

COMUNfARE – activating design research for making (economies) in common

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COMUNfARE (lit. commons-making, or communal making) is an on-going research project in which we experiment with how social, material and intellectual resources can be mobilised in order to foster progressive eco-social change. Change that undoes oppressive, exploitative and destructive power structures that run through the relations between humans as well as humans and more-than-human others. To develop this research, we methodologically draw on practice-based design research, communication design and critical pedagogy. Through these methods we activate situations of (trans) local, intergenerational and collective learning that explore how eco-social relations can be fostered that go beyond the disciplining, precarising and damaging ones that are produced by capitalist markets and neoliberal politics. Physically, the research is located in the post-rural Vallagarina district in the Italian Alps (Fig.1), the area on earth where we have the most ‘naturocultural’ ties and where we can guarantee a long-term engagement independent of volatile project funding. Conceptually and in terms of its politics, the research is in conversation with feminist, Autonomist Marxist and radical post-humanist theories and practices of the commons, community economies, making and care.



Figure 1: Panorama of the Vallagarina's main valley, autumn 2014

In what follows, we will outline how this research came about, what distinguishes the context in which it is based, what we find productive about our current theoretical points of orientation, how we have proceeded through so far and where we see it going – all in the hope to make connections with others grappling with similar concerns and desires.

How this research came about

We, that is, Fabio Franz and Bianca Elzenbaumer, are developing COMUNfARE as part of our socially and politically engaged communication design practice. The two of us – who are also partners in life – have been working together as Brave New Alps since 2005, when we were in the last year of our BA studies and realised that, when thinking and making together, our work took on more complex and critical facets. Since then, we have produced design projects that prompt people to discuss, rethink and reshape the politics of pressing social and environmental issues (Fig. 2). The desire driving our practice is to mobilise and expand our own – as well as others – social, material and intellectual capabilities to contribute to eco-social transformations by experimenting with non- and anti-capitalist value-practices.

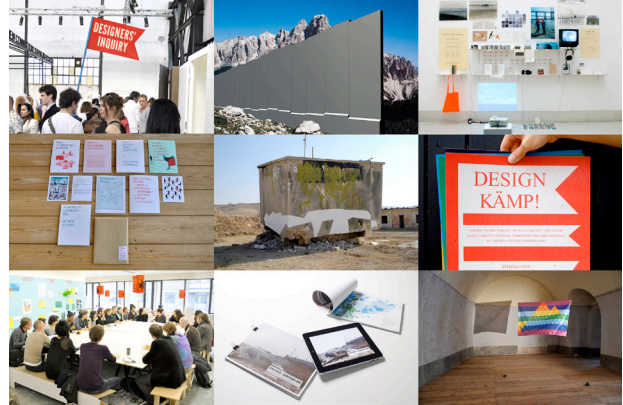


Figure 2: Sample of our projects, interventions and workshops: Designers' Inquiry (2012-2013), intacta Ltd. (2005-2006), Perceptive Safari (2008-2009), New Cross Commoners (2013), Hotel Oush Grab (2008), Design Kämp! (2009), Department 21 (2009-2010), Decode Jerusalem (2007), Audaci Montagne (2014). For a more detailed overview, visit: www.brave-new-alps.com

When we began working together, we focused on the politics of environmental issues unfolding in the Alps. But our desire to engage with and learn from other contexts brought us to work and study in places such as London, Warsaw and the occupied Palestinian territories. During that time, we learned lots and our world-view expanded: over the last ten years, while producing a wide range of projects and getting additional training amongst others in design research, conflict mediation, pedagogy and permaculture, there has been a gradually complexification of our capacities and the roles we assume in the projects we initiate. From rather straight-forward processes based on research, representation and divulgation, we moved from actors controlling most decisions (topic, timeframe, used media) towards being more consciously 'interdependent' actors setting up collaborative processes as part of larger eco-social assemblages, becoming facilitators, catalysts, moderators, 'meshworkers', but also still contributing to the processes with our more traditional technical and formal design skills.

During that time we also began to realise that we increasingly wanted to work on themes suggested by our everyday experience as precarious cultural workers, students / tutors and inhabitants of a specific geographic context.

