned a faint shade of sand, and her deep blue gaze has become empty. Her expressions are hollow. She has trouble breathing. Her lungs can no longer fill with air. She tries to inhale. Exhale. Her efforts are scarce. She's alone. She's tired. She's suffocating.

Our planet is sick.

Her symptoms are clear; she has COVID. Her loved ones weren't careful enough. They played with fire. And they burned her. In the emergency room, the doctors are unequivocal [1]: she caught COVID from climate change [2]. This is a wake-up call. Or is it?

As our home faces an unprecedented climate crisis of which the consequences are a pandemic, and of which the cause is unequivocally us, we have reached a tipping point:

How do we heal our planet?

As lockdowns were lifted, as cafes and restaurants and theaters reopened, as we could gradually hug our loved ones—we all experienced within our core the feeling of *Renaissance*.¹ This pandemic is giving us a long-awaited opportunity for us to rebirth a new world; inclusive, fair, engaged, diverse, caring, green, slow, meaningful. But how do we do this?

That's quite simple. Let's start by acting. So far, too many of us have been passive; to the point where we've ironically become the only species to actively study and document our own imminent extinction, all the while doing nothing significant to avoid it.

It's time to turn passivism into activism.

And like plants grow from the earth, activists sprout from the ground. Already, across the world millions of activists have burgeoned. They've not only put forward their ideas to solve the current emergencies, but most importantly they have acted upon them.

¹ "Rebirth" in French

They've tried. They've failed. They've learned. They've adapted. They've teamed up. They've tried again. They've succeeded. Let this be our model to change our broken systems.

To reshape Growth. To replant our relationship with Nature. To redistribute Power. To recreate Care.

This essay will offer paths to rethink the way we live and interact with people and nature. It will lay out some (out of many) concrete solutions that governments, companies and citizens can implement to catalyze change.

To catalyze *Renaissance*.

Reshaping Growth

"So when I leave here on this earth, did I take more than I gave?"

Benjamin Hammond.

"I do not want to contribute to this model of society that has given money more importance than life. I am here to live, not to increase the GDP."

Pierre Rabhi.

As a global pandemic settled, and as lockdowns were imposed across borders, the world was forced to slow down. Factories closed, cars were left in parking lots, employees started to work from home, and our usually hectic ways of life were deeply disrupted.

This forced deceleration made many of us realise the excesses of our lifestyles, and pushed us to settle with less, to reconnect with what mattered [3]. Yet, on every news channel, from the mouth of most of our politicians, the primary concern in this health crisis was clear: in a world that's slowed down, how do we maintain *growth*?

But it's important to stop and think. Growth of what?

Of money? Of power? Of things? Of greed?

Of slavery? Of inequality? Of wars? Of famine?

Growth. Growth. Growth.

Bigger. Better. Stronger. Quicker.

Repeating here what has been known for a long time: we cannot have unlimited growth in a limited planet [4]. Everything we have, everything we are: our past, our present, our future. Everything since the beginning of times and until the very end, is contained in

this fragile globe of a planet. The ground under our feet and the atmosphere over our heads constitute the boundaries of our world [5]. The sky is quite literally the limit.

Earth is both our womb and our tomb.

As we exploit our planet more and more—as we dig and pump and drill, as we *take, take, take*—we ignore these limits. But the pandemic came to remind us of their existence. We are attaining these limits very fast; our forests do not have time to regenerate, our biodiversity is shrinking, our oceans are acidifying, and our biogeochemical cycles are destabilised [6]. All so we can have more stuff, *more, more, more*. All in the name of growth.

As we *take take take*, we also take time away from our earth. Time it would need to regenerate. Time it would need to adapt to the changes we are causing. As time sifts away—both for us and our planet—we continue to exploit, and to produce more than we need.

Well, it is *time* for us to rethink how we define growth. It is time for us to rebirth a fair, inclusive, diverse growth, based on wellbeing and meaning, rather than monetary gains.

Across the world, activists of all kinds—citizens, NGOs, public servants, entrepreneurs, companies—have offered their ideas and resources to reshape and redefine growth. Since the 1990s, economists like Marilyn Waring or Philip Lawn have argued against the use of the GDP to measure growth, introducing, instead, other indicators – like the GPI - which value human and environmental wellbeing over monetary gains. In 2012, world-renowned economist Kate Raworth introduced the idea of Doughnut Economics, a model aiming to become a new basis for a society that respects the limits set by our planet, all the while meeting the needs of all [7]. Across the globe, cities like Amsterdam or Berlin have adopted this model to guide their future policies and projects [8]. Citizens across the world have also done the *very best they could* and changed their lifestyles and consumption behaviors to buy (much) less, but better [9]. For the past few decades, millions of social entrepreneurs have also unveiled the potential of the Social Economy—enterprises which base their internal operations on principles of solidarity and social utility—to redesign a just future [10]. They aim to put people and planet above profit and instill meaning back into our economy. Throughout the pandemic, Social Economy enterprises stepped up when the State was unable or unwilling to address certain issues, and provided concrete, rapid and local responses to urgent issues. This alternative economic model is evidence that inclusive, green, and sustainable growth is possible, given only that we redefine what we mean by *growth*.

So, let's aim for Growth of meaning. Growth of activism. Growth of fair labor. Growth of sustainable practices. Growth of kindness and care. Growth of recognition. Growth of teamwork. Growth of equality. Growth of knowledge, but most importantly:

Growth of action.

Let's do *the very best we can*.

Replanting Our Relationship With Nature

"The most scandalous thing in scandal, is that we get used to it"

Simone de Beauvoir

"We don't need to go to Mars, we need to return to earth"

Willow Defebaugh

"When the last tree is cut, the last fish is caught, and the last river is polluted; when to breathe the air is sickening, you will realize, too late, that wealth is not in bank accounts and that you can't eat money."

Cree Indians proverb

As we turn into the world's most diligent pests—endlessly exploiting nature and destroying biodiversity—we've (un)knowingly caused the very pandemic we're struggling to get rid of [2]. Biodiversity provides us with a number of life-support services that we often undervalue; a stable climate, clean water, a protective atmosphere, fertile soils and a healthy environment [11]. All forming the very basis of our physical and mental wellbeing.

Natural ecosystems regulate themselves through diversity; a fragile spider web connecting millions of species together and forming the very foundation of life [11]. When we grow genetically modified plants and monocultures, we kill diversity. When we raise single-specie livestock, we kill diversity. When we use pesticides and herbicides, we kill diversity. When we cut down acres of tropical forests, we kill diversity. When we (un)knowingly transport pests across oceans, we kill diversity. When we kill diversity, we prevent ecosystems from self-regulating and regenerating [12]. We impose upon ourselves terrible disasters; droughts, floods, wildfires.

And Pandemics.

When biodiversity plummets, chances for pandemic rise [12]. Bird flu, swine flu, H1N1, Ebola, HIV, Chikungunya - all epidemics that have been transmitted from animals to humans [2]. As we kill diversity, we create the perfect conditions for pandemics to arise. When in 1970, the World Health Organization counted about one new infectious disease every fifteen years, it now counts about one to five, *per year* [2]. In a sense, we were "lucky" that the pandemic we drew out of the box was COVID-19, instead of something much deadlier, like Ebola [2]. Yet, we're not out of draws. If we continue to destroy our natural ecosystems, we're headed right for another—potentially much more destructive—round.

The current pandemic has sounded the alarm; we urgently need to preserve biodiversity, regenerate our lands and oceans, and stop interfering with the fragile balance of our ecosystems.

Already, many solutions have been put in place. Across the globe, thousands of farms have turned to new agricultural methods. Some have faded out of pesticides—known to be huge destructors of land (and human) health—instead shifting to organic methods [13]. Others have decided to go further, and adopt permaculture or agroforestry, a way of using the very balance and diversity of nature to grow more resilient, nourishing, and varied plants [14]. Cities across the world have also begun to reintegrate nature within their core, offering citizens their own gardens to cultivate (like the city of Tulle [14]) or increasing green spaces and bike lanes (like the city of Copenhagen [15]). In Germany, many forest schools have emerged to accompany children's development within nature [16]. In South America, indigenous communities have risen up against deforestation [17]. In Africa, a "green great wall" is being grown across the entire width of the continent, to combat desertification, famine, conflict and insecurity [18]. Change in favour of nature is possible. All it takes is to take that first step.

So, let's relocalise food production. Let's regenerate our ecosystems. Let's stop deforestation. Let's educate. Let's grow food in harmony with nature. Let's stop throwing away. Let's learn from indigenous communities. Let's turn our cities green. Let's give nature the time and space it needs to regenerate. Let's reconnect with our world.

