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Challenging contemporary societal challenges: Commoning practices for technology, value, and care

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Abstract

There is arguably no one way to classify and analyse societal challenges. Common international frameworks, such as the Sustainable Development Goals, EU Missions or the Green New Deal, classify a broad range of issues, from climate change and wealth inequality to food security, overpopulation, migration and public health. The interconnection and interdependencies among their many dimensions make an all-inclusive presentation almost impossible, while there is as much to learn from any approach, as there is to learn from its blind spots. The recent publication of the 6th Assessment Report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change evinces the scale, urgency, and intensity of the ecological crisis. Moreover, the vulnerability of ecosystems and people varies substantially across different regions of the world, with the ones following historical patterns of inequality being disproportionately affected. The types of severe climate-related events expected in the next decades would require urgent comprehensive understanding and action on climate per se, along with bold interventions to address the impact. However, the severity of the two interwoven crises, namely ecological change and wealth inequality, seriously diminishes the prospects of solutions of the necessary magnitude and intensity. Simultaneously, the approach of global challenges and global solutions can often become part of the problem rather than the solution. The above fatal interrelation between ecological crisis and wealth inequality is eloquently demonstrated in technology. Across the globe technologically driven visions, such as green growth and climate neutral cities, shape political priorities and narratives for addressing climate change. But such visions remain blind to the vast ecological and social externalities of high technology, upon which these narratives are largely based. These externalities have been shown to reproduce exploitative patterns of both people and ecosystems, making the relevant solutions part of the problem. Hence, the discussion around addressing contemporary societal challenges needs to critically engage with their deep historical causes connected to the way we produce and organize our societies. We take course from the history and contemporary practices around the commons to debunk common myths about technology and unveil the underlying factors of production and organization that underpin the contemporary ecological and social crises and explore alternative pathways for technology, value, and care.



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