The slogan ‘the personal is political’ and the principle of ‘starting from the self’, which accompanied the work of feminist consciousness raising groups in the 1960s (Hanisch 1969; Malo de Molina 2004), had a deep influence on our work and the way we regard it in relation to our personal lives. So over time reflections about our own position, agency and what it takes to really transform a situation brought us to move away from works tackling issues of distant contexts such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict where we cannot guarantee a long-term day-to-day engagement. This shift in focus made us feel more comfortable in taking more radical perspectives, to construct more thorough arguments and to hopefully have a more transformative impact in the long run.

These reflections on how for a design practice the personal can be the political was especially triggered by a three months residency at Decolonizing Architecture (DA) in Beit Sahour, near Bethlehem in the occupied Palestinian territories in 2008. Decolonizing Architecture (DA), run by Alessandro Petti, Sandi Hilal and Eyal Weizman, is a spatial practice that focuses permanently on the symptoms of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. The myriad issues and situations that constitute the overall conflict represent DA’s ‘arena of speculation’ and intervention (Petti et al. 2010). The range of projects that took shape within this arena were all spurred from one crucial attitude – Petti and Hilal’s decision to ‘inhabit’ (physically, mentally and with their children) their chosen arena of speculation on a daily basis, which in turn allows them to produce an impressive body of meaningful, solid work that sediments and produces tangible change on the ground. The way DA activate the concept of ‘inhabitation’ is inspired by the cultural theorist Irit Rogoff, who describes how meaning is produced differently through the multiple relations that are generated when living through things. As an approach to knowledge production, inhabitations are rooted in feminist practice, implying that one enters an issue through a process of experience and experimentation, thus engaging in what Rogoff calls ‘embodied criticality’ (Rogoff 2006).

What we find particularly inspiring in this feminist approach and in tune with our wish to practise design in a slow, attentive manner that also fosters a questioning and transformation of one’s own position and subjectivity, is that in terms of knowledge production it denies a reliance on unmoveable assumptions and ‘that by wholly investing one’s subjectivity, one removes the distance, which might

allow for a safe and disembodied analysis and design proposal’ (Elzenbaumer 2014: 25). Moreover, it enables the generation of what feminist philosopher Donna Haraway calls ‘situated knowledges’, that is, knowledges generated from an always-specific standpoint that does not distance the knowing subject from everybody else but instead positions it in collective processes of knowledge production.

Inspired by the way Petti and Hilal ‘stay with the trouble’ (to borrow a phrase from Haraway 2014), we came to see how the longer one stays with the subject of one’s research and the closer one’s life is to what is being researched through practice, the more meaningful and deep-reaching any attempt to foster change within this context will be. Thus, in doing this our conception of what timeframe is required to produce meaningful design projects also changed and we began to move from producing what now seem short-term works with a clear beginning and ending, towards more prolonged engagements. On our side, this move required (and still requires) an active engagement in fabricating favourable socio-economic conditions permitting us to stay with the trouble – eschewing the need to move to yet another ‘trouble’ in order to make a living. Fabricating these conditions also requires us to unlearn the imprint of a cultural industry that values and fosters constant novelty and the fast accumulation of more and more projects. Thus, COMUNfARE has also come about as a further attempt to provoke an eco-social transformation of our own design practice – both in terms of its ambitions and its economies (Weeks 2011) – given that the functioning of conventional design practices is mostly out of kilter with what a movement towards eco-social justice requires.

The location of the research

We are developing COMUNfARE in what we roughly define as the Vallagarina district in the Southern Alps, Italy (Fig. 3). The district – 33km long and 22km wide – hosts about 100,000 inhabitants in a web of villages and towns up to 10,000 people and a central town – Rovereto – of 40,000 inhabitants (Fig. 4 and 5).



