



# Knowledge Practices Within and Beyond Sharing and Commoning Urban Initiatives

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In the context of neoliberal cities, with growing levels of housing commodification and space competition, sharing and commoning urban initiatives within the larger framework of urban social movements are shaping tactics of contestation. To what extent they represent sustainable efforts to urban commons governance remains largely unexplored. This article aims therefore to contribute to better understand how practices of solidarity can be maintained beyond their first productive phase and to explore the engagement of social movement and initiatives actors in the production and maintenance of shared spatial resources. To do that, we focus on knowledge practices as a key factor to ensure sustainability of actions within and beyond urban initiatives that engage with and practice sharing and space-commoning. Drawing on figurational sociology, we consider individuals involved in these urban initiatives as embedded in multiple social settings and networks of collaboration and interdependence, in which transactions such as resources, ideas and information take place giving way to collective action, new modes of participation and urban transformation. Within this conceptual framework, we explore how urban initiatives networks produce and transfer their knowledge (1) within their own internal set-up, (2) to private and public institutions (e.g., administration and political actors) and (3) to other civil society organizations. To do so, we draw on qualitative research conducted in three German cities, Kassel, Stuttgart, and Berlin on the topics of sharing and commoning practices in the field of housing and public space. By looking at the practices by which knowledge—required for action and networking—is co-/re-produced and exchanged, we identify those that constrain or enable sharing and commoning strategies on the long-term and have therefore a larger potential for sustaining efforts of urban commons governance.

**Keywords:** figurations, housing, knowledge, public space, sharing practices, social movements, urban commons, urban initiatives

## INTRODUCTION

The awareness that worldwide major economic crisis have been deeply rooted in the way our cities have been conceptualized and developed as engines of growth and sites of and for capital accumulation (Harvey, 2012) has led to a critical reflection on alternative ways to shape urban transformations. While financial investments in the built environment, particularly the housing sector, continue today their profit-oriented business as usual in German cities and elsewhere, the number of practices and scholarly works exploring alternatives for (re)shaping our cities and societies differently is continuously growing. A myriad of urban initiatives within, or influenced by, broader global and translocal urban social movements—e.g., the *Right to the City Alliance* in the US, the *Derecho a la Ciudad* movements in Latin America, or the *Recht auf Stadt* initiatives in Germany—are challenging the “neoliberal city” in its different manifestations, scales and geographies (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Mayer, 2012). It is in this context that the concepts of *sharing* and *urban commons*—that is, shared urban resources that are directly managed by local communities and their civic collaborations for their wellbeing—have (re)gained currency both, as theoretical lenses and practical approaches (Ferguson, 2014) to explore and activate new urban transformations toward more resilient urban societies (e.g., Radywyl and Biggs, 2013; Dellenbaugh et al., 2015; Sharp, 2018; Koch et al., 2020; Petrescu et al., 2021). The ‘revival of the commons’ in urban contexts manifests in the growing number of space-commoning processes, that encompass sets of practices and also imaginaries with emancipatory potential (Stavrvides, 2016; p. 7). From this perspective, urban commoning, i.e., the conceptualization, co-production and collective management of shared urban resources, is considered as a “project of resistance to privatization and globalization” (Petrescu et al., 2016; p. 718). A project with capacity to build “commons-based resilience”, a “transformative condition” that facilitates innovation (to meet social needs in a better way than the current existing solutions), adaption to urban change, and ultimately lead to more just and equitable ways of living (Petrescu et al., 2021, p. 160).

In line with Foster (2011) in this article, we consider sharing and space-commoning practices among diverse organizations, networks, and action groups as a specific manifestation of collective action. Embedded within or inspired by larger urban social movements, these practices are part of the ongoing efforts by many urban initiatives and activist networks to shape tactics of resistance against the growing space competition (Chatterton, 2010; Bradley, 2015; Foster and Iaione, 2015). They also constitute modes of cooperation (Huron, 2015, 2018; Iaione, 2016; de Angelis, 2017) that can potentially move beyond activist circles into complex “polycentric urban governance” models (Iaione and Cannavò, 2015) to counteract the current expanding levels of housing and public space commodification. The growing literature on sharing economy (Barron et al., 2018; Rutkowska-Gurak and Adamska, 2019; Vith et al., 2019), the urban commons (Feinberg et al., 2021) and (“new” and “urban”) social movements (e.g., Melucci, 1980, 1996; Mayer, 2012) acknowledge the transformative potential of sharing,

commoning and activist practices in the urban context as they can represent horizontal and decentralized forms of democracy and “prefigurative” (both goal- and process-oriented) forms of politics (Scholl, 2016). Still, it is important to acknowledge that many of these efforts are implemented on a discontinuous level. This entails that they are mostly productive in their initial phase, while they tend to lose momentum over time. Huron (2015) illustrates this by describing some commoning actions as temporary, make-shift, “pop-up” installations and questioning thereby the sustainability of such urban commons. In a similar vein, Scholl (2014) calls for further engagement to reflect and redress the explicit temporality inherent in many social movements. While we agree with Huron’s and Scholl’s critique of the transient nature of many activist and commoning efforts, and we consider *temporality* a crucial dimension influencing urban commons’ sustainability, other dimensions are equally relevant. Recent literature highlights for instance the importance of the commons *functionality* (and *credibility*) in the eyes of commoners and the wider community, for their viability and sustainability (Arvanitidis and Papagiannitsis, 2020). From a relational perspective, we consider too that the *interdependencies* between individuals and social movement actors (Fournier, 2013) and their underlying *power relations* (Angelis, 2010; Stavrides, 2016; Florea et al., 2018) as well as the *spatial* and *scalar* dimensions (Santos, 2014; Kip, 2015) of actions can influence the continuity of urban commons.

To better understand how urban commons and the engagement of social movement actors with them can be sustained, and therefore how practices of solidarity are maintained beyond their first productive phase, we focus on *knowledge practices*, i.e., how flows of ideas and communication within and beyond initiatives and social movements, necessary for action (McDonald, 2006), operate. We consider therefore urban initiatives as subjects of knowledge and “knowledge producers” (Cox, 2014). The underlying assumption is that understanding the way knowledge is generated and deployed within and beyond sharing and commoning groups and activists networks can inform about their functioning and output on the long-term. By looking at the forms and mechanisms by which knowledge (required for action and networking) is co-/re-produced and transferred, we aim at identifying those knowledge practices that constrain or enable urban commons governance. Also, we seek to expand the body of literature that cuts across (urban) social movements and collective action, urban commons and knowledge practices (e.g., Foster, 2011; Chesters, 2012; Scholl, 2014; Della Porta and Pavan, 2017) by connecting this with a figurational sociological approach (Elias, 1978). This way we consider social movements and urban commons’ initiatives as *figurations*, dynamic networks of interdependence, in which (in)material resources, ideas and information are being shared and exchanged. Such a process-oriented approach allows to explore how knowledge production and transfer, necessary to develop sharing and commoning practices, operates considering the dimensions of *temporality*, *relationality*, *power*, *spatiality*, and *scalarity* in urban commons initiatives, key principles of figurational sociology (Etzold et al., 2019).

To explore the role that knowledge practices play in figurations of sharing and commoning we raise the following questions: how does the production and transfer of knowledge operate across time, scale, space, and often asymmetrical relationships? To what extent do knowledge practices contribute to set in motion sharing and commoning process? How do specific practices of knowledge exchange contribute to sustain those actions? Which knowledge interdependencies within figurations of sharing and commoning hinder on the contrary their endurance in the long-term? By addressing these questions, we aim on the one hand to make sense of the knowledge-based mechanisms of *connectivity* that effectively contribute to the sustainability of commoning and sharing efforts. On the other, we seek to explore the constraints and dependencies that urban initiatives encounter in knowledge production and transfer processes within and beyond their own set-up or institutions. We operationalize the research by exploring how social movements and urban initiative networks generate and transmit their knowledge (1) within their own internal set-up, (2) to private and public institutions (e.g., administration and political actors) and (3) to other civil society organizations. To do that, we draw on qualitative interviews conducted within the framework of the *StadtTeilen* research project—a Germany based research network that explores the potential of sharing in housing and public space to reduce space competition in heterogeneous neighborhoods. In this context we approached and interviewed different urban initiatives and related stakeholders dealing with the topics of commoning and sharing in housing and public space in Kassel, Stuttgart, and Berlin, where the *StadtTeilen* research team has established expertise and ongoing collaborations with local actors. Within these cities, three neighborhoods were selected for their increasing competition for urban space. On the one hand, all three neighborhoods are experiencing processes of gentrification and a reconfiguration of their diversity. On the other, this context has motivated the activation of diverse urban initiatives devising tactics to respond to the growing commodification of spatial resources.

Against this backdrop, the article is structured as follows. In the “methodology” section we set first the theoretical background of our research on urban social movements and urban commons governance, by connecting them to the notions of right to the city, radical democracy, and sharing and space-commoning knowledge practices. Second, we introduce the figurational approach and its potential for the study of knowledge production and transmission within interdependent webs of sharing and commoning (*figurations*) within and beyond urban initiatives in the field of housing and public space. Third, we elucidate the research methods that guided the collection and analysis of empirical data. Building on this, in the results section we describe the flows of ideas and information within, between and beyond selected urban initiatives (housing projects, and public space residents’ initiatives) and related private and public actors in the three studied neighborhoods. In the discussion section we reflect on the identified knowledge practices across social movements and sharing and commoning initiatives from the perspective of relationality, power, temporality, spatiality, and scalarity, and conclude by highlighting those

knowledge practices with a larger potential to sustain urban commons governance.

## METHODOLOGY

### Urban Social Movements, the Revival of the (Urban) Commons and Space-Commoning Knowledge

#### From the Right to the City to Radical Democracy: Translocal and Multiscalar Urban Social Movements

In a time where human rights have been positioned on the foreground as a political model and ethical standards, they are still often perceived from an individualistic and liberal market perspective. This perspective can be problematic in many ways. It not only often disregards the harmful effects of the “urbanization of neoliberalism” (Brenner and Theodore, 2002) such as intensifying socio-spatial inequality, polarization, territorial competition and social insecurity; it also tends to ignore the collective component of human rights and its potential and value for improving everyday life.