Redistributing Power

The most common way people give up their power, is by thinking they don't have any"

Alice Walker

"Inclusion is not about trying to fix the person so they can conform, but about trying to fix the system so it can include"

Anonymous

The COVID-19 pandemic hit everyone differently. Being a woman or a man, rich or poor, from a developing or developed country, with or without a job, with or without health-care, with or without children, with or without a home—affected everyone differently [19].

Yet, those who governed and made decisions in many countries were mostly from one same group. White. Wealthy. Older. Male. Thus, many decisions failed to take into consideration the unique issues that groups that didn't fit these categories experienced. Because of our differences, because of societal expectations and norms, we all have different experiences of life, and of existing problems. This makes policies and decisions (un)knowingly discriminatory and undoubtedly distributive [20].

For climate change issues, the situation is very similar; there is an enormous problem of inclusion and power distribution within decision-making [21]. When France decided to impose a green tax on fuels in 2018, those living in city centers who rarely used their car were less impacted than those living in the countryside who used their cars daily [22]. In most cities, when transportation networks are designed, they are imagined with the travel patterns of men in mind, resulting in inadequate networks for women, who often use different itineraries [23].

But how do we build more inclusive and diverse decision-making spheres?

Power is often seen as an abstract concept, disconnected from the reality of the world. But where does power lie? In people. People make up our governments. People produce and people consume. People vote. People spin the wheel of our economy, our politics, our society. People exploit and destroy. But people also build and replenish. People give meaning to life, but also give value to things.

It all comes down to people. Power resides in people. And in order for us to tackle an issue that affects all in different ways, we need power to be redistributed in the *diversity of people*.

Across the world already, solutions have been put forward to create more diverse and inclusive decision-making spaces. In many countries, gender quotas in both public and private sectors have been implemented. In 2011, Sweden introduced an initiative that required its municipalities to re-evaluate all their policies through a gendered perspective [24]. Across the globe, millions of citizens have also started to remodel power, through actions they hold within themselves. Voting. Participating. Holding accountable. Electing. Protesting. Engaging. Joining. Volunteering. Speaking out. Including. Listening. Learning. Because when the world is silent, even only one voice can make a difference [25].

So, let's be more diverse in our governments and in our governance. Let's be more inclusive of people from different backgrounds, with different life experiences. Let's implement participatory processes in our projects. Let's be more empathetic, more caring, and more daring. Let's not see political will as political risk but as an opportunity for change. As citizens, let's protest. Let's vote. Let's hold office. Let's hold our leaders accountable. Let's engage in politics because politics are our everyday lives. Let's resist to indifference.

Recreating Care

"The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members."

Mohandas Gandhi

During the first lockdowns, millions of people came together to applaud frontline workers. The pandemic made us realise how fundamental they were in keeping us alive and in caring for us in difficult times, all under unimaginable conditions. As the pandemic settled, as the sprint transformed into a marathon, and as no one saw the end of this crisis, gradually care workers were pushed back into the shadows. Yet, they continued to keep us alive and to care for us, still under unimaginable conditions.

If anything, the pandemic has highlighted the fundamental importance of both paid and unpaid care work—which is overwhelmingly undertaken by women [26]. It has also highlighted the immense lack of recognition our society has for this work, despite relying entirely on it for its functioning.

Doctors. Nurses. Midwives. Elderly or Disability Care Workers. Therapists. Teachers.

All these paid care workers were fundamental in ensuring that the needs of the most vulnerable were met during the pandemic. They provided care, comfort, human contact, in addition to the basic requirements of their jobs. They worked, they overworked. They've been underpaid, overstrained. Yet they continued and continue to care for us.

Mothers. Wives. Daughters. Others.

All these unpaid care workers were fundamental in ensuring the needs of their relatives were met and our households were running smoothly during the pandemic. They provided care, comfort, human contact, in addition to their jobs, their individual lives, and their own personal responsibilities. They cared for our children, our elderly, our disabled. They cleaned our houses, kept our lives organized, did the groceries, kept in touch with loved ones. They conducted work so invisible that it took a pandemic to slightly uncover its existence. Yet, work so fundamental that if it were to disappear, the stability of our societies would crumble.

Today, more than ever, it's become necessary to not only recognize the importance of care work, but also to offer decent pay and working conditions for it.

Thousands of solutions exist. In Finland, paid and non-transferable parental leave of 480 days per parent, allows both parents to be fully implicated in raising their children, reducing gender inequalities related to care [27]. In Iceland, the governments experimented with a 4-day workweek, prioritizing human wellbeing [28]. Many companies have also become more flexible on working hours, accepting remote working, allowing parents to leave early to pick up children from school or banning meetings before 9am and after 6pm [29]. Countries that increased recognition for their healthcare workers have observed undeniable positive impacts over the whole of their societies [30].

So, let's put wellbeing over productivity. Let's increase pay and reduce working hours for our healthcare workers. Let's recognize and value unpaid care work. Let's make more time to connect with one another. Let's not forget the most vulnerable members of our society. Most importantly, let's care more.

Conclusion

"A vibrant, fair and regenerative future is possible. Not when thousands of people do climate justice perfectly, but when millions do the [very] best they can"

Xiye Bastida

As our home faces an unprecedented climate crisis of which the consequences are a pandemic, and of which the cause is unequivocally us, we have reached a tipping point:

How do we heal our planet?

The Answer? We catalyze *Renaissance*.

Renaissance of Growth. Renaissance of Nature. Renaissance of Power. Renaissance of Care. If we manage to adapt so quickly to a global pandemic, if our scientists managed to find a vaccine so fast, if our leaders managed to impose decisions so efficiently, surely, we can act to create a new world. Fast. Now.

The word most used in this essay is *Let's*. It's intended to be a word of hope, of encouragement, of action. Yet, it's impersonal, detached and targets no one in particular. I encourage you—reader, whoever you are—to replace it by “me”. Because “Let's” isn't a person, it isn't an actor. You. You are. So you—and me, and us—we're the ones who can truly change our world. Right now. Today.

You.

It starts with small steps. Ask yourself: what can I change in my daily life? What can I change in my family? At home? At work? In the streets? In my commitments and undertakings? In everything I do, every place I go? What can I do, to make this world a better place? How can I incorporate care for our planet and our people in every aspect of my life? How can I listen better? What can I do, to do my part?

And then do it.

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8. Solidarity in Times of Climate Change

Pranav Yadav, Defne Aksit

“In nature, nothing exists alone.”

Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*

Introduction

COVID-19 is an era-defining health crisis that is to influence the futures of many generations to come. The disturbance it caused to global society has unearthed many flaws in the way our world is run that were previously either overlooked or hidden under the busy flow of everyday life. The novelty of the systemic shock the virus has created is slowly fading as the world enters its third year of the pandemic. As the dust settles, New Commons emerge from it to set the stage for our future way of life. This essay focuses on solidarity as the New Commons of crisis management that arise from the response to COVID-19 and applies the learned insights to the other pressing global crisis that humanity is currently going through: climate change. Humanity will have to foster solidarity in each form—among groups, on the international stage and between generations—to optimise its response to the impending climate catastrophe.

Intergroup Solidarity

COVID-19 has uncovered deep fractures in the fabric of society. The science behind the vaccine and the measures against the virus divided many societies in half, creating intergroup conflicts such as anti-lockdown protests and a spiked increase in the hate crimes against Asian-Americans (NBC, 2020). Such intergroup conflict is detrimental to crisis mitigation. Moving forward, the New Commons of crisis management should be the opposite: intergroup solidarity.

Assuming intergroup conflict is the opposite of intergroup solidarity, we need to know the mechanisms behind it before we can solve it. Crowd psychology lends insights from the Social Identity Theory to understand this phenomenon. Intergroup conflict is driven by what psychologists call an *intergroup bias*. It denotes an individual's tendency to favour positive assessment of people belonging to the same social group as the individual over the so-called 'Others' who belong to different social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

To the extent that an individual identifies with their in-group, they engage in social comparison with other groups to increase the social standing of their in-group, sometimes

at the cost of harming the out-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This social comparison, in times of pandemic, has spilled into intergroup conflict. In order to foster solidarity instead of conflict, unfavourable comparisons between groups need to be reduced. How can we do that in the context of climate change?

