

# COMMON SPACE.

05 // COMMON SPACES // ANTOINE DUTRIEU,  
FLORIAN MICHAELIS, MADS PETER LAURSEN

# COMMON GOOD?

I talked to Mads Peter Laursen, Antoine Dutrieu and Florian Michealis about the space we live in and the possibilities of communing. Taking a look on urban planning with the approach to improve cities and people's living condition to be sustainable, increase people's health and happiness.

Mads Peter Laursen spreads with 'Bureau Detours' the idea of relating people in cities and in neighbourhoods. Mads is the founder of the Institute for X in Aarhus. The Institute for X is an organisation which is seeking for the best possible neighbourhood for all, by enhancing cultural activities, combining creativity with business as well as public debate the public education. The Institute considers itself as a laboratory for urban experimentation where initiatives have the space to grow organically.

Antoine Dutrieu is the Creative Development Manager at Communa. Communa is a non-profit organization for transitional town planning by temporary occupation of empty buildings. Temporary occupations initiate accommodation solutions and allow the emergence of projects of social, cultural or socio-economic interest.

Florian Michaelis is founder of the bureau for transformative architecture and urban development graadwies. Moreover, he belongs to the administration of AlteMu in Kiel. AlteMu focusses on individual potentials within the community in order to send impulses into society and to operate in a sustainable manner. Its urban development policy involves Kiel's citizens and external actors in shaping their immediate living environment following a bottom-up strategy.

**BUILDING CITIES  
AS COMMONS.**

**IN YOUR CITY: IS THERE A PLACE WHICH MAKES YOU FEEL ANGRY OR FRUSTRATED?**

**MADS** I get angry when I go to the harbour side, where the city meets the water. A key history has been almost scraped away, and you have only these few really old and beautiful buildings left, the rest is slowly being turned into this super polished harbour front. That is fucking boring. The scale is super humongous. I really get very annoyed when I go there, thinking 'how the fuck could you do this?' There used to be all these garages, silos and warehouses and these nice buildings, and they have just been scraped away. The history is gone. And then you see how many millions and millions and millions of Euros have been invested into these areas and then I am asking myself "how the fuck could you make something this bad?"

**ANTOINE** For me it is not a place. It's the fact that there are cars everywhere. That makes me angry.

**FLORIAN** The list is long. I'm most upset about the small Kiel Canal and its development. There are missed opportunities. From my point of view, the approaches were good. During the participation in 2017, issues for the future were clear, topics like sustainability, environmental awareness, surface management, water management and such things were all clear and conscious from a planning and technical point of view. Socially, too, the demands were already there. But they didn't dare to put them on the map. Instead they created a concrete desert and an artificial watercourse. And those who took part in the participation, who actually want to be there, they wished to row from the Kleinen Kiel into the Baltic Sea. Of course, this is perhaps illusory in some places, but at least opening the Kleinen Kiel would have been a possibility. I think that a great opportunity was wasted there. And I honestly think it's a terrible space, it's just not green, it's not alive.

**LOOKING AT URBAN PLANNING,  
WHAT IS MISSING?**

**OUTDOOR  
SWIMMING  
POOLS.**

**SCALE.**

**WHERE DO YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE?**

**MADS** I feel very comfortable at the Institute for X, but I'm probably biased. I also feel very comfortable where I am right now. So I feel comfortable in a lot of places, and I don't get angry that much, it's not that I walk around and get angry at all sorts of stuff all the time.

**FLORIAN** At the Bellevue Pier, where else? That is a place with potential, lots of potential. Right now it is a non-place. But it has its moments when it's really beautiful, when there are lots of people there, making music e.g. I have the feeling that people go there to meet, to find peace, to find themselves. It's a place where I also come to rest, where I am almost every morning. It is a place where we can tangibly shape precisely these goals of the community-designed city, the green city and the connection to the water. If politics decides to do that. For that to happen, some interests have to be set back. It is not important that there is a road. It is much more important that the green space, as it was originally, reaches down to the water again. There is so much potential and you can really feel it.

**ANTOINE** Right now, after driving my daughter to school, I have this tradition that I sit by a canal of water next to my daughter's school. Every morning I sit there and I meditate for half an hour. This makes me feel good and safe. And there is this park just next to my house. I really like to go there to enjoy nature and breathe fresh air.

### DO YOU HAVE ANY ROLE MODELS OR SOMETHING INSPIRING YOU?

**ANTOINE** No, I don't really work like this. I get inspired by many different small aspects of many different projects, but I don't like admiring one particular project or person.