It is in this context that notions such as the “right to the city” (Lefebvre, 1968; Harvey, 2003, 2012) and “radical democracy” (Massey, 1995; Laclau and Mouffe, 2001 [1985]; Heindl, 2020) have gained currency among academics and inspired social movements globally, e.g., from the Arab Spring, the Indignados/15-M to the Occupy movement. Both approaches share the focus on participation and collective action for emancipatory urban transformations and attribute therefore a key role to urban social movements and urban initiatives for generating social change. These notions underlain claims for the recognition of people’s right to access certain urban resources and to collectively participate from the processes that produce them, envision and shape urban contexts. By reclaiming the processes by which the urban is produced and by steering collective struggles and demands, urban social movements are considered to have the potential to contribute to structural and societal change (Andretta et al., 2015; Della Porta and Pavan, 2017; Domaradzka, 2018).

While the right to the city concept emerged in the scholarship of Lefebvre (1968) and Castells (1980 [1972], 1983) and further developed particularly with Harvey’s (2003, 2012) works, it traveled fast beyond the academic and theoretical spheres and was soon appropriated by different organizations and activists groups. It became first a viral slogan, a common banner, under which were assembled a wide range of social demands, from affordable housing, infrastructure, and services to more social justice and participation in decision-making processes (Mayer, 2012). The traction of the concept was so intense that it rapidly turned into (not always unproblematic) institutionalized forms, as the notion was adopted for instance in legal and normative frameworks worldwide (Friendly, 2013; Turok and Scheba, 2019). Over the last two decades the right to the city concept has been invoked in numerous ways and by a wide range of actors and institutions with differentiated goals and operating at various scales building from local networks of cooperation to translocal alliances across

different geographical settings. To stress the interrelationality and interdependence, multiscalarity and translocality of actors and institutions (con)figurations making urban claims is important for the argument in this article because it hints at the dynamic transmission of ideas and knowledge underlying the functioning of urban social movements.

The notion of “radical democracy” in turn, goes beyond claiming more participation in the production of the urban within the given governance frameworks of current democracies. Radical democracy entails demanding, or more precisely, creating new tactics of participation that per se challenge the established (neoliberal, market-oriented) governance setting. First formulated by Laclau and Mouffe (2001 [1985]), the concept and ideology of radical democracy implies that in order to steer social and political change, social movements need to challenge neoliberal notions and practices of democracy and participation (Chiumbu, 2015). Without going deeper into the different theoretical strands evolving from Laclau and Mouffe’s notion of radical democracy, for this article, we find it relevant as a critical lens to look at collective action in the form of sharing and urban commoning practices: The concept challenges the capacity of prevailing democracies to productively involve the actions of ordinary citizens; it also hints at processes of democratization in which diversity, in terms of various communities and new identities, should play an integral part; ultimately, under a radical democracy perspective alternative modes to conventional participation are considered central to active citizenship.

Along these lines, current democracies and modes of participation embedded in them, are considered as arenas of difference and disagreement, where efforts to build consensus in governance overshadow diversity and often oppress in terms of ethnic background, classes and gender (Mouffe, 2000). Some scholars have translated this critique into spatial terms and view the city as a whole as a field of contention where urban politics and urban governance are inherently conflictual (Edthofer, 2011; Barnett and Bridge, 2013; Heindl, 2019, 2020; Bach and McClintock, 2021) and where collective action is mobilized to build alternatives to mainstream urban politics and democratic participation processes. In their spatial form these alternatives are often referred to as ‘space-commoning’ practices (Stavrides, 2014, 2015, 2016; Volont and Dobson, 2021), which pursue the co-production and self-management of shared spatial urban resources, as a practice of radical urban politics. From the governance perspective there have been calls for developing new collaborative polycentric urban (commons) governance processes (Iaione and Cannavò, 2015) involving citizens, communities, and businesses, as well as knowledge institutions and civil society together with public actors. It is important to note however that not all governance practices exhibit always “radical democratic” principles and genuine participation. We recognize the underlying power imbalances that shape individuals and actors interdependencies within and beyond urban initiatives and social movements. Therefore, acknowledging and tracing the embedded power dynamics within urban social movements and urban initiatives that practice sharing and space-commoning is relevant to understanding not only their functioning (Chiumbu, 2015), but

also we argue, the extent to which they demonstrate the capacity to shape sustainable efforts of collective action.

### From Collective Action to the Revival of the Urban Commons and Space-Commoning

Urban initiatives and collective action can take different forms, such as groups of residents, neighborhood organizations, housing associations or social networks (Diani and McAdam, 2003), and adapt to specific places, scales and contexts. They can have different motivations and drivers (Bernhardt et al., 2020) and be politically or culturally influenced. In the last years we have witnessed for instance the emergence of collective action as protests against austerity measures (Della Porta, 2015), against the growing commodification of public and residential space (Di Masso, 2012; Larsen and Lund-Hansen, 2015; Debrunner and Gerber, 2021; Lima, 2021) or more broadly as claims for more inclusive and just urban transformations (Chatterton, 2010; Andretta et al., 2015). In a similar vein, our exploration in this article relates to urban initiatives and collective action with a progressive emancipatory-transformative agenda toward a city of (more) commons.

The notion of urban commons is not new and owes much to the body of literature that first examined the topic of collective action and self-organized management of natural resources, in particular Ostrom’s “*Governing the Commons*” (Ostrom, 2012 [1990]). While Hardin’s earlier essay “*The tragedy of the commons*” (Hardin, 2009 [1968]) had often served to advocate for individual property rights as the only way to ensure access and preservation of resources, Ostrom explored common property regimes that successfully administer resources by coupling together the idea of collective action with the concept of “commons” (as a “*common pool of resources*”). This way Ostrom’s research and subsequent work inspired by it, argue that problems and inequalities derived from market driven allocation of resources could be partly solved through non-market mechanisms: decentralized, self-governing units organized around common local resources (Blackmar, 2006).

When it comes to the urban context though, the study of collective action remained longer under-researched (Foster, 2011). Within the last 10 years however, we have certainly experienced a revival of the interest on the commons and collective action as potential tools for urban transformation (e.g., Angelis, 2010; Helfrich, 2012; Helfrich and Bollier, 2012; Borch and Kornberger, 2015; Dellenbaugh et al., 2015; Schneider, 2016 for a recent comprehensible review see Feinberg et al., 2021). The resurgence of the (urban) commons in Germany, but also elsewhere, is by no means casual. It responds to a large extent to the output of recurrent global crisis, the retreat of the public within the framework of resulting austerity policies and the increasing privatization trends. Public services have been reduced, the public housing stock is being sold off and public space is increasingly commercialized. In a persistently neoliberal climate an “insurgent citizenship” (Holston, 2008) conformed by scholars, critical architects, urbanists and citizen groups, is exploring the potential of the commons and commoning practices as “strategies of resistance” (Bradley, 2015). Particularly in places devastated by austerity reforms, these expressions of

resistance are shaping commoning for health care, food, housing, or public spaces (Kip et al., 2015; Arvanitidis and Papagiannitsis, 2020). In line with the notion of radical democracy, these insurgent voices are also calling for a change in vision and collective imaginary in how we conceive our cities. Hardt and Negri (2009) claim for instance to transform cities, so long considered as “engines of growth” into “factories for the production of the common”. The revival of the commons as a political imaginary (Chatterton, 2010) has definitively contributed to deepen the question for social and spatial justice in urban theory (Soja, 2010). This new political imagination constitutes a new space for politics that suggests new possibilities for decoupling every day urban practices and city governance from the logic of the market (Harvey, 2011). Spatial sharing and commoning practices and new modes of (commons) governance can produce a whole range of productive moments of resistance and solidarities, and through these, explore new visions toward more just urban spaces and societies.

The transfer into urban contexts of the traditional concept of commons—understood either from the historical approach to “rights to common lands” in pre-capitalist England (Sevilla-Buitrago, 2015) or like Ostrom as a “common pool of resources”—translates into a wide range of alternative forms of societal organization and practices as diverse as urban gardening, open-source software initiatives, or actions on the public space, all identified as forms of urban commons (Becker et al., 2015b). Most scholars in this field would agree that the concept of urban commons is based on the idea that certain urban resources, such as public spaces, ought to be shared and directly managed by local communities, often in civic collaborations, to produce and support a range of goods and services important for their wellbeing. As urban commons may take numerous forms, we focus selectively on urban initiatives that practice sharing or commoning in the field on housing and public space (spatial and tangible resources) and the way space-commoning knowledge (as intangible resource) is generated and spread. We stress this way the emphasis on practices and processes of collective action rather than on the common resources per se, as one could argue, that it is in the underlying sharing and commoning practices that the transformative potential lays and not in the resource itself. In a similar vein, Linebaugh (2014) describes commoning practices as intrinsic of urban commons, and focus on a process relational approach. So does Harvey when describing commons as complex socio-spatial entanglements, unstable and malleable social relationships (2012).

Although the sharing and commoning practices that we explore here have an underlying logic of withdrawing spatial resources from the market to promote urban change, such a purpose however does not always come without conflict. The urban commons literature suggests that the co-production and self-management of the commons frequently imply a claim over a good that is often the focus of conflict between different actors. It requires that a community that gathers around a particular good, be this tangible or intangible, communalizes and manages it, and by doing so, determines both access and exclusion norms to that good as well as mechanisms

for decision-making within the community. Urban commons, although not being a commodity, can therefore be appropriated by individuals or actors to extract value from them in a way that contradicts their nature and purpose. The notion of sharing (resources) for instance has been increasingly coopted by profit-oriented initiatives under the framework of the sharing economy (Barron et al., 2018; Sharp, 2018). So, while sharing practices (and commoning processes within them, as a form of sharing) might aim at constructing alternatives to neoliberal capitalism by remaining non-profit oriented, the border between what they constitute and what they aim to resist against often blurs. Temporality here plays a fundamental role, along other equally important dimensions such as functionality and credibility. The spatial and temporally defined institutional *function* of sharing and commoning actions, that manifests in their *credibility*, i.e., their perceived social support among participants and a wider community (Ho, 2014, 2016; Arvanitidis and Papagiannitsis, 2020) plays a crucial role in the production of commons and more significantly in their sustainability over time. As Arvanitidis and Papagiannitsis put it: “(commons) institutions *exist* and *persist* as long as they fulfill a function that is credible among social actors” (Arvanitidis and Papagiannitsis, 2020, p. 4). Therefore, rather than the formal and (legal) legitimacy frameworks underlying commoning efforts, the sustainability of commons institutions in general, and sharing and space-commoning efforts in particular, seem to be largely dependent on their capacity to develop as collaborative bottom-up interaction processes in which different perspectives, interests, conflicts, and stocks of knowledge are productively negotiated between diverse stakeholders. The current state of the art however hints at a lack of research on sharing and space-commoning knowledge practices and how they contribute to understanding the relations and interdependences that underly urban commons governance.