The Others of climate change can be conceptualised as a rapidly increasing group of climate migrants. In this context, 'Us' would be the people of the host country. World Bank estimates 216 million people to be displaced due to climate change by 2050 (Rigaud et al., 2018). Although the majority of these displacements will be internal, the accelerating dynamics of climate change is forcing cross-border migration with an increasing frequency (US Government, 2021). This increases the chances of intergroup conflict as cultures clash and countries struggle to cope with the influx. Such intergroup conflict can deteriorate the efforts against climate change by politicising human suffrage and playing into the hands of the far-right parties by giving them a convenient 'problem area' to divert the attention from ambitious climate policies, which they have historically been against.

To reduce the potentially conflictual comparisons between Us and Others, the framing surrounding migration needs to undergo a drastic change. Migrants and refugees are often used as political tools to sway public opinion. There exists a perpetual suspicion that refugees are hopping borders for the sake of it or are somehow cheating the asylum system to choose the country with the best social benefits, a phenomenon known as 'asylum shopping' (Reuters, 2019). Instead of an image clouded with fear and distrust, climate migrants should be framed as they really are: people driven to a desperate flight across borders after exhausting every other possibility to remain in their homeland (Yadav, 2020).

Here the grander ethical perspective can help propagate this framing: poor countries contribute the least amount of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere, yet they are the ones suffering the most disastrous effects of climate change (Sommer, 2021). Rich countries, on the other hand, have the highest historical accumulation of emissions that are directly responsible for the rapidly deteriorating environmental conditions in the third-world countries. They also yield disproportional power in the international arena. This skewed power relation can be observed in COP26, where the clauses detailing divestment from fossil fuels were watered down by the pressures of the power-rich countries (BBC, 2021). Against this backdrop, one can argue that climate migration represents the consequences of the first-world's actions. Therefore, they have an ethical responsibility to adapt and accommodate.

This accommodation requires the admission of xenophobic socio-political structures that still prevail in the Global North. Intergroup solidarity cannot prosper in a society where the discriminated is blamed for their own discrimination. A human centric approach to migration is required to put the human lives above political ideology. The

consequences of climate change are felt too disproportionately across the globe to call the crisis the 'Great Equaliser', but a rapidly warming planet does not recognise borders, either. Soon enough, the defining feature of the Us in-group will not be race, skin colour, or ethnicity—it will be the shared experience of the devastating consequences of natural disasters. As our planet increasingly turns against us, intergroup solidarity will not be an option but a requirement to weather the storm together.

Global Solidarity

The panorama of human history shows that the world has grown relatively peaceful over the centuries (Pinker, 2011). After the two world wars, the threat of nuclear warfare meant the cost of wars and the destruction they caused far exceeded any material gains that could be derived from them. As the world started to co-exist, free trade emerged as the norm and the cost of staying in a closed economy became too expensive. With the rise of globalisation, the world was connected in a web of international supply chains on the economic front and the Internet on the digital front. This interconnectedness led to prosperity for many, increasing the volume of trade and wealth by discouraging conflict – peace was good for trade and consequently, the world grew smaller.

The other side of the medallion, however, shows the ugly face of an interconnected world: its vulnerability to global crises. The high level of interdependence between countries means the world is much more vulnerable to systemic shocks than it was a couple decades ago. If there is a failure in one point of the supply chain, it now has the potential to be felt on the other side of the map. A supply crisis in Australia, and the world doesn't have enough Lithium for batteries. An epidemic breaks out in a city in east China, and it only needs a couple months before it takes over the world.

COVID-19 spread at an unprecedented rate, exemplifying how an increase in interconnectedness increases the probability of one nation's crisis to propagate globally. Its spread was aided by the my-country-first mentality of the world. Nations squabbled over healthcare supplies, rich countries hoarded enough vaccine orders to cover their entire population multiple times over (The Guardian, 2021) while poorer countries barely had enough doses to vaccinate their health workers (Dyer, 2020). This lack of global solidarity has prolonged the pandemic indefinitely as we come to understand that we are dependent on each other, but we are not working together. This is a mistake that the world cannot afford to make twice. In the face of me-first mentality of the pandemic, global solidarity emerges as the part of New Commons of climate mitigation. After its failure during the pandemic, how can it be fostered in climate change response?

Defining global solidarity is the first step. Climate change is a multi-faceted planetary problem that touches upon many aspects of society, therefore multiple operationalisations of solidarity in climate change response are possible. This essay suggests the following. The nations of the world have two main strategies in the fight against climate change: adaptation and mitigation. Adaptation refers to a country's undertakings to

adjust to the current and prospective adverse effects of climate change (European Commission, 2021). Mitigation, on the other hand, refers to the planet-wide efforts to reduce fossil fuel emissions and stabilise the levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere (NASA, 2022). Both of these strategies are necessary to combat the adverse effects of climate change. However, there is one vital difference between them: adaptation exclusively benefits the individual home country, whereas mitigation benefits the whole world. Therefore, one way to operationalise global solidarity in the context of climate change is to look at the extent of mitigation that countries engage in.

Here exists a dilemma. Mitigation is costly. It requires an upheaval of established indefinite growth-oriented economies (and perhaps even political systems) in order to significantly cut down on greenhouse gas emissions. If each country does it, it will be better for the collective. However, there exists a strong incentive for the individual countries to free-ride on others' efforts while continuing business-as-usual, thus delaying the colossal task of ditching fossil fuels and converting to a green economy. If each nation embraces this strategy, the world will collectively suffer. This is what economists call a public goods dilemma (Hauert, 2005). The stable outcome of the dilemma is that everyone defects (i.e., does not mitigate). To make countries cooperate, incentives should be created.

These incentives can be built in two ways. The top-down approach argues for strong institutions which ensure the nations' adherence to their climate goals. Such adherence can only be fully expected to occur if the countries who fail to fulfil their climate promises suffer the consequences of non-compliance. Even the United Nations, the highest commanding inter-governmental institution on climate change, does not have the legal authority to sanction individual countries who fall short of their goals. This lack of accountability hinders progress. The most important incentive of the top-down approach would be to create accountability structures between countries. This accountability should not only involve future promises, but also include historical transgressions. Developed countries have historically been the worst polluters, yet it is the poor countries that suffer the consequences of climate change the most (Sommer, 2021). The burden distribution of reducing greenhouse gases should be equitably allocated among the developed and the developing countries. These reduction goals must be reached by scientific consensus and should not be subject to the whims of politics; as we all know, "carbon cycles do not follow political cycles" (UNDP, 2007, p. 11).

The bottom-up approach focuses on the power of grassroots movements within a country, and aims to increase their sway on governments' environmental policies. The biggest challenge to climate change mitigation is on the political front. Ambitious policy making is hindered by the fossil fuel industry's power hegemony over politics (Downie, 2019), aided by a decades long successful climate misinformation and denial campaign (Schlichting, 2013) and the short-term profit orientation of the financial market (Gunningham, 2019). These structures protect the status quo of business-as-usual and are tremendously difficult to break. For the governments to take serious climate action, they need to face

intense external pressure from their people. There should exist a large enough disturbance in each fraction of society to relay public dissatisfaction with the current policies. The pressure from the people should make it too difficult for politicians to turn a blind eye to every citizen's right to demand a habitable future.

The combination of the top-down and bottom-up approaches is necessary to reflect the urgency of mitigation policies. There does not exist a greater threat to our global survival than climate change. In order to combat it, holding out on mitigation should be made too costly for the countries, both on the national and international level.

Intergenerational Solidarity

The many modifications to our way of living required to defeat COVID-19 are aimed at keeping our community safe. We wear masks to keep others healthy, we vaccinate to slow the spread of the disease so that the hospitals do not overflow, we stay inside and quarantine so that the immune-compromised and the elderly are safe. These precautions are characterized by a strong emphasis on ethical responsibility, and there is a certain direction: the young generations are tasked with keeping the old generations healthy. The elderly were the first to receive the vaccine and the first to become fully vaccinated, meaning the younger generations had to spend more time inside, were exposed to the risk of catching the virus for longer, and were the last to enjoy the freedoms that come with receiving complete doses. Without these measures, the health systems across the world would be overrun, and the pandemic would be next to impossible to contain. Therefore, the last aspect of solidarity that emerge as the New Commons post-pandemic is intergenerational solidarity.

The concept of intergenerational solidarity is perhaps the most defining aspect of climate change mitigation. "Each generation receives a natural and cultural legacy in trust from previous generations and holds it in trust for future generations" (Weiss, 1992, p. 21). This legacy has two sides: it gives us the right to enjoy certain benefits from Earth's resources, while imposing on us the obligation to protect and hand over our planet to our antecedents. This puts us in a peculiar ethical standpoint, since we are 'sacrificing' things (the right to use up all the clean water and natural reserves) not just for people we won't know, but also, for people who might not exist, depending on our actions today (Parfit, 1984). How much of these resources do we owe? To how many generations do we owe? What is stopping us from using them all for our selfish gains? To respond adequately to climate change, we urgently need a new intergenerational solidarity ethic to balance responsibilities to future people against obligations to our contemporaries (Ellerich-Groppe et al., 2021).