Figure 3: The red dot shows the location of the Vallagarina district in the Southern Alps, Italy



Figure 4: Views of the Vallagarina district, from North to South, 2014-2015



Figure 5: Rovereto - the district's central town with 40,000 inhabitants

The choice to locate COMUNfARE in this area has been very pragmatic: it is the area where Fabio has grown up in after moving to Italy from Germany at the age of 7 and it is only two hours drive (three hours by train) from the alpine valley where Bianca was born and grew up. As our respective families still live here and we have strong ties of friendship, it is a place we would constantly come back to, even if the design work we made a living from so far would take us to other places in the world. Moreover, here we can count on, and contribute to, social and material support structures that make us less precarious: we have our family and friends helping us out (especially) when we are ill or overworked, Fabio inherited a space in his parents house which over three years he renovated together with his father and we have easy access to shared resources such as tools and transport vehicles. Beyond these material and social support structures, here we have mountains, relatively wild spaces and fresh fruits just outside our front door and we can speak our native languages (Italian and German) on a daily basis: all things we miss a lot when working and living in other places. Making the Vallagarina our arena of speculation in terms of how our skills and resources can contribute on a daily basis to eco-social change also came from our desire to build social, material, affective and temporal stability into our design practice. This is because we began to realise living in a precarising city such as London, or moving from one funded project to another in geographically dispersed locations, began to wear us out and to make little sense in relation to the kind of eco-social change we want to foster and enact.

In many ways our choice for working in the Vallagarina resonates with the critique of project culture proposed by sociologists Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, who describe the neoliberal 'projective city' as one driven by temporary projects for which the capacity to disengage at their end is as important as the capacity to fully engage while they are running (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005: 110–112). COMUNfARE is an attempt to break with this kind of fast project culture by rooting it in an area we have a long-term attachment to and where we can have more agency on how we want to intertwine life and work – something we found to be rather inevitable in our practice. It is also an attempt to disentangle ourselves from the centralising, and in our case displacing, forces of the market, which in terms of cultural production mainly values what is produced in highly precarising metropolitan areas, while eagerly incorporating people, energies and ideas from peripheral areas.

Given these dynamics, for us it makes a lot of sense to root our desire for creating economies that contribute to progressive eco-social change in a place where disengagement is not built into the DNA of the endeavour. The fact that the Vallagarina is less geopolitically charged than places such as the West Bank and that it might be perceived as peripheral, while still being placed in affluent and privileged Europe, is a tension we explore by mobilising feminist geographer Doreen Massey's notion of 'geographies of responsibility': we explore how the local and the global are entangled in the Vallagarina and what geographies of social, ecological and political responsibilities run through it (Massey 2004).

Theoretical points of orientation

In proceeding with **COMUNfARE** we attempt to create relays (Foucault 1977: 205–206) with four main areas of contemporary political economy and philosophy in order to challenge our ways of doing, designing and relating as well as to probe the concepts and affects that spur our desire for transformative intervention. The four areas we currently relate with are the commons, community economies, radical posthumanism and matters of care as we have found that these entice our imagination and complement as well as challenge each other, while still all being inscribed in a trajectory of progressive eco-social change.

The 'commons' that appeals to us are those described by Autonomist and feminist Marxist theorists and activists such as Massimo De Angelis, Silvia Federici and Peter Linebaugh. This is because the way they frame the commons and 'activities of commoning' situates them as a material and social dimension that empowers people to cultivate values and ways of relating to each other and to nature other than the ones embodied and reproduced by capital (De Angelis 2007). Thus, the framing of the commons we are drawn to is not the one of a plan B for capital or of a resource to be strategically governed in order to be productive for the market, but the one that positions them as crucial in moving towards eco-social justice. In this framing, the emphasis is on the 'activity of commoning' without which no commons can be sustainably created, maintained or defended – an activity to which we hope design can contribute.

Approaching the commons through this active and transformative framing, allows us to probe our surroundings and the moments/places of sharing in the Vallagarina valley for what they produce in the world. Furthermore, it allows us to not take 'community' as a romanticised given, but invites us to problematize it and perceive it as constituted through repeated engagements characterised by cooperation as well as conflict through which the norms of the community's interaction and interventions are constituted. This relating with the commons supports us in considering what kind of material bases, activities and ways of relating we want our design activities to foster and gives us points of orientation for checking if our design interventions actually do what we would ideally like them to do.