### Sharing and Space-Commoning Knowledge Practices

Sharing and space-commoning knowledge practices are fundamental to set a particular action in motion, to produce a specific spatial common good (Bretfeld et al., 2022). Since knowledge is a fundamental resource in the production of the commons, we deem the question of how it is generated, exchanged, and ultimately implemented, crucial for urban commons governance and the question of their sustainability.

As urban initiatives, and commoners for that matter, come together to generate and transfer their knowledge—required for their collective-self (identity), for action (strategy) and networking (expansion and continuation)—they do not necessarily line up their motivations and goals with those of other related actors. We need therefore to consider urban initiatives within the larger framework of social movements as the producers and bearers of sharing and space-commoning knowledge, as experts in their own field. Thus, an important focus of urban commons governance should directly address the dynamics through which these collective actors relate to one another as individuals, and to other actors and institutions, as they produce and deploy their knowledge. It is important

to note that we do not assume knowledge within urban initiatives to be homogenous and equally distributed. We assume it to be diverse, contrasting, and at times conflicting—particularly when objectives differ, and power differentials manifest. From the perspective of radical democracy and critical urban politics however, we consider that it is in this diversity and disagreement (a liminal space of contention) that creative knowledge co-production and transfer can take place. This also applies when knowledge practices expand beyond the urban initiative core group into other actors and institutions.

Despite its relevance, so far little attention has been given to the exploration of knowledge practices in sharing and commoning initiatives. To address this gap we draw on the works by Casas-Cortés et al. (2008), Cox (2014) and more recently Della Porta and Pavan (2017) among others (see for instance Choudry and Kapoor, 2010; Choudry, 2015; Pinto, 2015), that have generated a fertile discussion on knowledge practices within the broader social movements literature. We deem it necessary therefore to expand and connect this work on movements knowledge into the study of urban commons governance.

Drawing on Eyerman and Jamison (1991) knowledge in the field of social movements has often been referred to as cognitive praxis consisting of three different dimensions: “cosmological” (as attitudes and visions guiding the movements and as a basis for critique and challenge of the status quo), “organizational” (as ways and experiences based on which the movement is build up) and “technological” (as creation and innovation, as modes of enacting experiences and knowledge into action) (Cox, 2014). Movements knowledge practices are attuned at the intersection of these dimensions and determine this way the distinctiveness of a movement in respect to others. Building upon this, Della Porta and Pavan (2017, p. 6) refer to “repertoires of knowledge practices” in social movements as the “set of organizational practices that foster the coordination of disconnected, local, and highly personal experiences and rationalities within a shared cognitive system able to provide movements and their supporters with a common orientation for making claims and acting collectively to produce social, political, and cultural changes”. This definition relates with other debates in the social movement literature that are also relevant in the study of sharing and urban commoning practices, such as the question of (collective) identity (close to the cosmological dimension) and strategy (instrumental-orientation, closer to the organizational and technological dimensions), or the questions of culture and meaning, and their interlinkages (Scholl, 2014).

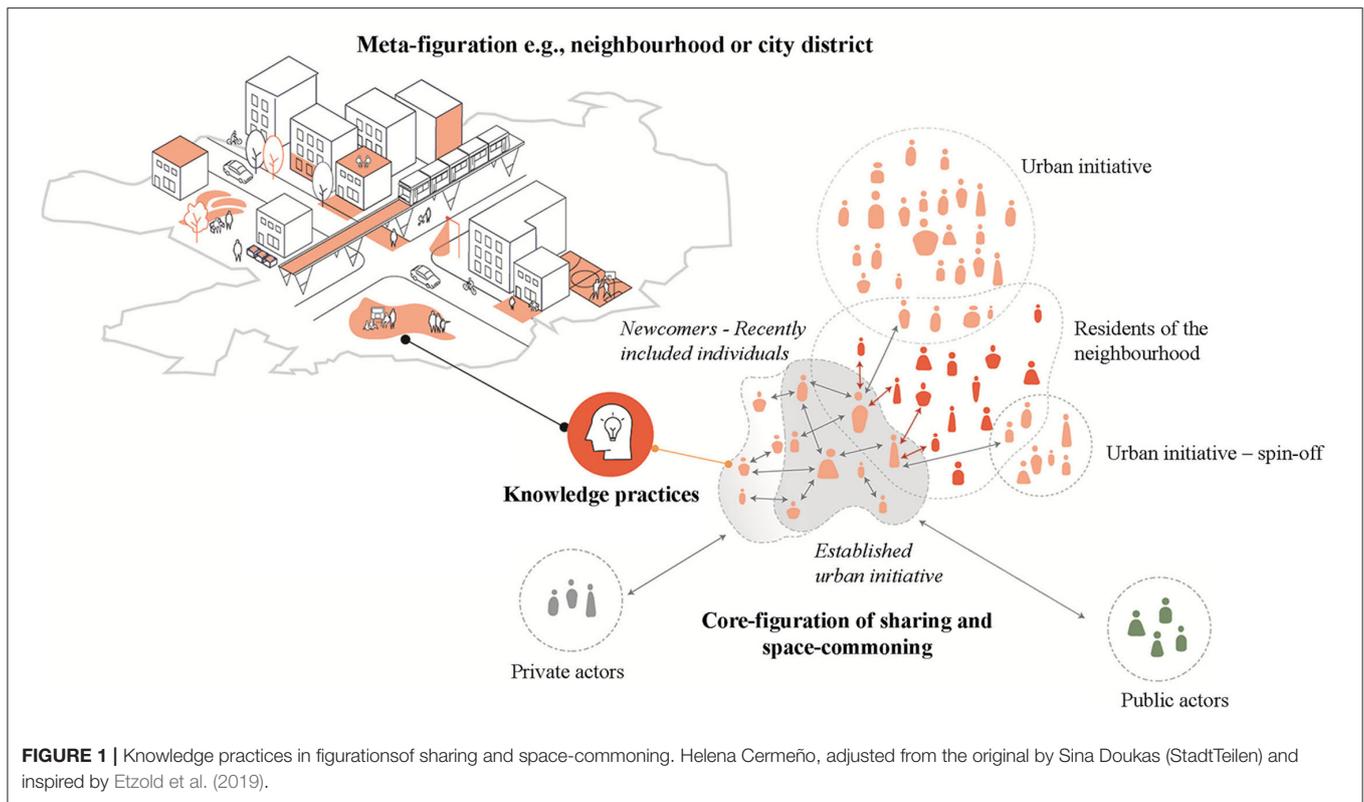
Our view here is that discussions on the cosmological-organizational-technological dimensions of knowledge, and the debate in the social movements literature around “instrumental” (strategy-orientated) or “expressive” (identity-orientated) motivations—in particular the question of how movements and urban initiatives integrate these dimensions and goals—are also helpful to reflect on how sharing and space-commoning knowledge is co-produced and transferred and the output of these actions on the short and long-term.

## Exploring Knowledge Practices in Sharing and Commoning Figurations

### Figurations of Sharing and Space-Commoning

In the previous section we have underscored first the shift in focus over the last years, from questions of rights to questions of citizenship (Holston, 2008; Di Masso, 2012) challenging current modes of democracy and participation (Heindl, 2019, 2020). It led us to discuss then how (trans-)local urban social movements (Hamel et al., 2001; Mayer, 2012) are increasingly advocating for new ways of collective action and the revival of the (urban) commons as a way to counter the growing space competition. Ultimately, we argued that sharing and space-commoning knowledge, as a constitutive resource for collective action, is generated and transferred in interdependent webs of individuals and actors involved in the co-production and self-management of urban commons; and that these knowledge practices are enacted at the intersection of a variety of strategic and identity-based motivations and are guided by the coordination of a multiplicity of (trans-)local, place-based experiences and shared visions toward progressive and transformative objectives. Our approach to the study of sharing and space-commoning knowledge is therefore dynamic, multilayered, and relational. So is our approach to the exploration of urban commons governance, as we recognize initiatives and social movements at the intersection with urban commoning and sharing initiatives as dynamic social networks (Diani and McAdam, 2003). Within this context, we expand the fields of social movements, urban commons and movement knowledge by combining these with a figurational sociology approach (Elias, 1971, 1978). This serves as a meso-level theoretical frame to situate our research on the relationships and interdependencies between individuals, actors, and institutions, involved in the exchange of sharing and commoning knowledge within and beyond urban initiatives and how these contribute to the sustainability of urban commons.

Figurational sociology (Elias, 1971, 1978) was one of the first approaches to focus on social actors rather than fully autonomous individuals. By opposing structural and functional paradigms of sociology and stressing on the dynamic bonds, webs of interdependencies and transactions between individuals, that constitute social formations or “*figurations*”: “[t]he concept of figuration serves as a simple conceptual tool to loosen this social constraint to speak and think as if “the individual” and “society” were antagonistic as well as different” (Elias, 1978, pp. 130–131). Elias describes this way the process of social formations as webs of interdependence coming into being through the interaction of actors and being characterized by transactions and power balances of many sorts influencing individual agency. To illustrate this, the literature often refers to examples of game models (Elias, 1971, 1978; Sökefeld, 2015). Individuals playing chess, a cards game or football match form a figuration in which they ascribe to (enact and reinterpret) certain rules and join different groups to compete against each other. The game model shows the inherent processual character of the formed figuration as relationships between interdependent people are dynamic, i.e., the act of a player triggers the reaction of other



**FIGURE 1 |** Knowledge practices in figurations of sharing and space-commoning. Helena Cermeño, adjusted from the original by Sina Doukas (StadtTeilen) and inspired by Etzold et al. (2019).

participants, and this in turn prompts further reactions and behaviors in the other players. The resulting intertwined web of human relations continuously readjusts as the distribution of power—*power balances*—changes (Van Krieken, 2005).