One of the ways to conceptualise the ethics of intergenerational solidarity comes from economic theory: discounting. Discounting means converting a future value to its current equivalent (Prest, 2020), where current value is worth more than future value. A small discount rate means we value things in the future almost the same as today,

whereas a high discount rate means their value in the future is drastically reduced. So, what does it have to do with climate change?

Policy-makers take discounting as a reference point when making cost-benefit decisions about the future. Utilising a high discount rate in environmental policies is a practice directly against intergenerational solidarity. Consider the Nobel Prize laureate Nordhaus (2014), who calculated the discount rate in his famously cited DICE model as 3% using a positive approach. He computed the future cost of natural disasters and health damages that would be partly caused and amplified by climate change, which directly translates to putting a price tag on future human lives and suffering. He plugged them into an equation with other numerical values like economic growth, and discounted them using the above mentioned 3% rate. His conclusion was that pursuing the 1.5 degrees threshold as agreed upon in the Paris Agreement

is not worth the money. Proceeding business-as-usual is more cost-effective in the long run than spending funds on climate change mitigation. The disastrous consequences of climate change and the human suffering this model would bring about loses its gravity due to the sole reason that it has not happened yet.

The 3% discount rate is not an economic fact set in stone. Other models employ different rates; notable among them is the model by Nicholas Stern (2006) that calls for immediate climate action. His report was presented to the British Parliament in 2006. The rate he proposes is 0.1% (Varian, 2006). This is not because his measurements are less precise than Nordhaus', but because there exists an ethical responsibility for our generation to employ a threshold of harm we can cause to our planet. Currently, our unchecked use of natural resources is an infringement on future human rights to live with dignity. Intergenerational solidarity, therefore, guarantees more than just the prosperity of the next generation; it safeguards the continued existence of the human race.

Conclusion

Climate change and the subsequent threat of species extinction are among the biggest planetary emergencies humanity has ever faced. Its significance was temporarily overshadowed by the emergence of COVID-19 as the deadliest global pandemic in history. The virus has an edge over climate change in terms of its nature: its existence is unquestionable, its causes are known, and its consequences are immediate. Unlike the virus, all these three characteristics of the climate crisis have been disputed at one point in history or another. The time for disputes is now over. We are living through the decisive decade to limit the harm the changing climate can do to our planet, and we need every insight we can get. The pandemic provides us with the New Commons of crisis mitigation—solidarity among groups, nations and generations. None of these are optional to implement if we are to continue existing peacefully on a habitable planet with our grandchildren and many children to come.

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9. Transition Commons, a Paradigm Shift for Building the Future Now

Andreea-Daiana Zavate

“The human activity impact on the global environment and society indicates that our society is generating a series of future failures such as global warming, loss of biodiversity, and large amounts of outstanding debt in many countries that will severely influence future generations.”

(Saijo, 2020)

Our society is built on a fundamental inequality that becomes more fragile and exposed with every crisis, war, and pandemic. We are stuck between unresolved past issues and uncertainties about the future. Yet, some are affected more than others; some have more power to influence the course of things; some have close to nothing. The current dynamics put a lot of pressure on governments, businesses, and people to acknowledge the bleak effects of our exploitative actions and shift towards sustainable and inclusive solutions.

But this is easier said than done. Our history is not one of progress or prosperity for everyone, but one of domination and exploitation of few over many. The future failures will result from how we treated matters in the past and what we are doing about them presently. If the task is to build “New Commons” able to withstand waves of disruption, then our attention and energy need to flow into designing a transformative system—a “transition commons,” that is.

The creative project I advocate for is to give transition commons room to develop by building collaborative platforms between different systems, generations, and cultures. This systemic transformation cannot happen spontaneously. It requires a paradigm shift that begins with rethinking how we tell stories and define problems. The mechanism for the New Commons first needs to bridge the diverse and fragmented narratives into a coherent story that can lead to action and change. But it is overly optimistic to think that the paradigm can solve all the problems it defines (Kuhn, 2012). We need to be practical and optimize our problem-solving processes by refining our toolsets. This will help the paradigm integrate into human activities.

The essay will focus on narratives and tools as the two key pillars to shift and sustain the transition commons as a new paradigm. But first, I will explain what I mean by transition commons and why it should be a strategic priority in shaping any inclusive future.

Transition Commons

Transition commons are necessary links to integrate discrepant narratives in times of crisis.

Transition commons are experiments, practical approaches, processes that help society and individuals close the gap between the past (the old) and the future (the new). They act as a bridge to help strengthen our resolve and build a direct experience of change-making. Without them, we will fail to become resilient, accept change, and incorporate diversity and inclusivity into our thinking and activities.

I consider transition commons to be a special paradigm that relies on “systemic micro-shifts” made during the crisis. The micro-shifts were triggered by the inefficiency of the old and rigid systems that could no longer contain nor satisfy the current demands. However, we are not prepared enough to enter a new era. We are still in a pre-paradigm period “marked by frequent and deep debates over legitimate methods, problems, and standards of solution, though these serve rather to define schools than to produce agreement.” (Kuhn, 2012). Trending terms such as the “new normal” or the “New Commons” are useful at contrasting the present experience with the life before COVID-19 to track changes and create a sense of continuity beyond the pandemic. The danger appears when they overlook the “between space”—the main body of the story. During the past two years, we have learned to adapt, compromise, work remotely, shift priorities, and accept new social norms. These micro-shifts can have a long-lasting impact, but without a robust channel to integrate these changes, they will not hold for long enough to generate the solutions and the opportunities required for any New Commons to emerge.

The key benefit of implementing transition commons as a mechanism for social change is how it shifts our thinking of the pandemic. Instead of considering it an interruption of life as we knew it, we can appreciate the continuity of life after it and throughout. Once we begin to see things in this light, we can recognize the transition commons in the collaborative and experimental projects people are pushing forward:

Hybrid work and the increasing use of systemic tools for collaboration have proven to be efficient, dismantling biases around productivity, work dynamics, and professional interactions. In effect, a better work-life balance is in the early stages of development to provide fulfilling experiences based on agency, self-organization, and creativity.

The accelerated development of Web 3.0, along with better and more comprehensive digital solutions such as blockchain technology, the Metaverse, NFTs, DAOs, challenge the status quo set by physical reality, centralised governing bodies, and market econo-

my. They constitute the supporting blocks of the creative economy and the potential for digital enhancement in the social space.

Movements like The Great Resignation (or “The Great Recognition”) have made individuals rethink their values, priorities, and relationship to work, society, and the planet, demanding more from corporations and looking for a real and meaningful change.

What all these interventions have in common, besides the context of emergence, is the transformative and pro-active character: “Transformative system change is a process in which actors and institutions within a system are able to learn through this dynamic change process by collectively experimenting with technical and social innovations” (Palavicino et al., 2022).

Technologies mix with social processes to develop and calibrate solutions to current and future demands. Many businesses are showing resilience; governments also begin to listen and adopt transformative approaches. But for the most part, the path to the future is paved with gaps (short-term policies, isolated initiatives, class, and generation gaps). When the mechanism of transition commons is absent, transformation is met by a tenacious resistance to change. The measures and policies adopted throughout the pandemic fed into a polarized society that created more divisions. Preventive measures cannot create enough room for transition commons to develop and ensure life after crisis.

Transition commons supporting collaborative initiatives need to become a priority both locally and globally. It is far from easy to align and communicate clearly in a multi-faceted crisis, especially when we come from diverse backgrounds and have no shared platform for deep conversations or tools to turn our insights into actions. That is why we need first and foremost to understand the narrative for the transition commons.

A Narrative of the Transition Commons

The transition commons require people to work with multiple narratives that do not always converge into a unified story.