'Community economies' as conceptualised by feminist Marxist economic geographers J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006a) prompts us to recognise economic activities as rooted in inextricable interdependencies and to consider how these need to be ethically negotiated with all the actors involved, human as well as more-than-human. This approach developed out of their previously established 'diverse economies' framework, which acknowledges 'the economy' as being constituted not only by the activities valued by the market, but also by activities that within a capitalist framing are invisible, such as self-provisioning, care amongst kin, or non-monetary exchanges between friends, but also distressing ones such as slavery and indentured labour (Gibson-Graham 2006b).

Combining our engagement with the commons with that of community economies allows us to think of very concrete activities that can function as vectors to create situations that experiment with what socially and ecologically just activities in the Vallagarina would look like (Brave New Alps 2016). With J.K. Gibson-Graham and Ethan Miller we are prompted to ask:

Who is the [human and more-than-human] 'we' that participates in the constitution of livelihoods and community economies?...What do 'we' need for survival? What constitutes 'enough'? How do 'we' produce, appropriate, distribute and mobilize surplus? (Gibson-Graham and Miller 2015: 14)

Asking these questions allows us to challenge in productive and energising ways the modes of working and living that are being taken for granted by humans populating the Vallagarina.

In considering community economies, we also refer to radical posthumanism as a constant reminder of our interdependencies and actual, as well as potential, alliances with more-than-human others. The way the Autonomist sociologist Dimitris Papadopoulos frames an insurgent version of posthumanism, positions it close to alternative political projects and social movements while simultaneously challenging the dichotomy between humans and more-than-human others (2012). This framing urges us to leave human exceptionalism behind by decentering human agency and a notion of the social based solely on human action and intentionality. It invites us to see humans as placed in a web of interdependencies, co-existing and making in shared ecological spaces.

In fact, approaching COMUNfARE with the desire to explore what it means to make in common with other humans and more-than-humans inhabiting and traversing the Vallagarina challenges ingrained patterns of thinking and designing. Following Donna Haraway (2014) and evolutionary biologist Lynn Margulis (1998) in acknowledging that as humans we are always already multi-species (and that we have been in relationality since the first cells started to form on this planet) energises but also complicates our steps in ways we are still trying to understand.

Our interest in the commons, community economies and radical posthumanism is tied together by 'matters of care' as proposed by feminist philosopher María Puig de la Bellacasa (2012). For her, matters of care – rather than sociologist Bruno Latour's 'matters of concern' – imply relations that affect and urge us to affect. When you care, you cannot be detached:

We can think on the difference between affirming: 'I am concerned' and 'I care'. The first denotes worry and thoughtfulness about an issue as well as the fact of belonging to those 'affected' by it; the second adds a strong sense of attachment and commitment to something. (Puig de la Bellacasa 2011: 89)

Thinking and acting in relation to matters of care supports us in approaching the eco-social and economic matters we deal with in ways that modify their potential to affect us and others. It complicates our modality of inhabiting the issues we work on and it allows us to engage with the affective as well as the political aspects that come with such inhabitations: they invite us to ask 'For whom?', but also 'Who cares? What for? Why do 'we' care?', and mostly, 'How to care?' (Puig de la Bellacasa 2011: 96) Furthermore, in engaging with these questions, matters of care require a material and social doing that needs to be repeated over and over again as one engages with the troubles of an interdependent existence. Thus, bringing us back to thorough considerations of the temporalities and relations COMUNfARE is entering into. Because caring relations need temporal consistency and cannot be romanticized as care comes with its own tensions and power relations. However, care constitutes an important requisite in an interdependent world in which we explore how we can rewire our complicated and often toxic connections between humans as well as humans and more-than-human others in order to create worlds in which – in the words of Donna Haraway (2011) – 'to live and die well.'