The emphasis on *power relationships* is particularly relevant in the exploration of sharing and space-commoning knowledge practices. Our conceptualization of power within and beyond urban initiatives is relational: power cannot be possessed by individuals, groups, or institutions, but operates rather in a relational form with ever-changing *ratios* between individuals and the larger social unit. The notion of “established and outsiders” figurations by Elias and Scotson (1994 [1965]) is particularly helpful to illustrate how newcomers aiming at improving their positions in a given figuration might enter into contentious relationships with established individuals that seek to maintain their privileged position (Mielke, 2015). As a group of commoners for instance seek to produce and govern new urban commons, they set in-/exclusive rules around the produced good, which determine the extent to which potential newcomers or outsiders can participate in the sharing and commoning action, and to what extent diversity of interests, ideas and values are integrated in the process of governing the commons.

Although contest situations, as presented in the games model, or “conflicts”—referred in broader terms as an universal phenomenon that can manifest in differences over interests, resources, values and beliefs, social status and practices (Mielke, 2015, p. 138)—describe well the notion of figuration and particularly the underlying idea or power ratios embedded in

the relationships and transactions between individuals (Sökefeld, 2015), other more “peaceful” social formations can be considered too: A classroom for instance in which students and lecturer interact and are mutually dependent in the transfer of knowledge and learning processes, or a shared residential space in a self-managed housing project, where established residents share their functioning logic with new coming residents. The example of the classroom serves well to illustrate the difficulty of ascribing fixed boundaries to a given figuration: digital teaching and learning environments have blurred the fixed physical boundaries of the (classical) classroom, no longer necessarily bounded to a specific territory (Cermeño and Baldewein, 2021). The same applies to urban initiatives within the larger framework of social movements. The *relationality* and interdependencies between social movement actors, their underlying power relations as well as the translocal dimensions—*spatiality and scalarity*—of urban initiatives characterize sharing and space-commoning practices. On the question of boundaries and scale, localized sharing and commoning urban initiatives can be considered as “core-figurations” embedded in larger “meta-figurations”, for example in larger social movements, in a particular district or the city space at large.

A figurational approach also brings in a particular perspective of agency seen as a sort of “relative autonomy”. Individuals within a figuration are considered to be linked to a greater or lesser degree to other people, and this way they are dependent on others: “[t]he network of interdependencies among human beings is what binds them together [...] [s]uch interdependencies are the nexus of what is here called

figuration, a structure of mutually oriented and dependent people” (Elias, 2000 [1994], pp. 481–482). The same way Elias emphasizes that individuals are dependent to one another by social learning, education, socialization, and reciprocal needs, sharing and commoning individuals and their related actors, build webs of interdependence as they co-produce and transfer their knowledge. Ultimately, we argue that the accumulation and transmission of commoning and social knowledge becomes fundamental for sustaining commoning efforts over time. The potential on the long run to produce urban transformations would depend however as Elias puts it on the (very) long-term “continuous social accumulation of knowledge [that] plays a part in the changing of human society” (Elias, 2006, in Dunning and Hughes, 2012; p. 72). We assume therefore, *temporality*, understood here as the time span in which sharing and commoning knowledge is accumulated and deployed, as one of the main factors playing a role in the sustainability of commons governance and their capability of triggering urban and social change.

Against this backdrop—and acknowledging inspiration from the recent figurational work by Mielke (2015) and Etzold et al. (2019) in different fields of research—we approach our exploration of social movements and urban commons initiatives as *figurations*, dynamic webs of interdependence, in which spatial/tangible and knowledge/intangible resources are being co-produced, shared and exchanged. Such a relational approach allows us to investigate how sharing and space-commoning knowledge practices operate considering the dimensions of *temporality*, *relationality*, *power*, *spatiality*, and *scale*, and their contribution to the governance of urban commons.

## Methods: Empirical Exploration of Sharing and Commoning Knowledge Practices

From a methodological perspective our units of analysis are selected residential and public space practices of sharing and commoning, what we refer to as sharing and space-commoning figurations, in selected neighborhoods of three German cities: Nord-Holland in Kassel, Mitte in Stuttgart and Südliche-Luisenstadt (Wrangelkiez and Reichenberger Kiez, Kreuzberg) in Berlin. Here, figurations of sharing and space-commoning represent small or medium-scale expressions of solidarity and resistance against the increasing space competition, a common phenomenon in the three neighborhoods which is challenging their population heterogeneity (in terms of origin, ethnicity, language, immigration status, age, gender, education, occupation). Although these neighborhoods share common problematics, they can be considered as contrasting cases since Berlin-Kreuzberg displays by far a much denser and historically conditioned network of urban initiatives dealing with sharing and commoning practices than the other two cities. Berlin has also therefore attracted much more academic attention. Because of this we argue for the need to challenge the epistemological privileging of larger cities. The results section brings thus illustrative cases of all three cities, allowing to unveil different sharing and commoning practices that have so far not been reflected in the urban commons literature.

To do so, we draw on empirical data collected within the framework of the ongoing transdisciplinary research project StadtTeilen. In total, 36 qualitative interviews were conducted: seven exploratory interviews describing the study areas, and 29 interviews with selected civil society urban initiatives, political actors, and private and public housing companies. In the first phase, interviews were systematically and collaboratively coded by the interdisciplinary team of the research project, reflecting on the spatial, social, and political conditions in which sharing and commoning practices were developed by different urban initiatives and their interdependencies with other actors and institutions. For the focused analysis on knowledge practices a second process of theoretical coding was undertaken. Drawing on the notion of figurations as webs of interdependence characterized by power balances (Elias, 1978, p. 15) and the significance attributed to the interconnections rather than the individuals themselves (Elias, 1978, pp. 130–131), the analysis of the data was guided by the main analytical categories of: interrelationality, power balances, temporality, scalarity and spatiality, while we sought for connections with relevant concepts such as identity, visions, strategy, organization, modes of action and exclusions, as identified in the social movements and commons literature review. Ultimately, we operationalized our analysis by reflecting on three scalar levels of knowledge production and transmission: (1) knowledge practices within urban initiatives’ own internal set-up, (2) knowledge practices of urban initiatives in interrelation with other institutions (e.g., public, and private actors) and (3) knowledge practices between urban initiatives and similar sharing and commoning groups, activist networks, or larger social movements. Given the fact that many of the interviewed initiatives often manifested contentious relationships within their own groups, or with other institutions, personal names of interviewed individuals, actors and institutions have been coded to preserve their anonymity (for a list of the selected interviews that are presented in the results section, see **Table 1**).

## RESULTS

### Internal Knowledge Practices Within Sharing and Space-Commoning Initiatives Knowledge Practices of Collective Identity and Non-formal Learning Processes

When analyzing figurations of sharing and commoning at the scale of urban initiatives and in particular their internal knowledge practices, that is, the co-production and transmission of knowledge between the individuals engaged in the social movement, organization, or group, we identified a dominance of “identity-building” vs. “strategic/action-oriented” knowledge exchange. Instead of targeting instrumental goals—i.e., the transmission of information, personal experience, and expertise *for* transformative purposes—knowledge practices within the internal set-up of interviewed urban initiatives primarily focus on the construction of a shared identity and collective self by building on relationships and trust (e.g., Interview INI-BL.7, 2019; Interview INI-KS.4, December 17, 2019).

**TABLE 1** | List of presented interviews with urban initiatives, housing companies and political actors.

Coded name	Type	Reach	Participants	Duration	Interviewee
<b>Kassel (Nord-Holland)</b>					
WOH-KS.1	Municipal housing company ( <i>Gemeinnützige Wohnungsbaugesellschaft</i> -GWG) providing rooms and support for self-managed activities via their linked housing association	Primarily targeting tenants of the company; open for all inhabitants of the neighborhood	Undetermined number	Since 1918	Interviewee 1: CEO
	Housing association linked to the municipal housing company, providing staff and organizational support for initiatives developed in their provided spaces/neighborhood center	Mostly active in the neighborhoods in which the GWG has properties	2–3 salaried staff and slowly growing number of self-organizing tenants – ca. 15–30 people	Since 2012	Interviewee 2: Employee at housing company, CEO of the housing association
INI-KS.3	Collectively owned and self-managed housing project, part of the network of the Mietshäusersyndikat	Mostly internally active; diverse individuals, political active tenants	ca. 16 inhabitants	Since 2006	Resident dealing with coordination, public relations of the housing initiative
INI-KS.4	Housing project for coliving options, owned by the University of Kassel	Mostly internally active; loose connections to other housing initiatives	ca. 40–45 inhabitants	Unknown – at least since 25 years	Former tenant, part of group activities
<b>Stuttgart (Mitte)</b>					
WOH-ST.8	A housing cooperative ( <i>Genossenschaft</i> ) supporting housing projects via management, knowledge, networking, and planning	Targeting housing projects in the city of Stuttgart and surroundings	ca.14 active housing projects with varying number of participants	Approx. active since 2000	CEO
INI-ST.5	A civil society organization, registered association, initiated to raise awareness, codesign and test ideas on alternative ways of producing, using and managing public space	At time of the interviews mostly focused on a specific city square in Stuttgart	ca. 20–25 active participants	2016	Founding member, responsible of public relations and networking
INI-ST.6	A civil society organization, registered association, with a focus on temporary transformation of vacant spaces, experimenting with new forms of coliving	Active in stuttgart	ca. 5 core members working together with varying groups of participants	Approx. active since 2018	Founding member, and resident in a residential initiated project
INI-ST.11	Neighborhood association, initiators of diverse projects in public space	Active in stuttgart	Varying number of participants depending on projects	2016	Three interviewees: 1. Founding Member 2. Extern associate 3. Extern associate
<b>Berlin (Südliche-Luisenstadt)</b>					
INI-BL.7	Association self-managing a housing and working project in commercial blocks and old industrial courtyard	Active in the neighborhood ('Kiez')	ca.50 participants	Since 1980	Member with responsibilities on technical administration and providing support to residents
INI-BL.10	An independent, solidarity organization with different projects. They advocate alternative lifestyles and offer "help for self-help" to other initiatives; meeting place for the neighbors and the neighborhood.	Active in the neighborhood ('Kiez')	The non-profit association has 30 permanent employees, 15 volunteers; members of the association ca. 40	Since 1981	Member and employee of the association with responsibility on administration, accounting, and organization
INI-BL.16	Initiative for tenants and small businesses in different neighborhoods with strong links with the neighborhood center	Active in the whole city	Core group ca.10 participants (for events ca. 30 active; able to mobilize up to 1.000 participants)	Since 2015	Member of the core group, with responsibilities of coordination, and public relations