Stories play a central role in the evolution of cultures. We rely on stories to guide our relationships, understand reality, and negotiate social contracts (Kurtz, 2014). However, when the description of the world is superficial, it limits those relationships, obscuring our judgment. As a result, people struggle to understand each other’s motivations and actions as well as their own (Morgan, 2000). When narratives are not complex enough, tensions arise in society, and contradicting attitudes and behaviors follow. But before articulating a story that is compatible with the complexity of our realities, we need to address the worlds colliding together to build a coherent experience of knowledge. I use as a reference the concept of Karl Popper defines (Figure 1):

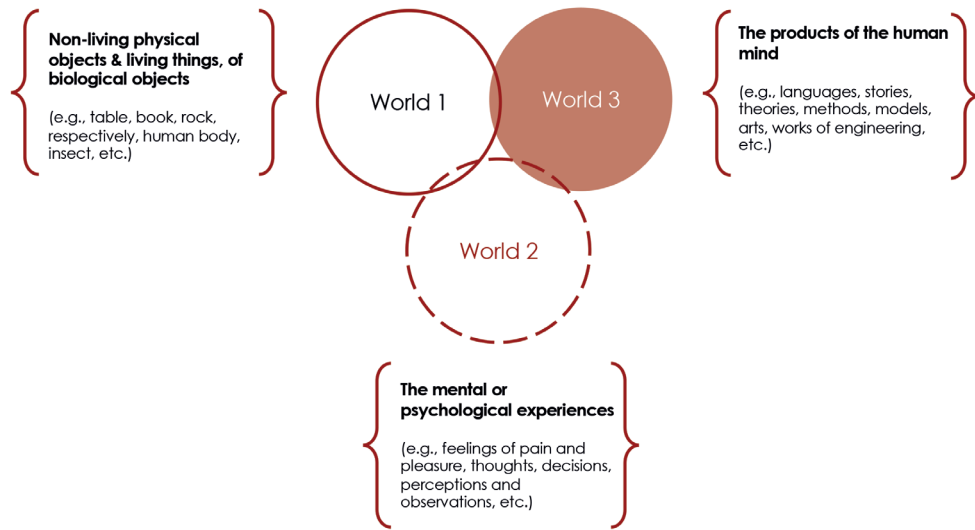


Figure 1. Illustration of the “Three Worlds” of Karl Popper.

Popper’s conceptualization reveals how the worlds intertwine and impact each other (Popper, 1978). Any paradigm shift needs to be validated by the exchange between these three worlds. A social change does not exist independently of the individual’s subjective experiences, nor does it serve what we might call an objective or material reality only. But the exchange is rarely uniform: social diversity takes a tremendous amount of time to integrate into institutions and systems. That makes individuals and smaller groups of people stay marginalized and excluded.

The narrative for the transition commons must address these gaps. Our disagreements begin with what I call “underdeveloped states of living.” They are the nuanced experience of many social realities that people navigate at different times, speeds, and levels of immersion. I use this metaphor to emphasize the irregular exposure and assimilation of narratives each of us undergoes. If the “New Commons” become the reality of choice, these states need to play a role in designing their blueprint. The three states of living – social, virtual, and mental – overlap and construct our given realities (Table 1). When the states are ignored and not made explicit, we live in partial realities.

If the goal is to build resilience against future crises, we can pair the three worlds and three states to create bridging narratives that people can navigate, keep track of change, and communicate (Figure 2). Without addressing complexity or questioning what we take for granted, we will run into the same vicious circle that heightens states of crisis. The future stories need to connect with the past and the present. It takes a collective effort to grow consciously into new behaviours, and it will not happen naturally. The next step into sustaining the transition commons is the human activity through transition tools.

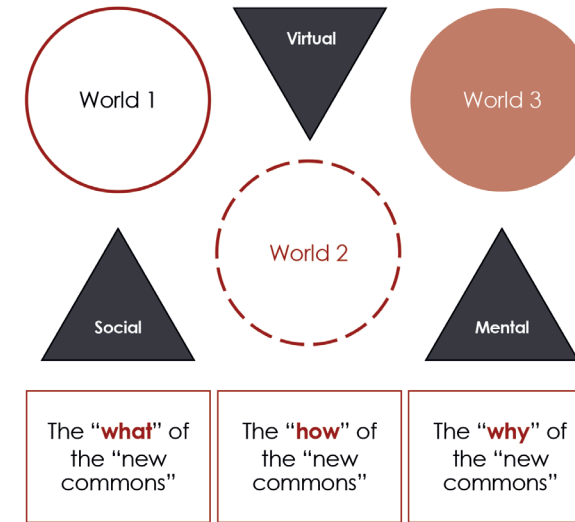


Figure 2. Merging states of living & the three worlds to build the narrative of the “New Commons.”

State	Focus	Description	Caution
Mental	Find meaning and cohesion	The “why” of the “new commons” to question, pursue self-fulfilment, and make choices about who you were, are or want to be.	It can become a dominating state, freezing actions and relationships, leading to isolation and anxiety.
Social	Communicate and build relationships	The “what” of the “new commons” with two functions: (a) to preserve the need for social ties and (b) to create a shared reality that pulls us out of fiction.	Spending too much time in it lowers the importance of having an internal, reflective life.
Virtual	Increase networking through technology	The “how” of the “new commons” that increase accessibility and navigation across time and distance (a mediated social state).	Overexposure distances people from genuine expression and physical interaction with the external environment.

Table 1. Comparison of different states of living.

Transition Tools

Tools are the scaffold for transition commons to turn narratives into active realities.

Human activity has always relied on tools to shape the environment. But it is a two-way street: the use of tools also impacts us.

“...tools function as extensions of human capabilities, allowing us to achieve what we cannot achieve with the body alone.”

(Introna, 2017)

Our innovation comes from the fact that we can impose functions or purpose for tools that “would not otherwise exist, thereby inventing reality” (Barret-Feldman, 2017). Tools have become extensions of our bodies, serving us throughout history to generate the virtual entropy of our world. They are the expression of progress, human ingenuity, and a center for generations exchange of knowledge and skills. But tools have also become extensions of our minds as thinking tools and mental models to help us better visualize, navigate complexity and ambiguity, and communicate with others.

Transition tools are collaborative enablers to undertake human activities on a more enhanced level that the narratives of the three worlds and three states can thrive. I subdivide the transition tools into two categories: enablers of platforms for collaboration and enablers of processes and collective activities. There is a subtle yet meaningful difference between the two that I will further discuss.

1. Tools That Enable Platforms for Collaboration

Tools for collaboration extend our ability to connect with others by establishing working models for context and challenges. The tech innovations have allowed us to create digital tools for handling complex tasks across time and distance. Among them, there are project management apps or clusters (e.g., Atlassian, Microsoft), design engines (e.g., Figma, Adobe), and web-based software ecologies (e.g., Cynefin Sensemaker).

While these tools are becoming more sophisticated and accessible, their collaborative reach is still limited. They can only help teams perform a certain range of tasks and provide pathways for productivity. Yet, there is no such thing as the best tool. It is the user’s task to figure out what works and can be taken on board as a practice. In the absence of pre-existent collaborative capabilities, it might slow down the adjustment period and learning to use the tool optimally.

Transition tools are not just ‘up to the user’ to figure out. They require the tool creators to engage with the narrative of the commons and bridge certain gaps in collaboration. We are not only solving problems; we are also solving problems together. And this ‘together’ is one of the most complex dimensions of the transition commons. I will tackle the generation gap as an example to illustrate best what I mean.

The generation gap is a concept based on the assumption that people from different generations have different values, priorities, and ways of looking at the world. Businesses often apply labels such as Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z, creating divided cultures. Truthfully, there is little to no scientific evidence to prove that the

generation gap is a valid segmentation (Costanza et al., 2012). While generations are realities, the gap between them is a continuously enforced narrative that flourishes without proper transition commons and a systemic platform to encourage collaboration. Working together requires a shift in perspective and priorities to recognize the unique role that parts play in the whole, to better leverage technology and access to learning, and to tear down the fundamental inequalities I mention in the introduction.

Digital tools will be part of the future, but we need to make sure they evolve to connect with the transition narratives and help us solve pressing issues that hinder inclusiveness. Thus, when designing digital tools for collaboration, how much do creators think of the depth of their users?

2. Tools as Enablers of Processes and Collective Activities

We must prioritize the use of tools that can help us generate solutions and carry them beyond the crisis timeline. The second category of transition tools needs support interactions and sustain collaboration in hybrid settings. These can be digital-based tools (e.g., Mural, Miro, Kumu) or physically contained (e.g., printed templates, Lego blocks). Regardless of the space they reside in, teams can apply them to work with certain constraints, map challenges, visualize abstract connections, define purpose, etc. Systems Thinking tools are known for their power to bring together many stakeholders (researchers, designers, system thinkers, business professionals, public sector experts) to work with complexity. Systems Thinking helps analyze impact and relationships at a larger scale and gather collective input to discuss and validate connections: Causal Loop Diagramming, System Archetypes Identification, or Root Cause Analysis (Kim, 2000) bring diverse people from different backgrounds to align and collaborate. As a result, the participants learn to work with assumptions, question biases, and discover a more integrated way to address urgent challenges of highly complex systems.

