

Action research and commoning: positioning architectural research in (or with) local grassroots group

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The proposed contribution is based on two case studies where architect-researchers and local actors partner as collaborators in commoning efforts. The first case develops around an ‘urban common’ (as named by the local council) Moruzzi Road in Pavia, Italy. The second one involves reappropriation of a disused open space as a community orchard at Huddersfield, UK. For us, the commons present a strong alternative or third way beyond both the state and market (Dellenbaugh-Losse et al., 2015). Thus, we consider a contemporary notion of the commons which concerns not only spatial resources, but also the protocols of commoning (Bollier & Helfrich, 2015) by the self-defined group of commoners. Our aim is to unfold what tools commoning ethos generate to support the local grassroots experiences and reflect on our role as architects in the process who are not trained as commoners. We suggest commoning spatial production detaches it from market logic and is inclined towards practices of activism and volunteerism using tactical tools of self-build, DIY architecture and temporary interventions. Both situations unfold the architects’ ‘good intentions’ and situatedness of such critical spatial practices within the commons framework. Reflecting on our own embedded positions as architects, we discuss evolution of power relations over time, recognise struggles as an integral part of the space-commoning practice and importance of conflict management among multiple voices.

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