(Continued)

TABLE 1 | Continued

Coded name	Type	Reach	Participants	Duration	Interviewee
INI-BL.17	Initiative for tenants and small businesses in the neighborhood; “for a social city and against displacement”	Active in the neighborhood ( <i>‘Kiez’</i> ) and areas around it.	Core group 5 members, (in events ca. 20 active)	Since 2017	Member of the tenants association with responsibilities of coordination, and legal consultation
INI-BL.19	Neighborhood association	Active in the neighborhood ( <i>‘Kiez’</i> )	Core group 3 (for events 10; in the association 16)	since 2015	Association member
POL-BL.20	Political actor Political administration (building councilor)	Responsibility for District Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg	— (Number of inhabitants 289,787)	since 2016	Building councilor of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, Berlin
POL-BL.26	Association of housing companies; represents public, cooperative, private, and church housing companies in Berlin and Brandenburg.	Largest and oldest housing industry association in the capital region	— (around 350 member companies in Berlin and the state of Brandenburg)	since 1897	Press spokesman and special representative of the executive board

These identity-oriented knowledge practices often entail maintaining already “established” cognitive resources and contacts in the sharing and commoning figuration. They allow preserving established positions within the figuration, reinforcing habitus, routines, atmospheres, lifestyles, ideologies, and extant structures within a group. To a lesser extent setting new ties with external actors via informal connections, friendships in particular, constitute a strategy to incorporate “outsiders” as “newcomers” to a group and facilitate this way certain continuation of the movement or organization. This is particularly visible in interviewed initiatives with a relatively long-term set-up, such as housing cooperatives or alternative projects of collective housing. As exemplified in a self-organized housing project in Kassel, the purposive limited knowledge transfer beyond the internal structure of the group is perceived by residents as an internal strategy to maintain the cohesion and homogeneity of the community. It allows the group keeping knowledge production and *learning*—defined as the process whereby knowledge is acquired, and new personal knowledge is created—confined to a selective cluster of individuals:

“[...] it’s a question of [restricting] accessibility, so that not so many people *learn* about it, just, mostly friends [...] they would apply to one room; they would be invited to come to a plenary session, introduce themselves and describe how they imagine living together; then we would vote about it within the group [...] internal plenums are set up [for this purpose and] also sometimes to see if everything works in the shared houses” (Interview INI-KS.4, December 17, 2019).

The previous quote also hints at the *mediums* for knowledge co-production and transmission. These include physical and digital spaces for interaction as well as analog and online communication tools (Interview INI-ST.5, January 17, 2020). Among initiatives’ internal platforms for exchange,

contact working groups and consensus-based assemblies or plenary sessions, conform the most common formalized frameworks for knowledge co-production and transfer, both at micro and meso-scales. The latter is exemplified by an independent solidarity organization encompassing different neighborhood projects and advocating for alternative lifestyles in Berlin. The organization, which offers support and “help for self-help” to smaller initiatives, resorts to frames of knowledge production and transmission similar than those used in smaller activist groups: “[t]here is a plenum every four weeks... we have then a management group, a meeting of delegates... and of course, there are also group meetings ... we take decisions by consensus” (Interview INI-BL.10, November 01, 2019). A similar formal organizational framework was mentioned in an interview with a self-managed housing project under the umbrella of the *Mietshäuser Syndikat*—a housing organization supporting a national-wide network of resident’s self-organized housing projects:

“[E]verything is decided collectively at a ‘weekly meeting’... but then there are also ‘action meetings’ and different working groups... there is for instance an accounting working group, a garden working group, a management working group [...]. There are managing directors, and everything is divided into working groups, but only to prepare the discussions to later take decisions. Ultimately, the group has always the decision-making power” (Interview INI-KS.3, April 16, 2020).

Within these partly *formal* structures and channels of knowledge production and transmission also process-oriented forms of *informal learning*—often referred as *non-formal learning* (Eraut, 2000)—take place. Non-formal learning processes, including for instance discussing, observing, asking questions, experimenting and problem solving (Manuti et al., 2015), constitute the larger part of the acquisition of knowledge

in formal initiatives' gatherings and plenums (Interview INI-BL.7, 2019). Ensuring both formal and non-formal internal transmission of information, experience and skills within a group is crucial for the continuation of an initiative over time. Personal knowledge/s, be these individual experiences (often informal) or skills (frequently considered as a set of formally acquired expertise), are bundled together in working groups. The production and transfer of knowledge is thus internally managed through the engagement of individuals in groups with specific contents. This allows practices of individual learning on the one hand and the (re)production of initiatives' knowledge on the other. It remains however important to note that *trust* is here a key factor allowing non-formal learning processes within sharing and commoning initiatives, and in particular intergenerational learning, as illustrated in an interview conducted with residents of a self-organized housing initiative in Berlin: “[e]xperience/s (“Erfahrungswerte”), that are non-material resources, have an important value to us; still, ‘building trust’ [“Vertrauen aufzubauen”] is more valuable [...] that everyone knows everyone, or everyone has collaborated in something together with someone else” (Interview INI-BL.7, 2019). In turn, *time* is an indispensable resource for building trust, confidence, for working together and ensuring a regular personal communication between individuals within a sharing and commoning urban initiative. Learning processes are contingent to the ability of participants to invest time for making contributions, to engage in open exchanges, and on the opportunities provided within the initiative for experimentation and innovation. Trust facilitates knowledge co-production and transfer as it allows participants for instance to seek help, and to acquire new skills by means of trial-and-error processes. Building trust is also key to ensure that some individuals in the group are accepted as “advisors”, as bearers of a relatively larger stock of personal and initiative knowledge. However, what is reflected in the interviews in the three cities is that trust is constantly in flux and needs therefore to be reinstated on a regular basis so that non-formal learning process can be maintained in the long term. For this, interviewed commoners, activists and participants of different sharing initiatives often refer to the importance of investing (free) time in the groups in building rapport with one-another besides the time dedicated to specific tasks (e.g., Interview INI-BL.7, 2019; Interview INI-ST.6, November 11, 2019, and Interview INI-KS.4, December 17, 2019). Investing time and building trust do not target necessarily achieving a certain status—or power position—within the group, but rather ensuring the possibility of a continuous negotiation of differences and disagreements based on which non-formal learning processes can be maintained.

### Conditions of Exclusivity and Power Embedded in Internal Knowledge Practices

The internal knowledge practices with an emphasis on building a collective identity aim allegedly at ensuring the continuation of space sharing and commoning practices within the groups. One of the interviewed housing initiatives in Kassel shows

however that their maintenance over the years is not so much dependent on the cohesion of the group but contingent to the commitment of individuals that manifest on a small scale in the collaborative tasks performed within working groups and plenums, and on the larger scale in the commitment with a particular way of life:

“[I]t is expected that one gets involved, that one invests [substantial] time in the house [...] sometimes there is also an extra plenum where we would try to reach a consensus and the process will take long; it can turn into long evening discussions [...] there are people who try to get involved, but who ultimately do not have so much time to take part in working groups (“AG/Arbeitsgruppe”) [...] for those I know that have established a [long-term self-organized] housing project it was really their ‘project in life’, they have not done or been able to do many other things in life besides that, because it does require a lot of time” (Interview INI-KS.4, December 17, 2019).

Active engagement is perceived to be so relevant for the preservation of the explored housing initiatives that refusal or inability to perform tasks can lead to group discomfort and conflicts. In addition, practices of knowledge reinforcing a very strong sense of the collective self in such initiatives are sometimes considered as a drawback for the diversity of the group as it renders difficult the inclusion of newcomers or “outsiders”—those who from a temporality perspective have been less involved in the initiative—or relatively less empowered individuals, for instance those with a different language, immigration status, age, gender, education or occupation than the “established” initiators of the project. These conditions of exclusivity and power imbalances can ultimately lead to the stagnation of knowledge acquisition and innovation within the boundaries of the initiative: “[t]o find in such [established] structures the space to participate when for instance one does not speak well the language, is quite difficult [...] it would be exciting to have people with different attitudes (*Einstellungen*), not completely opposing ideas of course, but people who are not so much in the same ... left-leaning green bubble” (Interview INI-KS.4, December 17, 2019).

The quote also implicitly hints at the fact that a shared ideology constitutes an important boon for many sharing and commoning initiatives as it facilitates the interrelations of its participants. At the same time however, it can lead to the exclusion of those with different political views. This contradiction is reflected in the interview with a member of a neighborhood tenants' initiative in Berlin (with strong connections with the local neighborhood center):

“[W]e are more accessible and inclusive because we are not such a typical, clearly left-oriented [neighborhood initiative]; ... left-wing organizations tend to be very homogeneous and then do not fit for people who are not that much politically active or so clearly left-oriented [...]; in our internal structure however there have been strong discussions about this [the implicit or explicit political orientation of the initiative] [...] We have nevertheless lost a bit the diversity we had initially... that is also different people with

very different backgrounds... and we are now mostly a group of people who can handle this kind of [activist, communication, community social work and mobilization] tools well, who can talk, write [on these topics/fields] and process/manage these contents. So unfortunately, we have also *homogenized* ourselves a bit” (Interview, INI-BL.16, 2019).

Conditions of exclusivity—that constrain individuals’ participation in highly demanding formalized set-ups and strongly homogeneous groups—often result in internal power asymmetries. To counter these some activist groups have opted for adopting higher levels of *informalization* in their internal structures with looser and decentralized forms of organization. This allows to better integrate diversity of personal knowledge/s and skills, as exemplified by a different tenants initiative in Berlin dealing with issues linked to gentrification processes:

“[w]e have no structure, no areas of responsibility [...] if no consensus can be established in the first run, then the next time we keep talking and see where the difficulty or the conflict lies and how to solve it [...] Anyone can participate in the initiative in many ways. You can come over and say: ‘I have absolutely no idea about press releases, but I can paint incredibly beautifully, so let me paint posters and banners’. Or one could say: ‘I really want to do something in the neighborhood, so I distribute our flyers there’ or ‘I do press work, etc.’ [...] There are no moral obligations like: ‘well, well, you said you would come, why you did not’. We know that we all do this *voluntarily*, so *any form or any attempt to give it a formalized structure is likely to drive the initiative apart rather than bringing it together*” (Interview INI-BL.17, 2019).