While Systems Thinking tools have the power to enrich conversations and narratives, they are not properly integrated into policymaking, business transformation, or academic research. We need tools to channel insights into action and connect diverse narratives through hands-on experimenting, prototyping, and scenario planning.

- Experimental design tools provide an efficient process of conducting focused research to analyze the relationship between and among many variables (Bell, 2009).
- Prototyping tools support the iterative process for testing ideas while looking for the optimal intersection of desirability, viability, and feasibility.
- Scenario tools for future visioning are a flexible platform to stretch creativity, generate new possibilities, and explore the unknown.

Recent approaches such as Future Designs advocate embodying the notion of “futurability,” encouraging people to devise long-term policies and strategies that will affect the imaginary future generations (Saijo, 2020). Based on their framework, Future Designs created a prototype for a long-term vision in the year 2060 in Yahaba, Japan. The prototype, “travel to 2060 in a time machine”, connected the current generations with the imaginary future generation, opening the forum for a more supportive and understanding attitude. Instead of proposing separate strategies, they constructed a connected narrative, integrating those ideas. They considered existing systems flexible and open to change, inviting more innovation and greater empathy towards future generations (Saijo, 2020).

We need flexible and creative tools for transition commons to build more proactive experiences in different areas of our lives. We do not necessarily need more tools to accelerate the transition from a crisis into a new era; we need to learn to use what we have more purposefully to enable the important exchange between tools and narratives. Why are we not including these tools in the education curriculum to help students from an early age to think creatively and systemically? Making tools more narrative-oriented can ease the translation of our insights into actions that the rest of the world can understand. Still, it would be truly useful if we encouraged more people to learn and use these tools in their activities.

Conclusion

The future will always be uncertain. I find the popular phrase “we are dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants” (attributed to Bernard of Chartres) to be one of the most misleading legacies of the prior paradigm:

- In the absence of proper preservation, our past is as speculative as our future. The most well-documented part of history is a representation of “dwarfs standing on shoulders of dwarfs standing on shoulders of dwarfs...” and so on.
- All generations build on shaky grounds, not knowing whether their decisions are right for the next generations.
- If there are any giants worthy of utmost respect, they are unknown buried in primitive sites, where perhaps only the indigenous people still reach. The giant that we stand on is the planet that sustains all life.

Thanks to the pandemic, our efforts to improve the human condition and life on the planet helped us (re)discover a key insight: our world is built on fragile but complex systems that require novel approaches to build resilience in a crisis. The transition commons bridge the existing gaps through supporting tools and richer narratives, but it is not a trivial patchwork.

The belief that the future will be substantially different from the present extrapolates from current understanding, mainly based on intuition and familiarity with the known

(Burnam-Fink, 2014). The future, however, is anything but certain or linear. Even in the absence of a robust transition commons, we may find a way to bridge our narratives towards the “New Commons,” but “laissez-faire” is not a viable strategy.

Transition narratives and tools can help us attain “New Commons” where everyone can contribute towards and actively participate regardless of age, interests, cultural backgrounds, etc. The paradigm shift of transition commons can act as a dynamic foundation addressing disruption, inequalities, and future crises. The future is not a reality, not yet. While transformation is inevitable, I see an opportunity to learn from recent events. But instead of looking at fragmented realities, we can channel our energy better in what needs to be done now.

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10. Dealing with COVID-19 in Everyday Life

Esra Zorer, Arjen Van de Walle, Corvin Illgner

Introduction

Vast, ancient forests home to thousands of species, cold water flowing through rivers and reaching deep into the earth, sidewalks treaded upon during morning rush hours. These are things we make daily use of and, as members of broader societies, have free access too. These are things we have in common, and as such can be called the “commons”. The size of a commons can range from a small playground to the entire planet earth and its near surroundings. It can also be thought of from very tangible ways such as a vacant lot in the city to more abstract subjects such as our common language. The corona pandemic has left the world scarred and has changed our perception of societies and commons in general. With this essay, we trace future commons through the lens of digitalisation and draw attention to both its great potential to change commons in a positive direction and to some of the many pitfalls that need to be avoided.

Transformation of the Old Commons

In 1968, Garrett Hardin defined a phenomenon around commons, in a word, an important characteristic of commons is that they entail dimensions of rivalry which causes a decrease in the benefits one can get from a common when others use it too, think of overfishing in the seas. This phenomenon is called the “tragedy of the commons”, stating that every individual pursues to maximise their own benefit as rational beings (Hardin, 1968). Nowadays, the tragedy of the commons is a more applicable concept than ever mainly because of the system we have built in the Anthropocene.

Proposed by Paul Crutzen (2000), the Anthropocene refers to a geological epoch in which human activity distinctively affects the geological processes of the Earth by creating a vastly different environment and thus leaving a trace in Earth’s geological history. Such anthropogenic pressures have been pushing the Earth System to a state in which it is not able to provide every person a life of dignity and opportunity anymore (Raworth, 2017). Hence, Johan Rockström and his colleagues developed the concept of planetary boundaries in which they believe humanity can safely function (Rockström et al., 2009). They established nine interdependent planetary boundaries and according to their research, we have already transgressed three of those boundaries: “climate change, rate of biodiversity loss, and changes to the global nitrogen cycle” (Rockström et al., 2009, p.2). Moreover, the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic has been argued to be the result of a transgression of these planetary boundaries (Crutzen, 2002; Rockstrom et al., 2009;

Steffen et al., 2015). At this moment, it seems humanity will somewhat move past the pandemic but the question still arises whether this will always be the case: As human beings, are we destined to push boundaries and play in astounding tragedies?

According to Elinor Ostrom, such an approach paints a “disempowering, pessimistic vision of the human prospect” (1999, p278) pointing out how various local communities managed to protect natural resources for thousands of years. Starting from utilising local self-organisation and know-how, users can in fact cooperate well to manage commons when they have common interest and understanding of the resources (Ostrom, 1999). For issues like transgressing planetary boundaries and global climate change, we need to figure out if there is any form of governance that is able to successfully integrate local knowledge into global problems. Even though complexity increases significantly on the global scale, a nested approach to connect local institutions globally with the help of advanced technology (Ostrom, 1999) might have potential benefits and it might be a sound alternative to our current centralised, neo-classical system of governance. For this nested approach to work, we aim to build common values and awareness on a global scale, and digitalisation has a lot to offer to enable this connection.

In periods of systemic crises, systemic changes are often bound to occur. A fractured system creates windows of opportunity for novel socio-technical developments to enter the playing field (Geels, 2018). The digitalisation of society is an example of such a development as, already ubiquitous before the pandemic, its presence in people’s daily lives has increased substantially. For instance, as physical contact became troublesome, means of interacting from a distance were rapidly embraced and digital means of communication skyrocketed. As such, the pandemic led to a dramatic progression of the digitalisation of society and vice versa, digitalisation allowed for a useful new way of dealing with the pandemic. This leap forward in digitalisation occurred in an already changing digital landscape. From banking to public administration to utilities, digitalisation has already been occurring extensively, and this progression is expected to occur for years to come.

As digitalisation was previously mentioned to have a very large influence on the commons, it is crucial to creatively envision how these commons will change over the coming years, and which challenges will have to be tackled. As the effects of this evolution will be so far-reaching on everyday life, such thought experiments may be overwhelming. One might be tempted to lean too much to the side of dystopia in imagining a future which would be inevitably grim if the current progress would not be stopped. On the other hand, excessive optimism in the effects digitalisation might have on society may cause us to not be considerate enough of possible dangers. It is therefore important to find the grey zone between both narratives.

Nature and Digitalisation

When thinking about the commons, the image of vast natural systems containing valuable resources often comes to mind. When humanity obtains access to such natural com-

mons, and these natural commons are not able to infinitely supply human demand for its resources, this oftentimes leads to the tragedy of the commons. For a very long time indeed, discussions were held on how to prevent excessive exploitation by, for instance, putting boundaries on extractive practises such as fisheries, lumber, and grazing. However, one common in particular was deemed capable of infinitely providing humanity and not being vulnerable to human actions: the climate system. Nonetheless, this belief has been disproved by modern science and led to a drastic shift in our mindset. Since the dawn of modern industrial practice, humanity has had such a far-reaching effect on the composition of the atmosphere, that the effects of its exploitation can now be noticed and are expected to have devastating effects on the continuity of human society as we know it. Here, digitalisation offers a unique opportunity to change our exploitative attitudes and come up with creative solutions such as building global connections of local expertise or observing and analysing environmental data more precisely. With digitalisation, we have the chance to think out of the box and move away from the centralised approach to discover other possibilities.

