

Conference paper for the 1st IASC Thematic Conference on Urban Commons

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Potentials and limits of Urban Commons in the city of Lüneburg

Background

Research on the commons is gaining scientific momentum. The term remains however controversial. One strand of literature refers to commons as a regulation problem focusing on institutions for resource management. According to this strand, self-regulation is regarded as an effective alternative to market and state regulation (Héritier 2002; Keohane et al. 1995; Ostrom 1999). A second strand views commons as a political programme with emphasis on power, participation, responsibility and justice (Brunnengräber 2003; Constantin 2002; Helfrich 2009; Mahnkof 2003). In this paper, it is argued that thinking these two strands more strongly together opens possibilities for law and governance innovations at different levels and scales.

This study therefore focuses on the transformative character of commons at the city level. Empirical evidences are obtained from Lüneburg – a Hanseatic City with seven thousand inhabitants located in the North of Germany. A range of collaborative practices of self-governance can be observed in Lüneburg, such as for example urban gardening projects, co-housing initiatives or energy cooperatives. These initiatives can be regarded as change agents and initiators for institutional innovations. They are however embedded in a complex legal and political context. Little is known about how to think these practices more holistically together. Data about the potential of these initiatives for a commons-based city is missing. This study aims to close this research gap by analysing the potential of self-governance schemes in the city of Lüneburg and possible new ways of law and governance practices at the city level.

Research Questions and Research Design

This research project is embedded in the research agenda “Future Cities 2030+” of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) that supports the transformation towards sustainability of 50 German municipalities. It aims to answer the following research question:

RQ0: How would a commons-based city Lüneburg look like in 2030?

To answer this overarching question, five research grouping work simultaneously towards this goal (Figure 1). Each group works around a different thematic field (health, environment, infrastructure, knowledge, food). The project is structured in two phases: In the first phase, the commons-based community is Lüneburg is analysed as well as relevant stakeholder identified (Reed S. et al. 2009; Varvasovszky et al. 2000). The following questions are answered in this first project phase:

- RQ1: Which is the legal and political context of resource management in Lüneburg?
- RQ2: Which examples of self-governance exist in Lüneburg and how can they be classified?

In the second phase, a scenario analysis (John et al. 2015; Kosnow et al. 2008) with relevant stakeholders is conducted. The following set of sub-questions is answered in the second phase of the project:

- RQ3: How can existing practices of self-governance thought together?
- RQ4. To which extent can self-governance practices elsewhere be applied in Lüneburg?
- RQ5: Which roles would the municipal administration play in the transition?
- RQ6: Which kinds of institutions innovations would be necessary?
- RQ7: What kinds of potential hurdles can be identified?

In a final step, the single visions are combined to a holistic picture that provides information about the potential for urban commons in Lüneburg and possible hurdles.

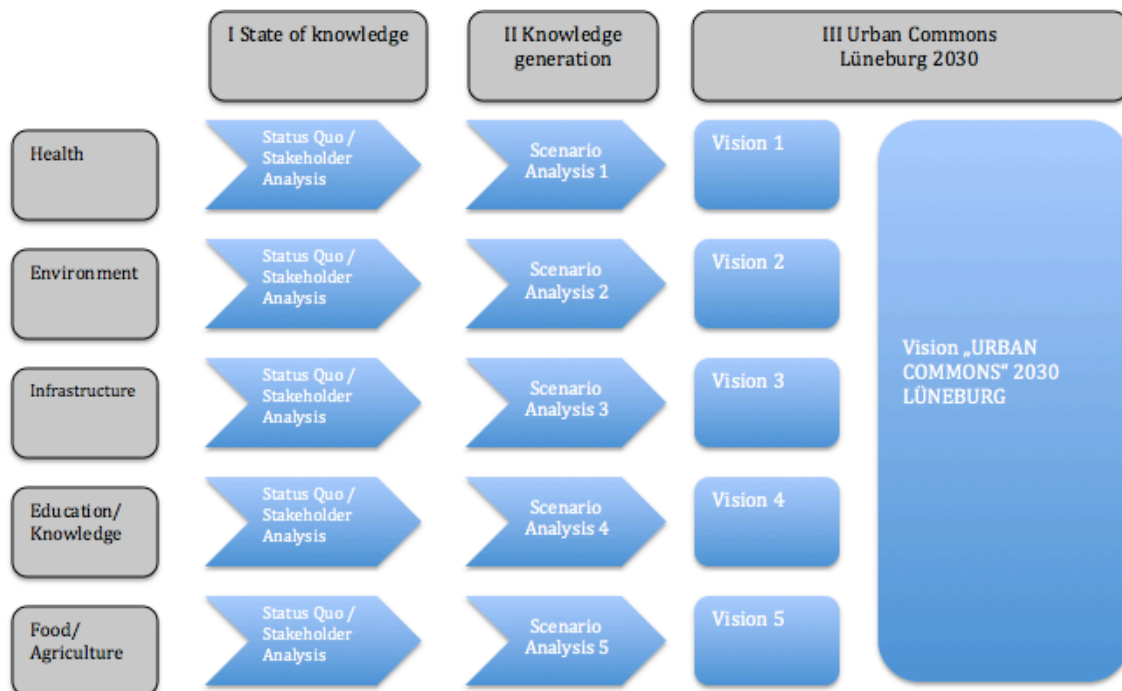


Figure 1: Overview over research design

Expected Outcomes:

Data are currently collected and analyzed. Final results are to be expected by the end of the year 2015.

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