### Diversity and Integration of Newcomers’ Knowledge

In housing projects, the arrival of new residents joining the initiative entails a dynamic development of internal knowledge. This brings on the one hand new ideas into the group, but also contributes to destabilize the existing project through antagonism and dissent: “[t]wo shared flats became free because they [a previous established group of residents had left the initiative and] had founded their own housing project, a smaller one. Here there are already 40 to 45 people, that’s a lot; some look for something smaller after a while, because different opinions clash and people who have been here for a while have very different ideas than people who are new” (Interview INI-KS.4, December 17, 2019). What we could consider on the one hand as the implosion of a housing project as the integration of the newcomer’s knowledge fails, conflicts arise, and established residents leave, on the other hand it could be seen as an inherent opportunity for replication. In other words, diversity, disagreement and mobility of people and ideas prove to be productive for the further development and dissemination of initiatives and housing projects: It is not uncommon that contentious relationships between individuals of the group lead to the dissolution of part of the initiative and the creation of spin-offs—new housing projects—elsewhere, allowing the reproduction of a non-market-oriented housing alternative/vision in new locations of the city. It entails at

the same time the mobility of a particular sharing and space-commoning expertise that was until then largely localized and restricted to a specific housing project.

The fact that the housing initiatives we explored have experienced one or more spin-offs, posits to a very particular form of generational knowledge transfer: those residents that act as initiators of the housing project, more often than not have already lived in similar initiatives: “[m]ost part of the residents here have already experience with self-organization or have been actually involved in similar projects for years; for them this [housing initiative] is not something completely new” (Interview INI-KS.3, April 16, 2020). The interaction of spin-off initiators with new residents contributes to the transmission of residential commoning expertise to new, often younger, residents.

### Knowledge Practices From and Toward External Actors and Institutions Initiatives’ Knowledge Toward Action and Institutionalized Collaborations

Besides fostering a culture of collective identity, knowledge practices can take the character of information, expertise, and formalized contents to target specific actions. This is very much distinct from habitual-cultural knowledge dominant in the internal knowledge practices within initiatives. The analysis of the data shows that transformative, action and strategy-oriented forms of knowledge practices are much more prevalent in cases of external knowledge practices—i.e., knowledge produced and transmitted from and toward other actors and institutions. In the following, we elaborate on the different identified urban initiatives’ external knowledge practices from and toward other actors and institutions. This form of knowledge production and transmission often entails too an important learning character. It is however particularly distinct from internal knowledge practices not only for its strategic orientation, but because it enables larger reach of expansion of the initiatives and productive networking possibilities via multi-stakeholders collaborations. Both, the instrumental orientation of knowledge co-production and transactions and the accumulation of knowledge through learning are particularly relevant for seeking an impact beyond small-scale sharing or commoning actions. They both can potentially contribute to long-term actions and larger urban transformations.

Collaborations with different actors are perceived by many interviewed initiatives, particularly among meso-level figurations, as key to ensure the impact of actions and their maintenance over time. This of course includes interrelations and interdependencies with public and private actors, but also with neighborhood residents. This is illustrated by the following excerpt of an interview with a member of a neighborhood tenants’ initiative in Berlin, about how a “low-threshold” level of knowledge and expertise allows to engage and include diverse residents of the neighborhoods in their social mobilization actions:

“[W]e have been visible in different working groups [over the years] together and for the people of the neighborhood ... one could just join and take part [in the actions]... and of course, for that the [knowledge, expertise] threshold to make sure that many people can be approached and participate needs to be very low [...] but to really make these efforts work we need a “boost” from political actors; so we try to involve them too” (Interview, INI-BL.16, 2019).

Interviews with urban initiatives in the city of Stuttgart that are dealing with sharing and commoning in public space, particularly referred to the experience with a certain degree of institutionalization of collaborations with public actors, as a way to ensure the maintenance of newly created polycentric urban governance networks: “such a collaboration across different public departments (*ämterübergreifend*) into a project [launched by an urban initiative] did not exist before in the city of Stuttgart...; this is a good development which must be maintained in future projects...so that somehow a cross-sectional department (*Querschnittsreferat*) is developed within the city” (Interview INI-ST.5, January 17, 2020). Within this framework, two interviewed initiatives in Stuttgart have developed in the last years several projects to temporary convert public places into new communal spaces, for instance by transforming former parking lots into community places, and by re-designing former business-stores into experimental housing projects (Interviews INI-ST.6, November 11, 2019, and INI-ST.11, October 30, 2019). Despite the interrelation with public actors, still most commoning activities in public space remained temporary. Among other possible reasons, urban initiatives criticize the cumbersome administrative requirements and structures that allegedly do not facilitate self-organized and co-production processes. And even when the municipal administrations are in favor of new cooperative planning procedures and initiatives toward increasing shared urban spaces, as is the case in Stuttgart, the responsibility for demanding urban transformations is often thrown at civil society actors.

Other interviewed meso-level urban initiatives (neighborhood-level activist groups) in Berlin also reflect on the institutionalization of collaboration networks as a niche for social innovation and the partial professionalization of space-commoning urban initiatives and housing activists efforts:

“[N]ew structures reflect the cooperation between district, partly also provincial/statal structures and urban initiatives from which have emerged concepts such as the ‘AKS’ [*Arbeits- und Koordinierungsstruktur für gemeinwohlorientierte Stadtentwicklung (AKSgeWoh)*] “Working and coordination structure for urban development geared to the common good”, including a Berlin expert committee for property values] or new projects like the LokalBau [...] Also [it is important] to bring to the forefront the topic of common-good, non-profit-oriented real-estate development (*Gemeinwohlorientierte Immobilienentwicklung*) in a liminal field between urban initiatives and state structures” (Interview, INI-BL.16, 2019).

Collaborations between housing initiatives and public actors, particularly outside Berlin, are allegedly dependent on the scale and size of the housing project and the number of mobilized activist groups (Interview INI-KS.3, April 16, 2020). Scale is reportedly a determinant factor influencing the support of some cities to syndicate’s housing projects (*via* for instance special provisions for the allocation of land): “[O]n a city-political level it is exciting [to seek collaborations for housing projects] ... for example in Marburg and Mannheim the municipality has allocated land favoring the “concept” [of a project] ... not according to the highest bidder [...] there are concepts and ideas, especially on participation and cultural spaces for the district that are much more interesting than anonymous condominiums” (Interview INI-KS.3, April 16, 2020). Contingent on the scale of the project and the political will however, these collaborations remain unfortunately scarce in many other smaller cities such as in Kassel, where the number of self-managed housing projects remains scant.

### Appropriation of Initiatives’ Knowledge by Private and Public Actors

Knowledge that is produced and transferred to set a certain action in motion (“applicable knowledge”) constitute a source of information and ideas for other actors too. For instance, successful experiences with sharing practices in the design and management of urban and residential common spaces constitute tacit knowledge that is being increasingly appropriated by a wide range of public and private actors.

This is the case for instance of a municipal housing company in Kassel that provides shared rooms at the disposal of residents and neighbors. The (offered) shared spaces, respond to a spatial necessity of residents and provide the possibility for collective, self-organized action within them. It is important to note however that in such an example, although space-sharing is seen as a value added for the housing projects, both by the housing company and residents, they are not a result of collective action or commoning practices, neither do the *shared rooms* constitute strictly speaking “spatial commons”. The notion of *sharing* here needs therefore to be nuanced. We refer to *sharing* as the range of collaborative practices along the *commons* and *sharing economy* continuum, that is, processes by which goods are (co-)produced and jointly used, but that can be more (as in the case of sharing economy) or less (as in the case of commoning) commodified (Bretfeld et al., forthcoming). Along this continuum, the *shared* spaces provided by private or municipal housing companies, are still far from the notion of urban commons, since residents that benefit from the (given) sharing options are in this case merely consumers, not initiators, producers, or commoners of such spaces. The activities however undertaken in such common rooms—as identified in the studied cases in Kassel and Berlin—can on the contrary be considered as micro examples of collective action. Leisure events, social services and networking are either self-organized and managed by the residents themselves, or in cooperation and negotiation between residents, housing associations, and the respective private or municipal housing institutions (Interview POL.BL.20, 2019; and Interview WOH-BL.26, 2019).

While in this context, the power to self-organize activities rests in theory on the residents themselves, the maintenance of the required resources (i.e., shared rooms and additional facilities) is contingent to the decision-making authority of the housing companies. This entails clear power differentials and a fragility on the long run of sharing and commoning processes undertaken by residents. To mediate these power asymmetries, in the Kassel example, a housing association (a top-down purposively created organization) operates as intermediary between residents and the housing company (Interview WOH-KS.1, October 10, 2019). The network of relationships between residents, the association, and the company, constitutes a multidirectional transmission of knowledge: On the one hand the often called “expert” and academic knowledge is *assumed* by institutional actors to trickle-down from the housing company toward residents. On the other, residents generate and transfer up to the association parts of their own expert knowledge: sharing and space-commoning experience, derived from everyday life practices and needs, as situated experiences in the existing conditions and material limitations. That residents—and urban initiatives for that matter—strongly localize their knowledge practices in their own necessities and urban contestations not only largely justifies them but also renders them necessary for others—be these housing companies, public actors, or similar urban initiatives.

Local experiences on residential shared spaces have proven the added value of sharing practices in the field of housing so much so that they have been transferred to new models of (co-)living in real estate companies and housing associations: “[...] in the housing industry we didn’t really have any role models, now it is more like we are being asked to report on it nationwide” (Interview WOH-KS.1, October 10, 2019). Although this transaction and appropriation of knowledge can be productive in the sense that it allows increasing spatial practices of sharing, one must recognize the different underlying motivations of sharing models. In contrast to residents’ drives, anchored in localized needs (strategic and action-oriented) and shared visions (cosmological dimension of a residents’ or activist group), at the housing company level, facilitating neighborhood sharing networks serves primarily to create an attractive housing offer, low tenant turnover and good publicity. The same interviewed housing company in Kassel legitimizes for instance the investments in shared facilities and neighborhood initiatives as a “corporate social responsibility strategy” (Interview WOH-KS.1, October 10, 2019). At the level of the housing association the focus is the creation of neighborly solidarity by “helping residents to organize themselves”. But as long as residents’ activities are launched and/or supervised by staff members of the housing association and not by the residents themselves, this remains problematic for it constrains the autonomy and innovation capacity of residents initiatives: “[residents activities are] autonomous, self-managed; [but...] we provide the premises with good equipment and also staff... full-time staff that *coordinates and supervises*... although we prefer when it is managed autonomously” Ibid, (2019). Despite the many limitations of strongly top-down steered models of sharing from a commoning perspective, the intersection of knowledge practices on different levels: residents, association, and housing

company, is clearly productive and instrumental in urban contexts with little activism experience and low density of urban initiatives.