**MADS** I have several, actually. One is called philosophy of both, this can be in everything in life, to not get into this black and white understanding of things. Can you be capitalistic and socialist at the same time? Yes, you can. In everything, you can work with this philosophy of both. What is the good in this and what is the good in that? And then try to take the good and put it together in a new way. And if it's 10 things then take the best of 10 things and put it together. With the Institute for X we took some five or six different projects and try to take the best out of them. One of them is a coworking space in Copenhagen I used to come at, people were really working, but the vibe was still really good. But it was pretty close to public. So we took the nice part: working people, doing their shit, being nice together, in a nice place. And considered that we don't want to be so close to public.

**FLORIAN** Luc Schuiten, who works visionary instead of just being a visionary. I learned so much from him, e.g. to take people as they are. I was a student when I did an internship at Luc's. When we first met he was like "hey, who are you anyway? A trainee? Cool, you can do that. But with us, everyone has to find their own place. And since I don't know you and you don't know me ... Here is a pile of books, look through them and then come back and tell me if you're up for it." To be so inviting and just to give an impulse to make people curious and to say "Hey, I invite you to join me and I trust you to do it." To bring along such confidence, such basic trust and optimism, that's definitely what I learned from him and why he is a great role model. Another role model is Peter Zastrow, from Zastrow + Zastrow Architects in Kiel. I learned from him is humility and reverence for what others do. He was very self confident. But despite that, he always had respect for others. I perceived that to be good and I took that with me.

## SUCH BASIC TRUST AND OPTIMISM, THAT'S DEFINITELY WHAT I LEARNED FROM HIM.

### WHAT EXACTLY DO YOU DO ALL DAY?

**ANTOINE** I work for a non-profit called Communa. We occupy vacant buildings in order to recreate spaces for projects that are beneficial to the city. It is housing for people who are economically disadvantaged, disadvantaged artists and marginal people. We also host offices, artists, workshops and also we have spaces for local activities for neighbours and kids from the neighbourhood. This is what Communa does – and I am developing new projects for Communa. So I find the buildings and I also design what could be in it. I create the project from scratch. Once it's running, I leave it to someone who is going to manage it on a daily basis.

**FLORIAN** Changing society, working for people. That is my goal, that's the reason why I do what I do. And empowering people to be self-effective. From a purely technical point of view, that probably amounts to activism, project development and architecture or space development. Those are more the symptoms of what I do and not the purpose of my work. With graadwies we develop new economic systems. We sit down and think about how the economy works. Who earns at which point and

THE IDEA WAS  
TO CREATE A SMALL  
SPACE OF UTOPIA.

who should earn, so we can bring society closer together, to create more equality. We sit down and think about how spaces function, how we can dissolve anonymity, how we can lead people into communication. We consider what influence architecture or spaces has on the environment. And then we try to always communicate the most

positive image possible and promote an optimistic way of thinking. That means we try to get away from "Hey, no, you must not" towards "Hey yeah, go ahead. Yes, you can do that. But pay attention to..." To create an affirmative culture.

**MADS** The idea was to create, I guess, a small space of utopia. Or a space with a different reality than the rest of the city. Cities, as I see them, are turning into huge suburbs somehow. So we are building the Institute for X to have some place where the city is a little bit more crazy and wild, hand-held and homemade. And not so perfectly made. When we build stuff and cities today, it's super perfect and very finished and polished.

DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF 'IMPORTANT'? WHY?

**ANTOINE** Am I important for my girlfriend and for my daughter? Yes. Am I important in the city? Probably not. I hope some people love me at least a little bit, that I am important for them, but I'm not sure about that.

**FLORIAN** Me, important...? I am replaceable. Completely. Each of us is interchangeable. I believe that if it wasn't me, it would be someone else. Hmm, I think I can communicate quite well and think quickly. But does that make me important? Others can do that, too.

**MADS** I think it is super important to have this space for failure I offer people at the Institute for X. In society these days everything has to be perfect. Is it Instagramable? Yeah, no, it's not. It's fucking ugly and it doesn't work. OK, that's fine. Let's try something else. I think it's super important that that is allowed to exist. And you can learn a lot from this and can also be easier to be a human and it can be easier to live.

WHAT VALUES DO YOU USE AS A GUIDE?