Methodologies so far

When we set out on this research, we knew that we were passionate about creating and activating spaces for collective learning, making and organising, but were yet unable to see how we could ground and situate this passion in meaningful ways in the valley. Thus in our quest to find out how we could contribute to progressive eco-social change in (and starting from) the Vallagarina, we have so far activated four distinct yet interlinked methods: visits to eco-social change initiatives in other European localities, exploratory day trips in the Vallagarina, a series of convivial roundtable discussions and the periodic publication of a research zine – all geared towards grappling in practice with the specificities of our arena of speculation and questioning of how to most productively situate ourselves in it. We asked ourselves what eco-social change initiatives are already underway, here and elsewhere? Who can be our human and more-than-human allies? What issues, modes of engagement and language moves people living here? Where to intervene and how? With what issues and modes of engagement can we picture ourselves in this context?

Building trans-local alliances with eco-social initiatives

In order to help our thinking about COMUNfARE we are visiting bottom-up eco-social change initiatives in other peripheral, rural or semi-rural areas in Europe. So far, Fabio has visited Transition Town Totnes in Devon, UK, and together we visited Montagna Viva (Fig. 6) in a village near Modena in Italy (Elzenbaumer and Franz 2015) and The Non-Formal University of Teremiski in a tiny village on the Belarusian border (PL). We also joined the Eco-Nomadic School Network through an Erasmus+ grant which we won for the period of 2015 to 2017 together with Myvillages (NL), Sheffield School of Architecture (UK), the Gallerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst Leipzig (DE), atelier d'architecture autogérée (FR) and Asociatia Pro-Turism Nedeea Valeceana (RO) in order to work towards innovative and sustainable models for locally embedded future livelihoods through a focus on inter-generational ecological and economical co-learning. Moreover, we are in conversation with Cornerstone Housing Co-op and the co-operatively-run print shop Footprint in Leeds (UK) – which are both part of Radical Routes, a mutual aid network of radical UK co-operatives – because when Bianca is in Leeds, she lives in this housing co-op, which in its basement hosts the print shop. These connections and exchanges help us to construct a framework of operational reference points and to weave 'learning alliances' that inspire the design of COMUNfARE. Placing the research in conversation with a trans-local network of initiatives, helps us to consider COMUNfARE as a node of a trans-local web of progressive commons-based initiatives, which in turn very much resonates with what geographer Kye Askins (2015) calls a 'feminist understanding of scale as interconnecting' rather than supposing that change occurs by one actor that scales up exponentially.



Figure 6: Discussing Montagna Viva with some of its core members at the initiative's communal garden and Fabio cutting the new Montagna Viva postcards, produced in Monchio in collaboration with Dagmar Diesner and Massimo De Angelis, April 2015

When we visit other initiatives for a couple of days, we operate according to a very loose structure: we know the issues we would like to discuss, we bring practical questions also in relation to our initiative and we try to give something back to the groups we meet (which so far has been feedback on their on-line communication strategies, helping out with graphic and exhibition design, sharing examples of other initiatives and sharing project funding). We never make audio recordings, but instead take photographs and make lots of notes, as for us these visits are about creating alliances and potential friendships rather than about detailed ethnographic studies of how they operate. In this sense, we hope that these engagements contribute to the 'circulation of the common' (Dyer-Witheford 2006) where groups of commoners support and strengthen each other socially and materially.

Exploratory day trips in the Vallagarina district

To transform our condition in the Vallagarina of somewhat 'ignorant-but-eager-to-know-locals', during the first 8 months of the research we undertook a series of 18 day trips around the district. These trips helped us to actively pose questions about this area we care about: its past and future, its current functioning and internal logic and its connections with other places in the world. Just as when wanting to make friends with someone, we undertook these one-day excursions to get a more nuanced sense of the physical conformation and the habitats of the various valleys the district is composed of; to observe the land and the way it is used, how it has been moulded and transformed through geological forces, human and more-than-human activities operating in and running through it and to find out about the existence of various kinds of institutions, organisations and self-organised groups. Through these day trips we gathered entry points for first speculations around what forms of physical presence COMUNfARE could take.

In terms of choosing places to visit during these trips, we followed the urge to physically be in parts of the district we had never been to before. This decision was driven both by curiosity as well as pragmatism, given that we spent most of the first year of this research in the UK (in Fabio's case mainly due to PhD research training activities at the University of Sheffield). This meant that every time we came to the Vallagarina we had to be strategic with our time as we also had to juggle many family-related commitments. When undertaking the trips,

we would try to have one or more people accompanying us in order to build elements of dialogue and sharing into this preliminary research process. These dialogues were fruitful both in terms of reading the territory as well as imagining further practical engagements.

