

It was difficult
but also nice and
we got to know
a little more

Prologue. Josephine Baan, Marea Hildebrand, Philipp Spillmann

Looking forward

It has been a year. And it has been quite a year. In early 2020, the School of Commons launched a new program alongside a wonderful selection of new projects and participants. Fresh-faced, full of ideas and expectations, we embarked upon this road together, intent on unearthing dormant knowledge, novel insights, and perhaps finding some common grounds. And as it is often the case, nothing turned out quite as expected. Nonetheless, the past year has brought together an exciting range of individuals with diverse backgrounds, knowledges, and bearings, and together they have made School of Commons to what it was during this extraordinary and unprecedented moment in time. In this publication, we hope to give a slight insight into the people, projects, and experiences of School of Commons in 2020.

By way of introduction, School of Commons (SoC) is a community-based initiative dedicated to the study and development of self-organized knowledge. Promoting a broad, integrative understanding of the term 'knowledge', we focus on matters surrounding the production and mediation of knowledge with a focus on self-organized practices. The content and position of SoC is defined by our community rather than a predetermined program. All of SoC's research is conducted in our three labs: LEARN, MAPP, and READ. You can find out more about each lab via [this link](#). The labs are run as peer-based collaborative endeavors with annually changing members. They bring together a wide range of participants and guests to share their curiosity, skills, and visions. Results of our ongoing research are regularly published online on the SoC website and presented on public displays. All content produced within our labs is openly accessible, and anyone can apply to a lab.

At SoC, we hope to establish a community of practitioners in which reciprocal exchange, peer learning, and a friendly atmosphere are the main ingredients. We aim to develop a program that is open to all, and encourage working across different age groups, disciplines, and (educational) backgrounds. SoC's program is developed bottom-up rather than top-down; instead of providing a fixed curriculum, we encourage our participants to actively shape our program, either by organising and hosting events themselves, or by inviting guest speakers and tutors that are relevant to their research and practice.

The onset of the pandemic in early 2020 meant that we – like everyone – had to rapidly adapt to new and unfamiliar circumstances. Where the SoC usually relies on informal encounters, spontaneous gatherings, and spending time together, we were suddenly faced with the, by now, familiar vortex of video calls, emails, and whatsapp groups; none of which are particularly conducive to establishing a strong sense of community. On the upside, this did make it possible for people from all over the world to participate in and contribute to SoC, ultimately leading to a more diverse and inclusive program. For this we are grateful, and excited to continue in a similar vein in upcoming years.

Hence, whilst not without its challenges, 2020 has brought forth an incredible array of voices, at times finding resonance and harmony. In this spirit, this publication functions as a compendium of sorts, compiling the topics, projects, and people that have made up School of Commons during this year. Each week, a new contribution by one of our participants will be published online, shedding light onto their research and offering an occasional insight into the peaks and valleys of collaborative learning. We will end the publication with a short note in which we look back on the year, but for now we are *looking forward* to sharing work by the people that have given life to School of Commons in the year of 2020.