**MADS** I used to say: "Why do birds fly? Because they can!"

**FLORIAN** The well-considered, that's also the reason why we're called 'graadwies' – which is Platt and my great-grandmother always said, when something has to be well-considered, graadwies. That's super important to me. So thoughtfulness is a value. Optimism. And equality or fairness. And not just fairness towards

people, but towards everything. That means just as much towards nature, human beings, the economy. Everything has to work. It is a justified claim that projects are economical. It is a justified claim that nature has priority, that nature has to function. We humans are living beings, we have to function but we only function in natural, good environments, in desirable environments. And it is also a justified demand that social coexistence is working. And that's why equality is totally important for me.

**ANTOINE** Love, joy and ambition.

LOVE. JOY. AND  
AMBITION

**WHO IS THE WE?**

**WHEN YOU FEEL THAT  
YOU BELONG TOGETHER  
IN A SPACE, IN A MENTAL SPACE,  
IN A PHYSICAL SPACE  
WITH PEOPLE.**

**A LOT OF CIRCLES, THEY  
ARE GETTING BIGGER, BIGGER,  
BIGGER. AND THE BIGGEST WE  
IS PROBABLY THE WHOLE  
WORLD.**

**LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE.  
PEOPLE WHO SHARE  
THE SAME VALUES.**

**WHAT MAKES YOU AN ACTIVIST?**

**MADS** I never have called myself an activist, but I probably am. It seems a little bit like activist is something you put on yourself, like now I'm an activist or at least how it is today. I'm an activist and I never put it on myself. I was just doing my things. Activists are also part of something, a part of Greenpeace, of Extinction Rebellion, you join this cause where you can be an activist. And I never joined a cause. I want to make a different reality in society, in a physical space, like this is my activity. So am I active or am I an activist? I think it's a different thing. I'm active within what I do. And seen from the outside, that's probably an activist act.

**ANTOINE** I'm not sure. No, probably not. When I go to see real activists, they would say that we are nuts. When I go to see a politician, they might say that we are. It depends on the point of view. I don't consider it because I think activists, they work against something. We work for something. We don't want to destroy anything, we just want to promote our values as much as possible. So I'm not trying to destroy any system. I'm just trying to convince people that we are going to make them live in a better way, in a healthier way and funnier way.

**FLORIAN** Yes, but on a different level than I used to be. I supported the anti-nuclear movement, digging up tracks and demonstrating against toxic waste dumps. At some point I turned 16 and that became a bit less and I found a different form. Now I have discovered that you can also be effective if you simply set an example and invite people to join in. It's maybe the hippie movement of activists, it is peaceful. We always try to be relatively kind and say "Hey, I invite you to join. If you're up for it, I'm totally happy, because I'm sure you're someone who can contribute a lot to change. And if you're interested, be there. And if not, that's cool too." So, that's a very friendly form of activism.

**OUTLINE YOUR IDEA OF 'COMMUNITY', PLEASE.**

**FLORIAN** For me, community always meant taking the others into account. Asking how other are doing. Sharing is a very important part of community, not just things, but thoughts, emotions, feelings. Community is a bit of a binding link between people, and I think we have far too little of that. The capitalism and our market economy which is exemplified to us, was created out of the economic miracle, which follows these categories of my house, my boat, my something, it makes you feel you need all that to be happy.

More through less – that is something you can experience very well in a community, by sharing. And you have much more happiness, when you share your happiness. And your sadness is much easier, when you share your sadness and you laugh a lot louder, when you have more people around you who also laugh. But you must not take yourself too seriously. I think that the less we own and the more we disperse into the community, the better it works. It sounds fully

AM I ACTIVE  
OR AM I AN  
ACTIVIST?

**YOU HAVE MUCH MORE  
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YOUR HAPPINESS.**

socialist communist, but it's not, because it didn't work there, because in the end individuals enriched themselves again. But we see that piece by piece society understands and the collective memory and the collective intelligence can lead us there. I do believe that this will also work at some point maybe not in our generation but in the next or the one after that. But it has to work, because otherwise we'll always have war, revolutions and social division. And we actually want to promote togetherness.

**ANTOINE** It is in the concept of this German author, Max Weber, 19th, 20th century, and he differentiates 'Gesellschaft' and 'Gemeinschaft'. I find it interesting to put it like this, because the 'Gesellschaft', the society, is a pack of people

## COMMUNITY IS A SET OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE CHOSEN TO LIVE TOGETHER AROUND A CHOSEN SET OF RULES.

who haven't decided to be together. It's like people in the city, they live together because they were born there and they don't necessarily choose their common rules. While the 'Gemeinschaft', the community, is a set of people who have chosen to live together around a chosen set of rules. So for me, that is the most important aspect of community.