Circolo del Suolo – convivial roundtable discussions

In July 2015, we moved from Leeds to the Vallagarina and began to organise a still on-going series of public activities under the title Circolo del Suolo (The Soil Club – Fig. 7), such as convivial roundtable discussions, guided walks and film screenings. Through these activities we continue the research on the area, especially in terms of finding out more about progressive eco-social change initiatives, while opening the research process up to people we do not necessarily know. The activities are thus a way to generate knowledge together with others and to grow our mycelium of local connections in a slightly more formal way where we do not only act as researchers but also as cultural producers who contribute to the ecology of activities organised in the district.



Figure 7: Poster announcing the Circolo del Suolo, July 2015

By bringing a range of activities together under the name Circolo del Suolo, we framed our research interests around the commons and around the nexus of human and more-than-human communities: material soil as a local yet global commons that needs to be cared for and that cares for us and ‘social soil’ as something that also needs constant care in order to allow for a good life for all – locally and trans-locally. Our guiding question for the activities were (and still are): Who is today – visibly or invisibly – building soil in the Vallagarina district? What processes of material and social composting are under way? What sort of humus is being created? What actors are thriving, which are struggling and which are missing? To prepare the club’s activities, we would have preliminary meetings with people and groups whose work we were interested in – such as a renegade wine maker, a social bike repair workshop, a filmmaker investigating the legacy of terraced landscapes, a social worker from the local refugee camp, a heterodox economist and a unorthodox mayor. In these meetings, we would at length introduce ourselves and our research in order to then have a conversation about what our interlocutors do, why they do it and what enables or blocks them. Following these meetings and visits, we would consider what kind of activity and overarching topic their expertise could be woven into. So far this has resulted in roundtables on agriculture and diversity (Fig. 8), diverse economies, immigration and new modes of living together (Fig. 9), guided walks on how the climate and morphology have shaped the built-up environment in the valley (Fig. 10) and a symposium on ‘diritti d’uso civico’ (rights of civic use, common rights) and collective property. In contributing with these activities to the local ecology of cultural activities, we also introduced modes of engagement that tweaked acquainted formats in subtle yet significant ways in accordance with the values we have built into Brave New Alps over the years, such as horizontality, gender equality, conviviality, and openness, but also value-practices such as experimentation, a shared inquisitive spirit, care, active listening, and commoning as sharing food and making gifts.



Figure 8: Roundtable discussion 'Diversity & Agriculture' in the courtyard of Nomi's public library, July 2015



Figure 10: Guided walk with architect Tullio Zampedri exploring how the climate influenced the built environment of the Vallagarina, August 2015



Figure 9: Roundtable discussion 'Cohabitation. New Constellations' around migration, welcoming and co-living with refugees, conference room, Municipality of Nomi, October 2015

In the roundtable discussions, which so far have been the activity with the thickest form of engagement, we aim at creating a convivial situation that encourage people to engage with others around everyday tactics and challenges, to be inspired by other's activities and to build their network. Generally, the discussions pose a lot of emphasis on practice and most of the invited speakers are themselves practitioners. This is because we see practice and its complexities as a fertile starting point for these exchanges: it provides a first common ground for discussion between the presenters and allows guests from the public to contribute to the conversation starting off from their personal experiences. Our role in the roundtables is, amongst others, to set up the spaces to allow conviviality to unfold (which is generally quite a time-consuming task as the spaces that host us throughout the district are generally rather sterile and uninviting), to prepare food and drink, to frame the evening and moderate the discussion. We also weave more political and philosophical layers into the discussions, driven by the desire to open up different ways of thinking and to complexify the discussion about the wider geographic-economic-political context in which we are situated.

