

# An Invitation

June 2020

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

I hope this letter finds you all healthy and with positive energies for coping with our current pandemic situation.

I'm in the process of initiating the setup of a collective. I imagine a small group of like-minded people with shared concerns about the Earth and shared intentions to fully understand our environmental emergencies. We search for creative responses and forms of actions. We might be at different stages of this process, looking for solutions and meaningful, effective steps to take. Some of us are working in areas of ecological arts practices and are involved in climate activism in local or wider contexts. Our conversational, social practices create connections and creative partnerships through dialogue, participation and exchange. Some of us are educators or practitioners of therapies, working and thinking in holistic ways.

Forming this group could offer *a space for sharing* our experiences, thoughts, readings, work practices, creative ideas, and through this sharing, create *a space for learning* from each-other. (We might of course share other things too – walks, gardens, journeys, music, dinners, coffees and cakes etc. – as soon as these will be possible to share again, in physical presence!) We as a group would decide *what to share and how to share*. We would decide together how we could work together and how could we take actions.

I'm approaching 8 friends and colleagues with this letter, so we could form the first small core group.

I would like to invite You to participate in this collective.

Many of you know that I'm currently a student on a Masters course on Artistic Research in Social and Political Contexts in Antwerp, Belgium. My long term research project is an exploration of collectivity and cooperation in conversational social arts practices. I believe that now, probably more than ever, collectivity and creativity are crucial for our world. A social arts practice (on this little island) seems a small segment of this world, but for me it can be an anchor for my work. It can be a starting point from where it is possible to connect, grow and work with others of different professions, histories, experiences and from different walks of life.

Initiating this collective is also part of my research.

Over the past few months, my readings, visits, meetings and conversations in and around the university focused on ideas about *Commons* and the ways people can operate together in a collective way in society.

In my writings I called our potential group *Y Commons* – for myself, as a working title (avoiding *X* as it seems to be an overused letter for the unknown).

Naturally, the name / title of our collective would need to be decided collectively.

## Why Commons?

When thinking about *Commons* and their future potential for society, I find it easier to look at what the people (= commoners) in a *Commons* do. Commoners operate on the basis of shared values, visions and aims. They organize themselves in an equal, non-hierarchical way and are autonomous, often working independently from political or commercial powers and structures. Crucially, their relationship within the collective is based on trust and mutuality. Mutuality and reciprocity are important here: the *Commons* only really works when everyone feels equally supported while supporting others. Decision making is carried out in a conversational

way – which, for me, doesn't mean that we have to agree on everything (thankfully, there is no such thing!), but dialogue, listening and exchange can create a common ground. Collaboration and co-operation are methods for working in partnership with others.

This is a very general and short description and there are many theories and understandings of the concept of *Commons*. We could certainly spend some time to discuss it and debate it in the future!

My research work means a curious situation for me in our (potential) collective.

I will be a participant, collaborator and commoner in the group, but in the same time, working on my artistic research process too.

This will be a challenge no doubt, but it reminds me of my experience with the *Deenview Project* in Castlecomer over the past few years. This was a long term project exploring communication, social exclusion and participation with members of the Deenview Centre community, adults with intellectual disabilities and learning difficulties. I participated as an artist in a position of an initiator or enabler of the project, or a curator in some parts. Together with collaborator and project partner Claire Wilson we managed to achieve a more equal and much less hierarchal environment with the participants, where everyone's inputs, responses, ideas and opinions were respected, valued and considered equally. While working in this collaborative environment, I was also researching it, writing about it and including it in presentations – with the fully communicated consent of everyone involved.

I will continue with this ethical approach and I will discuss participatory consent and all connecting details with you.

At the moment I'm in the position of this initiator, who tries to support the start of this collective, connecting with everyone – but most of these connections are already there! It will be our collective choice how the group is shaped in the future.

What are the next steps?

I appreciate it if you would please let me know if you are interested. Then we could "meet" - this will still have to be online at this stage. I propose to set up a ZOOM meeting for all of us to have a chat, introduce ourselves, start our collective brainstorming and see how we feel about this potential collective – and about the potential of the collective. Your options are open, continuously.

Thank you for taking the time to read,

Warm wishes

Tunde

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Anette Baldauf, *If we can't come together, we will all fall apart*, 2005, detail of cover image on *Spaces of Commoning*, Publication Series of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Vol.18. 2016, Sternberg Press.