## External Knowledge Practices Between Urban Initiatives

In the following we elaborate on external knowledge practices between similar actors, i.e., between urban initiatives, activists groups or social movements. These civil society groups contribute to the co-production and transaction of sharing and space-commoning knowledge by conforming intertwined networks of solidarity or temporary affinities: “[N]etworking is always beneficial [...] whether it is for counseling to get advice from others, to give advice to others or to exchange ideas: How do you do this? Do you have experience with that?” (Interview INI-BL.10, November 01, 2019).

The *Miethäuser Syndikat* (“apartment-house syndicate”)—a solid network of self-organized autonomous housing projects in Germany—is an illustrative case of solidarity and residential space-commoning knowledge practices between housing initiatives. Although we discussed previously that within these housing projects’ internal set-up knowledge is largely oriented toward building trust and a collective identity, in their relation to the syndicate, knowledge practices of networked housing projects generate “strategic collectivities”: housing projects’ knowledge combines mostly therefore organizational and technological dimensions, as initiatives co-produce and exchange information, skills, and financial resources to be able to set, manage and maintain self-organized autonomous housing. Together they form a large-scale network of strategic action and collaboration that can contribute on the long run to the withdrawal of housing from the market. Within this network, the syndicate’s accumulated experience allows it to adopt a counseling role for newly founded and existing housing projects interested in “decommodification of housing” (or “property neutralization”) that is one of the basic pillars of the syndicate:

“[ca. 14 years ago] ... at that time, the syndicate was much smaller. There were only 20 projects, now there are about 150 housing projects [...] here, in the founding group [of a housing project under the syndicate], there were about 16 people, ... we have dealt with self-administration structures ... we have acquired much knowledge about it, also about accounting, financing of housing projects ... thus some of us act now also as syndicate’s consultants for other housing projects... we accompany them [in the process]... we do this on a voluntary basis... here in North Hessen we are currently accompanying eight new projects” (Interview INI-KS.3, April 16, 2020).

The advisory role of the syndicate also includes mediation in case of conflicts within the network or in individual projects. For that purpose, *partnerships* between housing projects under the housing syndicate network are being explored as an instrument for conflict resolution:

“[W]e put the focus on the consultations; also, but less, on funding and structural organization, so, mainly on group and social dynamics ... because we have found in the syndicate

that this is the main point at which groups fail... and where there are conflicts [...] the consensus principle is problematic when it comes to address disputes [...] there are now various attempts to take up this question structurally. For example, partnerships between projects, [could be used, but still are not institutionalized] as a kind of arbitration court [...] for now we have solved this with a “consensus minus/plus one” decision-making principle... if we take a decision together and one person vetoes it, then, the person has two weeks to find someone else who supports the objection so that the veto applies... this is to prevent that individual persons paralyze projects.” (Interview INI-KS.3, April 16, 2020).

A similar example of strategic-oriented knowledge practices for support and consultations to other urban initiatives can be found in Stuttgart in an interviewed housing cooperative with a focus on co-living (sharing living spaces) and with particular emphasis on generational residential mixing: “[T]enants groups approach us and we support them in the construction and realization of theirs project ... from our experience we are able to transfer a relatively large amount of know-how. For example, on how to find suitable rooms’ sizes so that this [a co-living project] works permanently [in the long term]” (Interview WOH-ST.8, January 30, 2020).

Besides this action-oriented instrumental knowledge—that combines technological and organizational dimensions of residential space-sharing and -commoning knowledge—commoners interested in self-managed housing options often share aspects of the cosmological, expressive dimension: a certain “political attitude” as “founding a syndicate project now is a political act in itself” (Interview INI-KS.3, April 16, 2020). However, to allow the inclusion of different housing initiatives the syndicate does not adhere to a fixed/exclusive political identity: “[T]here is no common ‘political self-image’ in the syndicate [...] the only basic consensus is actually the communitarization of residential property and the self-determination of tenants ... beyond that, there is no agenda” (Ibid, 2020). In this case, from a cosmological perspective of knowledge, it is therefore necessary to distinguish between the individual residents, the housing projects, and the network of the syndicate as such. Housing projects often get active in housing policy and urban political contexts by building networks with similar urban initiatives —e.g., with a shared vision and ideology—to share ideas, skills and experiences and jointly mobilize. This way they amplify their impact on urban political struggles. This can be exemplified by the connections and knowledge exchanges of a syndicate project in Kassel with a regional network involved in campaigns against discrimination in the housing market, with other syndicate projects and with “right to the city” networks (Ibid, 2020).

Other than knowledge transfer between initiatives active in the field of housing we have identified various practices that urban initiatives involved with space-sharing and —commoning in public spaces, enact to co-produce and diffuse their knowledge as they relate to similar organizations, activists groups, interpersonal networks, and individuals. Interviews conducted in Stuttgart reflected particularly on the importance of relationality and knowledge exchange for space-commoning

actions: “the reason why this [initiative/commoning action in public spaces] is growing and has been successful for a few years now is that networking is good and that has something to do with sharing, with knowledge exchange” (Interview INI-ST.11, October 30, 2019). We need to consider here different scalar, temporal, and spatial dimensions of knowledge practices.

On a meso-level, localized mid-size organizations such as neighborhood or cultural centers act as points of connection between different organizations or activist groups, to allow cross-fertilization and synergies to take place. A similar effect is achieved by smaller urban initiatives—with otherwise fluid boundaries—by temporarily appropriating public spaces, and this way territorializing their activities:

“[T]he Austrian Square was a place where initiatives would come for gatherings and information events about their activities or where experts would lead consultations; there were all sorts of activities, panel discussions were organized... in the end, we prepared a “platform for initiatives” [...] it just needs such a [public] space in the middle of the city ... where people walk past and stop...” (Interview INI-ST.5, January 17, 2020).

These gatherings strategically located in visible, and contextually relevant spaces, serve as assembly and experimentation arenas, and have the potential of activating diverse individuals and actors: “[W]e had real assemblies on the street... and formed working groups on the street... one was a media group, another was a research group, another an action group and so on ... we worked in different groups together, and for, the people of the neighborhood; people could just sit down and join” (Interview, INI-BL.16, 2019). In these spatially and temporarily contextualized actions initiatives knowledge is transmitted not only to similar groups but also on the micro-level to interested individuals—potential future commoners, activists, practitioners or simply, ordinary people—who can incorporate the situated knowledge/s into new activist groups (e.g., spin-offs) or within their own personal everyday practices: “[T]hrough our work we can share and transfer these [sharing and commoning] experiences and this way encourage other people to share more or to participate more in public life and organize actions” (Interview INI-ST.5, January 17, 2020). A distinction however needs to be made on the logic of knowledge transfer between initiatives on the one hand and toward and from residents on the other. Exchange between similar activist groups often adopt a “supportive character” in the sense that, within their networks of solidarity or affinity, they facilitate the exchange of information and know-how on experiences and actions. In the interactions with individuals and residents, the knowledge practices include two differentiated orientations: the first one covers identity and strategic-oriented information from the initiative toward residents (top-down). The second includes the bottom-up transfer of personal knowledge and everyday experiences from ordinary citizens into the initiative knowledge. The latter, as in the studied cases in Stuttgart, serves for instance as input for collaborative urban design processes, without which these initiative-driven urban transformation processes would remain relatively top-down oriented forms of politics.

## DISCUSSION

*Space-sharing and -commoning can be read as figurations in which different paths of knowledge production and transmission overlap and intersect.* These are of course more complex forms of figurations than the ones illustrated by Elias in the metaphor of games. This is so, largely because the rules by which commoning or sharing practices take place are dynamic and variable, shifting the figuration boundaries on a relatively flexible way as we saw for instance in the different networks of interactions within and beyond autonomous housing projects, particularly as they enter negotiations with public actors, contingent on the political landscape, the scale, and the perceived potential social impact of the project. In the following we shortly discuss within a figuration framework the most salient factors that we identified in the interviews as relevant to urban initiatives' internal and external knowledge practices, e.g., identity building, trust, time, physical contact for discussions, opportunities for experimentation, non-formal learning processes, networking and collaborations; we do that from the perspective of temporality, relationality, scalarity, power ratios and spatiality as we reflect on how these aspects contribute to co-produce and govern more or less sustainable urban commons.

*Temporality—Figurations of sharing and commoning evolve dynamically via interactions and power shifts.* Temporality, understood here in relation to the accumulated knowledge and experiences of individuals within an urban initiative over time (linked to the time individuals are involved/ “established” in the group), contributes to build a stable collective identity within an urban initiative; it contributes this way less to trigger transformative actions and more to the preservation on the long-term of the cosmological dimension of initiative knowledge such as in autonomous housing projects. Temporality, understood however from the perspective of the deployment of knowledge, supports on the other hand the development of actions and the activation of strategic goals at different paces. Even if “fast-tracked” actions of sharing and commoning are not sustained on the long run, they have potential for innovation as they allow knowledge practices to spread beyond the internal framework of an organization setting external collaborations with different actors. Resulting polycentric commons governance networks entail dynamic negotiation processes within constant and productive power shifts between the involved actors. They constitute nested figurations of interdependence and collaboration that can lead to innovations on the way spatial resources are created and governed. Even in long-term established figurations such as autonomous housing projects, knowledge practices within the group dynamically evolve with the absorption of newcomers' knowledge. It either enhances internal diversity of knowledge or leads to the partial disintegration of the initiative and its replication elsewhere—when the incorporated knowledge challenges the shared narrative and vision of the group and power relations are shaken to the point where group coherence is no longer possible. In both cases, residential commoning knowledge is sustained.