**MADS** A community exists of a lot of egos. It's again the philosophy of both. When you are in the commons it's important that you don't devalue the egos. Back to this question, what are humans? We are ... I am Mads ... You are Laura and it's OK. We can still share something and we can still create something together, but in this search for commons, we should not lose our-

selves. It is very important in a community that there is the space to become yourself. And not become the cluster. It's OK just to do your own shit. And then somehow in this community vibe, when people are together and they are doing their things and the environment is kind and loving and you can fail, then people start to do things together. I am a very social person, but I also need my own time and my own projects. I don't want to be told by a common thing how I should feel about things and what I should believe in. Individuals are super important. If we look at what era we are in, we are in a super individualistic era. Maybe we have always been that, I don't know. But maybe it's part of the human race to be individualistic. And seek our own happiness and joy. In the Commons, there are bubbles, and somehow all these bubbles are connected to the one next to them, they are connected in a chain kind of system or a piece of foam. Looking at a piece of foam, it's one object, but it consists of small bubbles. All the bubbles can have a good relationship to the bubble next to them. It becomes this big piece of foam with a big feeling of togetherness, even though that everybody is never together at the same time or sharing the same thing at the same time. But in between this bubbleness it is nice. That's like millions of connections of good energy.

**WHAT IS THE OPPOSITE OF A 'COMMUNITY'?**

**FLORIAN** Competition. The opposite of community is elbowing out, competition, egoism. Self-enrichment

**MADS** I see communities all over the place, actually. There are different forms of communities. It's very hard for people not to somehow be in some kind of community, you really have to insist on being alone. Of course they can be more visible or they can be more easy to access. Communities can do more things for the public without the I-need-to-make-the-money-out-of this style. Then I think it is also something about consciousness. Are you conscious that you are in a community and part of something? Hardcore capitalists and criminals, I think that's the two things where I don't see community developing in a nice way because they are so aggressive towards their surroundings. Probably the criminal syndicate also is a community within, but they are super destructive towards their environment. That's not community spirit. The same thing with hardcore capitalism, they are just in it for the money so they can take their young babe with the big boobs on some yacht. It's not very good for anything else. They just steal it another way within the law. So these two I'm not so fond of.

**ANTOINE** There is either people who live together for pragmatic interests, I mean, we share a city and maybe some type of community somehow. I think there's a spectrum, on the one end are the communities, further on the track are societies and on other end, there is individualism, people who mostly live for themselves and by themselves and who are ready to cheat on people for their own interests and lower other people's interests. So the opposite of a community would be the individualistic.

**ARE YOU CREATING COMMON GOOD THROUGH YOUR ACTIONS?**

**MADS** Yes, I am very certain that we are creating common good. It is very much about this oasis in the city. It creates a space of belonging, a space of togetherness, a space of exploration, creation, possibilities for people. And then it

also creates a nice place to visit for a huge amount of other people. Yes, I'm sure that we are doing something for the common good of the both, the city, but also for the people participating in it.

**ANTOINE** Yes, on different levels. Each time we open a new building, we create a common space. It's not the ownership of the space that is important anymore, but rather the usage of the space. And we try to make it as common as possible. Some people have private spaces, but there is always either space to eat together, to meet together or a big space for events that we can organize together. This is very important for us and each building. And definitely within Communa itself, within the non-profit, we are creating a common goods out of the money, we have on our bank accounts.

It doesn't matter how old you are or how long you've been working for the non-profit – everybody is paid the same. We try to make money and salaries a little bit more equal. That makes it common good for me. And we do some recycling of food twice a week. We share it with about two hundred people every week. The making of free food is common good for me.

**IT CREATES A SPACE OF BELONGING, OF TOGETHERNESS, A SPACE OF EXPLORATION, CREATION, POSSIBILITIES FOR PEOPLE.**

## IT'S ABOUT GOOD NUTRITION AND HEALTH, ABOUT THE FAIR USE OF RESOURCES, ABOUT CONSCIOUS LIVING.

**FLORIAN** I think so, the AlteMu will be one of the biggest. We have just formed a cooperative. In which everybody is invited to be a part of it. Everybody can start a project, be creative, can garden or just chill on the roof

and have a beer. And one of my favourite projects, which has a great impact on the common good and the health of society, was the cooperation with a local dairy. The basic requirement was to achieve a functioning economic system, and we managed to take this family farm to the next step. They made the cheese dairy out of it for us. So they produce milk and cheese locally and fairly and in a super quality. It's important to me that we promote these projects, that we promote small structures that function in collectives. For me, that was a project that totally promotes common good, because it's about good nutrition and health, about the fair use of resources, about conscious living. A project that is absolutely close to my heart. I'm really glad that I can say that design- and architecture wise it really doesn't matter.

### WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE MORE RADICAL?

**FLORIAN** I really would like to be more consistent. I think laws sometimes really suck. They keep me from realising the projects. However, things are only possible step by step. And if I want to have an equal society or a change of laws, it also only works step by step. The student dormitory, one of our projects, it was about restructuring the social housing subsidy. And we launched it as a pilot project

and now we have to monitor it and maybe in five years we will manage to restructure it. You can't change structures from one moment to the next. It's just not possible, you have to break everything down into small pieces and that's maybe annoying to me and makes me think, fuck, if I would build for myself, I would build completely different. If I would develop something for myself, I would develop something completely different.

**ANTOINE** If I didn't have a child and wouldn't need sleep so much than I could like between three and five in the morning, do some radical actions. Yes, I would do. But in my work, in my daily life, I think I am living according to my values.

**MADS** I would like to be way more effectful on how the rest of the city is built. But that's very hard to get into that. It's a bit like a huge machine that is just rolling on and it seems more or less impossible to get inside the machine and actually do some-

thing else, it's just traveling alone and keeps on bulldozing old buildings and building up these big, schema following buildings that look like they're from the suburbs but built inside the city.

YOU CAN NOT  
CHANGE STRUCTURES  
FROM ONE MOMENT  
TO THE NEXT.

## ONE WISH FOR TOMORROW'S SOCIETY?

**I WOULD CHANGE THE AIR OF THE CITY SO PEOPLE ARE MORE PEACEFUL.**

### YOUR CONCRETE UTOPIA: WHAT SHOULD OUR CITIES LOOK LIKE IN THE FUTURE?

**MADS** I think there's lots of different types of utopias. For me, it's a place like X. With its free spirit, cultural orientation, diversity, activity and colours and smells and creations being made all the time. And with friendships and love. It's a place where all these things can intertwine. That's utopia for me. Somehow I think cities will actually get closer to that. At some point people responsible for building and developing cities will actually have learned to build good cities. The systems are moving in a better direction, where they actually want to build something that is liveable and has a flair for small shops and for shred areas and for smaller streets. Where they don't use this giant ruler on everything, and all the buildings are aligned straight. But that's a next generation thing. This generation is still fucked. Wait a bit, and I think the Cities will start to be built in a nicer way.

**ANTOINE** The city would be self sustainable, much more closer to sustainability in terms of management of energy, food production, water production and treatments. Which means that we would have to reuse most of the streets, to do bike lanes instead, to do lakes or ponds and plant a lot of plants. A lot of these spaces would be used to achieve this goal. But in order to be self sustainable, you don't only need to produce energy and food locally, but you also need to lower your needs. Which means there would be much less cars, only some that would be shared by neighbourhoods. There would be a lot of public transport, super efficient and regular and working with electricity, maybe. Or with plastic. They just found a way to use plastic as energy for engines. It's crazy.

Also cities would be turning to a lot of small villages, so citizens would have more decisions to take about their neighbourhoods than currently. And everybody would be much more of a maker than working in offices, as we do now. They would repair the streets and plant the plants. People would be much closer to their production and

back to the elements they need, such as housing and water and food. Definitely there would be a lot of forests schools, that you have in Germany. There would be animals. There would be no speculation systems. Maybe we still use money, but in a way that it actually doesn't matter if you get rich or not. There would be places of cults that are shared: the mosque will be the same church than everybody else.

**FLORIAN** I think I'm very close to Luc. In utopia, we really live in harmony with people, with nature, with animals and have all our cycles. I would wish to live in a tree. How cool would that be? It's a really cool tree house together with the tree and not being afraid of nature anymore. Why are people afraid of spiders? There are so many people who have arachnophobias. Why? It's a living creature. In my utopia people are no longer be afraid of encounters or of strangers. There is healthy respect. And in cities are networks of high-tech tree houses. People learn to use their mental abilities. Really use them. We created the interface between computer and human? Why can't I create a direct human-to-human interface? That would be really crazy and utopian. You could really feel what the environment is feeling and doing. Like trees being connected via their roots.

**THAT WE BECOME ONE  
WITH NATURE. AND THAT  
HOUSES ARE BUILT  
FROM LIVING PLANTS.**

**I REALLY WISH THE PEOPLE  
TO BE GOOD.**

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**muthestus**  
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