Though, what will be the outcome of digitalisation on the way humanity interacts with these natural commons? For one, digitalisation will allow for many human actions to move from the physical to the digital world and take many of humanity’s flaws with it. Think for example of the positive effects working from home can have on carbon emissions and other environmental strains. Also trends in machine learning and AI (for instance in the context of the Internet of Things) is bound to make our energy use more efficient. However, important flipsides exist: the computational power necessary to drive digitalisation needs a great deal of energy and consequently leads to a lot of emissions. As reported in the scientific journal *Nature*, computing power is currently responsible for about 2% of global emissions, but processes such as bitcoin mining show that these emissions could skyrocket once the need increases (Jones, 2018). Advances in AI and big data collection, management and analysis can be expected to further increase the share of computing within global emissions.

This raises the question of how digitalisation will affect our relationship with the environment. One might be tempted to envision a digitalised future as being one of complete disconnect with nature, in which an artificial environment is perfectly tailored to human needs and wants. From one point of view, this trend would fit in the way contemporary humans are oftentimes virtually completely disconnected. Even though this trend might continue, the place the environment takes in the new digitalised commons may evolve as well. This could be in a similar manner to recent developments in the legal status of the environment. After obtaining ‘environmental personhood’, in which non-human entities such as rivers and lakes obtain the status of a legal person, various environmental entities across the world can now sue other legal humans in, for example, cases of pollution (Breton & Zaccour, 2020). Likewise, why would the environment not be able to be represented in future digitalised commons, under the motto of eco-inclusion? It might be excessively anthropocentric to state that only humans can partake in new digital reali-

ties, for sure if interactions with the physical reality remain. Consequently, as long as the trend towards digitalization exists, our connection to nature demands a representation of it within the digital world.

The Future of Working

Among many other things, working life was heavily influenced by the pandemic and thus deserves consideration in future visions on the New Commons. Even though the topic differs from sharing and co-managing natural resources in the highlands, working life is a common as well since it is an environment where rivalry between actors exists and in which people are relatively free to partake. In this context, working is the backbone of our current economic system and, as sometimes occurs with commons, it can experience tragedies like high unemployment rates. Markets are in fact quite fragile against crises and can have devastating impacts on the broader public. This was perfectly illustrated by the 2008 financial crisis, where the effects are still relevant even years after (Thakor, 2013). However, it also has the ability to adapt and transform in accordance with changing circumstances. Changes in how we work can lead to both positive and negative outcomes and it would not be wise to evaluate it without investigating its relationship with digitalisation.

Long before the COVID-19 pandemic, the way in which we work was being challenged by the digital transformation as many companies were trying to keep their places in the market or use the opportunity to gain competitive advantage. Nevertheless, one global health crisis appeared to be enough to demonstrate how relatively unsophisticated we are in relation to the digital revolution, like prehistoric fish crawling out from the sea. As countries announce full lockdowns one by one, many companies had to adapt to remote working at once, even though only few of them were ready for this transition. However, it is questionable whether we have sufficient rules and regulations for remote working or even the physical capacity to manage this process. Moving existing teams to online is one thing, but what about young professionals just entering the workforce? On top of that, we know that there are many professions for which it is virtually impossible to integrate remote working into their daily practises, such as the essential workers. Some people adapted to remote working very easily and enjoyed getting rid of spending hours in traffic and working in their pyjamas, whereas others experienced distractions and burnout. But one thing is for sure, this crisis has accelerated the digital transformation of working life.

Although there are mixed feelings regarding remote working at its current state, we can take the COVID-19 crisis as an opportunity to identify the weaknesses of remote work and enhance the way we work to increase resilience for potential crises in the future. In accordance with this purpose, we must first redefine employee rights and responsibilities within the scope of remote work to avoid burnout and provide advanced digital tools and necessary training to enhance communication and teamwork. For employees that do not have a proper space for remote working, there can be free working spaces

from repurposed buildings in neighbourhoods that have good internet connection and these places themselves might be one of our future urban commons. Additionally, under the condition of providing upskilling and reskilling to essential workers, some liabilities would be transferred to machines with the help of digitalisation and enable such workers to participate in remote working as well with new jobs created as a result of digitalisation.

The Information Society

As previously mentioned, the effects of digitalisation from nature to industry are greatly shaping our view on the idea of commons and how they will be identified in the future. Though, one common that might not be clearly visible at first, yet is of crucial importance for humanity, is information. Information is stored widely in digitalised forms, whether this includes personal data, business secrets, or technological and medical advancements. Thus, making information available for the vast majority through open channels may dramatically influence societal and technological change. The pandemic was one driver that accelerated this idea of information sharing.

During the pandemic, the communication between different levels of governance had reached new heights. Municipalities were in constant information exchange with country governmental authorities to communicate infection rates and other information. These numbers were then used to plan and execute measurements in order to successfully diminish the infection rate. This is only one example of how information sharing can be beneficial in reaching a common goal. Information as such frequently flows through communication channels that are nowadays immediate, connected, and available for all. This availability could be a driver for further collaboration. It is also an opportunity to avoid the tragedy of the commons, which was introduced earlier. Data sharing and data management allow us to examine the current stance of the earth, mitigating human impact and eventually anticipating future consequences of human actions in every domain. With our rapid development in this area and due to the high adoption rate of digitalisation because of the pandemic, information as a common is becoming more and more graspable. Societies and systems have to change in order to allow information sharing and make it a truly and widely accessible common. This might be a chance for us to change our approach to information and see it as a valuable common for the improvement of our society by free access rather than a mere source of profit, a promise which was made already in the early days of the internet yet remains largely unfulfilled as of yet.

The previously mentioned examples show how information can be seen as a precious form of commons. During the pandemic, many misused the open access of information to spread misinformation and reduce institutional trust. Indeed, a study by Pummerer, Böhm, and Lilleholt (2021) found out that this misinformation, in the form of conspiracy theories, had negative effects on the “support of governmental regulations, adoption of physical distancing, and—to some extent—social engagement” (p. 1). Therefore, information always depends on the presentation, and one needs to be wary about this.

A critical mind and challenging thoughts could pose solutions. Additionally, with an increasing need for digitalisation, more personal information is presented digitally. This has tremendous risks as this data needs to be protected to not fall under misuse. Cyber-attacks, especially in a more digitalised world, will become increasingly dangerous for security purposes. A good digital security system is necessary to enable this new world. Still, the benefits of information and digitalisation cannot be denied and will be prosperous for humankind, if adapted adequately. Within this essay, we could not even scratch the surface of information streams and uses. In the future, this will exponentially rise, making information the most important common to ensure the success and wealth of our species.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic was a wake-up call for societies and acts as a demonstration that we cannot passively rely on current system paradigms to protect us from a possible dystopian future. Therefore, a social transition is necessary to obtain a sustainable and resilient future so that the full use of collaborative and creative potential of citizens is best put to work. Crucial in envisioning this future, is envisioning the future of commons and the role of humanity in accordance with it. These commons are changing rapidly and the steps we will now take will determine our future. As Elinor Ostrom suggested in 1999, one possible step is to bring local expertise to manage this process with a nested approach. One major global trend in this regard, highlighted by the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, is digitalisation.

Although it is already one of the main factors shaping our lives, how we approach digitalisation makes the difference. In many ways, the COVID-19 crisis was an opportunity for us to realise how important digitalisation is to shape and manage the New Commons as it is impossible to visualise a future without digital advancements. In this essay, we tried to demonstrate how some commons are correlated to digitalisation under the influence of COVID-19 pandemic. In our new digitalised world, we are able to handle some of our physical activities on virtual platforms which might decrease our negative influence on nature. Yet it is important to consider the inclusion of nature and the environment in the future commons. To combat a global issue like the climate crisis, digitalisation could be used to enhance global communication and cooperation. In the future, it might even be possible to anticipate the harm of our actions through information sharing and management, making digitalisation a main tool for sustainable action. Additionally, the way we work and our information society are already in a deep transformation under the influence of digitalisation in which COVID-19 only accelerated. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that we use digitalisation for the right purposes. With an open mind and open heart, we can shape the New Commons in a connected, inclusive, and resilient way in our digital world and build a prosperous future for humanity.

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Reflections

As members of the team that started to study the need and opportunities for New Commons after the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, we are of course triggered by any work that might contribute to the next step of actually *shaping* New Commons. This collection of essays is particularly interesting and valuable as it contains representations of the concerns, views and ideas of the young generation with respect to shaping New Commons in society. A generation that is indeed strongly depending on not merely a revision of the old commons but on designing and organizing a New Common future. Here are some reflections on the volume.