Guida del Suolo – publishing a research zine

In order for us to reflect on the issues raised during the activities of the Circolo, to interweave them with issues we are exploring through other routes (reading, attending lectures, seminars and workshops, as well as Brave New Alps' activities that are not directly part of COMUNfARE) and to reach beyond the temporary space created by the Circolo's activities, we periodically produce a self-printed and digital A3 zine (Fig. 11). We populate the zine with visuals, edited transcripts from the activities, short texts written by us in which we mainly interweave ideas around feminist, autonomist and posthumanist approaches to the commons, economies and communities and inspirational excerpts of theoretical texts we translate from English to Italian.



Figure 11: Guida del Suolo, issue #1, October 2015, and issue #2, January 2016; 200 copies are printed and distributed, while a digital version of the document is also available online

The title of the zine is Guida del Suolo – una guida del comune, dei beni comuni e dei loro custodi in Vallagarina e dintorni (Soil Guide – a guide to the commons and commoners of the Vallagarina and surroundings) with the idea that in the future the single zines (Brave New Alps 2015) can be combined into a more consistent publication.

But for now, the low-key, self-printed A3 format enables us to keep momentum (we publish a zine approximately every two months) by sharing knowledges and inspirational texts in accessible bite size. The zine is an attempt to open up the research and the network we are building. It invites others to connect with us as they see what we are interested in and where our skills lay. Moreover, the zine functions as a vector through which we cultivate the relations we are building up through the temporary activities as we re-edit the transcripts with the people contributing to the activities and then distribute the copies of the printed zine also through their spaces and initiatives. By producing and distributing the zine we create something tangible in this first phase of the research, which hopefully underlines the fact that our activities are not only focused on asking questions and verbally discussing issues, but also about feeding back and sharing the knowledges produced.

Next steps – an outline

Since we started out with the activities of the Circolo, others have sought out connection with us, getting our skills activated for getting two local initiatives off the ground: one engages with how rights of civic use (or common rights) could be mobilized to support local micro-economies revolving around agricultural, farming and woodland activities and is co-organised with Agitu Ideo Gudeta, a goat farmer and Slow Food cheese producer (Fig. 15). The other is the activation of a community garden to bring together locals and asylum seekers hosted at the local migration camp who are interested in engaging with the land. This initiative is developed in collaboration with volunteers at the Centre for Peace Education Rovereto and social workers from the migration camp. Though these initiatives are not strictly connected to activities we would undertake ourselves, in the sense that we do not want to become farmers, gardeners or social workers, we see our involvement as yet another way of contributing to the circulation of the commons and the experimentation with other ways of doing and relating in the Vallagarina by sustaining others with our expertise.

In terms of considering how the research activities of COMUNfARE could sediment in one physical space, we are planning the set-up of an 'incubator for community economies', i.e. a space where ways of producing, relating and exchanging are fostered that work towards progressive eco-social change, as such a space is definitely lacking in our arena of speculation and its wider geographic context. In this space, we envisage ourselves experimenting with a 'social print workshop' that caters especially to social and ecological initiatives, while continuing to organise the Circolo as a commoners-led learning initiative that is active locally as well as trans-locally. Time-wise, we want to get started with this space by September 2016, taking the time up to then to prepare the ground. However, we do not see the setting up of the space as an end point to the research but as a format of engagement through which new questions and possibilities will emerge.

Concluding thoughts so far

Regarding the overall process of the research, on our good days we feel enthusiastic about how well things are going: we are growing an inspiring network of local and trans-local allies and we see how on a micro-scale we are contributing to progressive eco-social developments in the district. We are happy about being able to take our time for decisions and development and we see possibilities opening up which we could not have envisaged a year ago and we are constantly learning new things and feel that we are slowly growing into our arena of speculation. On our bad days however, we feel like it is all going way too slow and that we are not daring enough because we are not putting all our energies and resources into COMUNfARE but continue to give too much time and resources to cultivate the diversity of economies that have sustained us so far. Moreover, we fear that whatever we will do will not really have a meaningful impact in terms of eco-social change. On our normal days, which are luckily prevailing for now, we keep in balance between these two views and gain satisfaction from taking one step at a time and enjoy the slight changes of subjectivity, perspective, relations and possibilities each of them brings about.

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