*Relationality—Figurations of sharing and commoning consist of chains of interdependence between individuals and levels of*

*organization.* Individuals within urban initiatives relate to one another in more or less formalized platforms of exchange in which non-formal learning constitutes the main form of generation and acquisition of knowledge. Physical encounters, trust and time are crucial here to ensure that personal knowledges, skills, and accumulated initiative knowledge are productively bundled together across different organizational levels and potential conflicts are negotiated. Individuals within a group also build informal ties with external actors that enrich the initiative. These interrelations with outsiders influence in turn internal knowledge practices. As new knowledge is integrated in the initiative by incorporating for instance the personal experiences of neighborhood residents, a shift from preservation, identity building and cosmological dimensions toward more strategic-, organizational- and technological-oriented goals takes place in the initiative. Sharing and commoning initiatives territorializing their actions in contextually relevant and accessible (low-threshold participation) urban spaces are more likely to activate these new interrelations and this way contribute to the continuation and expansion of their narratives and goals within their own initiative or via spin-off groups. In these space-commoning knowledge practices relationships are mostly initiated *bottom-up*. In cases where private and public actors appropriate initiatives' knowledge to incorporate space-sharing concepts in their corporate goals and projects, interdependencies are *top-down* dominated. Although we cannot speak of commoning here, in smaller cities like Kassel, where the density of activist networks is relatively lower than in other urban contexts, top-down neighborhood common rooms facilitate favorable conditions for long-term collective action to develop in the neighborhood.

*Scalarity—Figurations of sharing and commoning develop at different spatial and social levels.* The smaller and more homogeneous a sharing and commoning figuration is, the more individuals within it are positioned toward building a collective (often exclusive) identity. The larger the figuration becomes, the more interrelations and interdependencies are built, the more networking the initiative achieves, and the more internal knowledge practices are directed toward innovation and long-term transformative endeavors. Urban initiatives experience however thresholds beyond which they turn ungovernable in their stabilized form and need to (re)adjust their boundaries. From a figuration perspective, mid-size initiatives (in which other smaller activists groups are embedded) can be considered as meso- or meta-figurations that comprise smaller core-figurations of sharing and commoning. In this context, the production, transfer, and absorption of knowledge toward and from outsiders, facilitates “scaling up” initiatives efforts: e.g., the development of spin-offs or networks of collaboration creates a social field that amplifies the effectiveness of sharing and commoning actions beyond their immediate environment.

*Power ratios—Figurations of sharing and commoning are marked by unequal and shifting power relations.* Social relations of power (“power balances”) determine the positionality of individuals within a group and the cosmological, organizational, or technological orientation of the knowledge practices of

an initiative. Internal knowledge practices oriented toward collective identity are prevalent when positionalities embedded in the relationships and transactions between individuals in a group are maintained, i.e., when the internal status quo and the structures of an initiative are preserved. This can lead for instance to long-term stability of a housing project, but also to exclusivity. Shifting power positions allow in turn to integrate new knowledge practices, and to shift toward innovation as they enable to develop critiques of the internal status quo of an organization and validate alternative proposals to overcome these. Diversity of experiences and knowledge/s is balanced within urban initiatives via consensus-based decision-making processes, which help to level unequal power ratios. Also, knowledge practices from urban initiatives to external actors, particularly to public institutions, are still marked by power asymmetries that hinder the larger societal impact of commoning efforts, especially when the relationship of the involved actors is characterized by dependence.

*Spatiality—Figurations of sharing and commoning are embedded in places, operate through networks, and are shaped by territorialization.* Urban initiatives situate their knowledge in their specific context, its socio-spatial characteristics, necessities, and urban struggles. To address and impact on these specific localized needs, initiatives often integrate external actors within their knowledge practices. This allows to combine the preservation of their collective self along with setting up new organizational and action-oriented knowledge practices in multi-stakeholders constellations. Even more than other social movements knowledge, space-sharing and -commoning knowledge is always spatially grounded and, therefore, it is a result of actors' reflexivity according to the places in which they co-produce, transfer, and aim to implement this knowledge. The autonomous housing cases and public spaces actions we explored show that these space-commoning efforts are shaped in very specific territories, where boundaries are strongly territorialized. Networking allows however the boundaries to blur, enabling individual projects and actions to shift to a multilocal figuration of larger spatial scale, social and urban reach.

## CONCLUSION

Within the larger framework of social movements, urban initiatives' efforts to co-produce and collaboratively manage urban spatial resources, i.e., sharing and space-commoning practices, constitute today not only tactics of contestation against prevailing economically driven urban developments in European cities, but also a basis for developing new urban commons governance arrangements. Drawing on insights from three different German cities, in this article we have specifically addressed urban initiatives that engage in the co-production and self-management of non-commodified forms of housing and public spaces. Despite dealing with similar urban problems—among others, the increasing commodification of, privatization, and resulting contestation

over spatial resources—the explored initiatives and their related actors, constitute variegated examples of collective action, within different scales, socio-spatial and political arrangements. In this context, we have argued that a focus on initiatives knowledge practices allows a better understanding of how different forms of collective action in general, and sharing and space-commoning in particular, operate and can be maintained beyond their initial productive stage, contributing this way to the sustainability of commons governance. From a theoretical perspective, adopting a figurational approach allowed us to reflect on the extent to which temporality, relationality, scalarity, spatiality, and power relations, manifest in practices of knowledge co-production and transfer within and beyond urban initiatives, contributed to facilitate or hinder collective action and its continuation over time.

The explored cases showed that knowledge practices are enacted between interdependent individuals and institutions involved in space-sharing or commoning figurations toward the production and governing of urban commons. The dynamic co-production and transmission of ideas and information shaped relationships within and beyond the explored initiatives and contributed to the production and (re)adjustment (re-figuration) of commoning networks in constant movement. The positionalities of individuals (established, newcomers, or outsiders) within a sharing and commoning figuration, their power balance in respect to others and their connections and transactions of knowledge were therefore in constant flux, despite efforts for collective identity, cohesion, and structuration that sought primarily the preservation of the initiatives, their logic, ideology, and collective self. In contrast to the knowledge practices that were mostly “expressive” i.e., “preservation” — and identity-oriented, urban initiatives enacted too instrumental “innovation-oriented” knowledge practices, that pursued specific localized actions on a small scale and sought, on a larger scale, a transformative agenda to challenge the status quo. As they pursued the co-production and governing of new and more sustainable urban commons, sharing and space-commoning figurations intersected with other urban demands and political disputes, most significantly with the ones related to housing and the appropriation of public space. Space-sharing and -commoning figurations emerged not only therefore from the actions of those who actively mobilized, such as individual urban initiatives. Core-figurations, with their interconnections, interdependencies, and possibilities to scale-up, created spaces of contention in the city (physical and digital) in which every day urban life and urban struggles take place: a space of conflict both in the sense of contested physical space, which can be occupied, appropriated, and temporarily transformed, and of social space, in which different people from their own positionalities, construct social relationships and interdependencies with one another.

Particular attention should be directed toward interdependencies at work. As our analysis showed, diverse modes of knowledge production and transfer (mostly those

identity-oriented) often produce conditions of exclusivity which ultimately risk leading to unequal access to the produced resources. Also, strong dependencies from institutional actors, can hinder self-management of the shared spatial resources. Still, interdependencies and knowledge exchange in multi-stakeholders collaborations showed to be productive: On the one hand, support from private and public actors to residents' groups and small-scale urban initiatives facilitated setting-up sharing practices in urban contexts with a low density of urban activist networks like in Kassel. On the other hand, collaborations between stakeholders allowed implementing adequate policy interventions to sustain ongoing sharing and space-commoning actions perceived as functionally relevant. That was the case for instance of the "concept" land allocation by municipalities for housing projects under the Mietshäusersyndikat network. This calls for future research to deepen into how and in which formats and methods can space-commoning knowledge more efficiently be co-produced and mobilized in multi-stakeholders constellations, involving initiatives, policy makers and planners. This is relevant with view to ensure liminal spaces of interaction, mediation, and conflict resolution at the intersection of the formal (legal) legitimacy frameworks and the bottom-up, endogenous, and spontaneous expressions of collective action. While the latter do not always find legitimacy in existing legal frameworks, as they are often informal, at the borders of legality or even beyond them, they enjoy however relatively high levels of *credibility*, i.e., social acceptance in the eyes of commoners and the wider community for the function they fulfill (Arvanitidis and Papagiannitsis, 2020).

Finally, and abstracting from the specific neighborhoods in the three explored German cities, we see the value added of combining a figurational approach, as a meso-level perspective, with the epistemology of social movements knowledge, to further explore sharing and commoning efforts in urban governance contexts in other European cities. Beyond that, in other societies and cities of the so-called Global South and Global East, a figurational approach cum context-sensitive collective action approaches could also contribute to shed light on the situated knowledge/s practices underlying localized tactics from below. Moving away from a social movements lens however, these have been often conceptualized with alternative approaches such as the "quiet encroachments of the ordinary" (Bayat, 2010; Becker et al., 2015a), coping and "survival strategies", as well as "everyday subaltern strategies of resistance" (Chatterjee, 2006), which are deployed within the framework of the growing precarity, dispossessions, lack of affordable housing, socio-spatial inequalities and urban fragmentation prevailing in many rapidly urbanizing cities. To what extent these tactics of resistance can lead to forms of sustainable urban commons governance in cities of the Global South and East, remains largely unexplored.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The datasets presented in this article are not readily available because Qualitative data collected for this research are not available to third parties. Requests to access the datasets should be directed to HC, [hcermeno@asl.uni-kassel.de](mailto:hcermeno@asl.uni-kassel.de).

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

HC led the writing process of the sections "Introduction" and "Methodology" (which includes the theoretical framework and research methods). Within the "Results" section, NB and HC co-led the writing process of the sub-section "Internal Knowledge Practices Within Sharing and Space-Commoning Initiatives"; FB and HC co-led the writing process of the sub-sections "Knowledge Practices From and Towards External Actors and Institutions" and "External Knowledge Practices Between Urban Initiatives". HC, FB, and NB collaborated in writing the "Discussion" and "Conclusion" sections and elaborated **Table 1**. HC produced **Figure 1** based on the original by Sina Doukas (StadtTeilen) and copy-edited the article. FB and NB received project funding. All authors are part of the transdisciplinary research project "StadtTeilen", reviewed each other's contributions to this paper, and approved the submitted version.

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