First, and not surprisingly, all contributions clearly emphasize the great need for change. This need is derived from the radical impact and lasting consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic that has disrupted the world as we knew it. Most authors are also quick to add the life-on-earth threatening development of climate change as another impetus for shaping New Commons and adjusting our thinking and behavior. The joint question of the contributions as we see it, is threefold: how can we actually shape New Commons, how to we get there and, furthermore, what are the possible risks and pitfalls of the commons we might manage to create?

The contribution by Andreea-Daiana Zavate offers an elaborated view on the transition to New Commons, as they will not appear overnight. This makes sense. She speaks of the requirement for transition commons, a transformative system, designed to building collaborative platforms with the use of digital tools. So-called micro shifts that are already happening, can add up to a coherent narrative that can pave the way toward action and change. Rather than seeing the pandemic as an interruption of life as we knew it, we will be able to value the continuity of life after it and throughout.

Many of the contributions attempt to sketch the nature and also the *sine qua non* principles of the New Commons. There is quite some agreement on the digital nature of New Commons, or at least about the role of digitalization in designing future commons. Esra Zorer, Arjen Van de Walle and Corvin Illgne e.g., adopt a position that comes close to that of the British author James Lovelock in his book 'The Novacene'. The three authors envision a digital future and state that the sharing of information will be the core of a new, better common. With all the knowledge available now and with the scope for a 'nested approach' where local expertise can be connected, we can not only build a better society but also prevent future harm. The Covid-19 pandemic, besides its disastrous effects, has given a strong push towards the digital sharing of information and knowledge.

At the same time, these authors touch upon important downsides and points of attention of relying on digitalization in shaping New Commons. At this stage, digitalization requires enormous amounts of energy, among other things in the form data centers. How are we going to solve this issue? Is this just a matter of time, of technological progress? Furthermore there is a legitimate concern for the quality and objectivity of the information that might flow so easily through the digital channels and platforms. Will it be possible to drive out fake news and misinformation in the novel commons? How do we look back at what happened in this respect during the Covid-19 crisis and, meanwhile, the Ukraine war? And last but not least, how can nature, and its interest, be adequately represented in digital commons? Is this incompatible? We can of course not neglect our physical environment, that provides us with the air that we breathe. These are major issues that need to be solved.

The volume also rightly contains fundamental criticism of the way the digital and data society has been developing so far that should not be ignored. Jinane Araqi makes an essential plea for digital sustainability. In this contribution a gloomy picture is presented of the rise of 'surveillance capitalism', where users are being robbed from their data with the aim to use it as prediction material and sell it to third parties. If the New Common takes the shape of this new economic order, we as humans will merely serve as the raw resources of the economy, Araqi argues. The Metaverse, as now being developed by among others the founders of Facebook, might turn out to be the new panopticon that will discipline and control people to a yet unknown extent. This notwithstanding, Araqi also sees some opportunities if we manage in time to create a comprehensive framework for the Metaverse. Yet, as the author acknowledges, technology normally evolves much quicker than legislation. So we have a major concern here.

Maciej Gadzala's essay neatly ties in with the major concern expressed in the former essay by making the case for so-called neuro rights, defined as new ways of engagement between us and the technology that should stop unwanted advances on our brains and minds. Gadzala, starting from Max Weber's theory of bureaucratization, studies the history of Facebook and shows how in its business model the algorithms affect our mental health by overpromoting negative content, leading to over-engagement. The important task at hand is to dismantle, again in Webers terms, this cage of the future. Another essential warning for the corruptions of future commons.

There are more relevant do's and don't's in the book that deserve to be considered by the architects of New Commons. Three essays focus on the role of education and imply that a New Common in general needs to be supported by a New Common of education. George Michael Chirilaş has a case in point by seeing the current educational system as outdated. It remains too theoretical, encourages a closed mindset by failing to take different cultures into account, and insufficiently promotes teamwork, change and future orientation. As the author rightly puts it, education should evolve to the new era of information and show students where to find information and how to evaluate its content and validity.

Ebbe Tim Ottens and Sebastian Arthur Rostron address a concrete bias in education which stands in the way of designing commons that are sustainable and healthy for their participants. These authors support the international movement of 'Rethinking Economics' and hold the Neoclassical view on economics responsible for misunderstanding the purpose of individuals and society at large. In this view productivity, rather than happiness, is key and we are turned into rational objects that only want to serve ourselves. This, indeed, is a bad starting point for creating New Commons. The authors point out that neo-classical economics, which is by the way dominant in Tilburg University's education, misjudges who we are, unlike behavioral economics. We fully agree with the argument that a narrow-minded obsession with efficiency comes at the expense of resilience and longevity. Another reason for re-evaluating our relationship with education.

Nina van Rosmalen offers a very concrete proposal for education reform, based on the experiences during the pandemic. Hybrid forms of education may prove the most effective, as they provide opportunities for both benign physical contact between student and teachers in education *and* for inclusion and participation of students that would otherwise be excluded in the case they are not able to be on campus. However, being lecturers ourselves, we are aware of a difficult dilemma. Currently, if you offer hybrid courses less students may come to campus leading to a diminishing quality of interaction. Of course, in line with the two previous contributions that we discussed above, radical innovation of the content and method of teaching and education might counteract this undesired effect.

After all these justified criticisms, one of course gets anxious to reflect on the positive do's in founding and building New Commons. The program requirements as they are called in the construction industry. The essays offer tasty food for thought here. Food and consumption are the main ingredients of the contribution by Merijn Broos and Timo Warringa. They argue that a New Common can only be based on a minimalist life-style. We currently waste food, disrespect animals and suffer from overconsumption with immense effects on our planet. In accordance with the essay by Ebbe Tim Ottens and Sebastian Arthur Rostron, they pledge for an emphasis on intrinsic values and happiness, rather than an utilitarian approach that is obsessed with possession and consumption. One might worry whether such a minimalist approach would be any fun. However, the good news that the authors bring is that the latter approach proves to reduce depression among the population and that social activities are much more rewarding than physical products. In spreading this shift of moral attitude towards nature, our hunch would be to drop the term 'minimalism' and stick to the positive and appealing term of a sustainable lifestyle.

Ombeline Siraudeau's essay fits and supports this conceptualization of the New Common. Central to this contribution is the concept of 'renaissance': a long-awaited opportunity to rebirth a new world, that will be inclusive, diverse, caring, green, slow and meaningful. Here as well the argument is forwarded that we should reconnect to what

really matters and cannot have unlimited growth. A very strong slogan is worded by way of conclusion: the sky is literally the limit.

Finally, essential design principles for New Commons are also provided by Pranav Yadav and Defne Aksit. These authors picture the Covid virus as a systemic shock and together with the climate crisis as the grounds for the emergence of New Commons. They focus on solidarity as the premises of the New Commons. A distinction is made between three dimensions: intergroup (here and now), international/global (there) and intergenerational (then) solidarity, a distinction that is frequently used in the literature on the broader well-being perspective (e.g., by CBS, the Netherlands Bureau for Statistics, in its innovative monitoring of well-being and the SDG's).

Establishing these principles requires a lot from us all: we should stop unfavorable comparisons we make between groups; rich countries (the first world) should acknowledge that they have made the most impact on the deterioration of the climate and therefore have to do the most to mitigate these effects (including framing migration caused by climate change differently) and acting on intergenerational solidarity is probably the most defining aspect of climate change mitigation. The latter strongly depends on the degree to which we deal with discounting the future in our economic theory. We do depend on each other, is the lesson this essay emphasizes once more. We should overcome the so-called public good dilemma, as the authors call it, or, put differently, stop the tragedy of the commons we are currently stuck in.

Summing up, there are strong take-aways from these passionate contributions by the representatives of young generations. It is high time that we start shaping New Commons, without further ado. Digitalization can be an enormous force in the realization of the commons, but should be handled with care to avoid unwanted effects that might corrupt the commons. Besides, we should be able to keep representing nature in this process. Another message that needs to be heard is that the reform of education and teaching, both content and method wise, is a precondition for building New Commons. Like any other educational institution, universities carry a great responsibility here and need to step forward. And finally, less is more, in many ways in this imminent renaissance of our society. Purpose, meaning, social activities and the resulting happiness will keep making the world go round. And the communality of the New Commons can only be vested on solidarity: between groups, globally and between generations, as these next generation authors have pointed out loud and clear.

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Colophon

A TILBURG UNIVERSITY ESSAY: THE NEW COMMON

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