What can Ostrom's eight design principles contribute to understandings of intentional community living?

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Devoted to Ostrom and all those pushing for a world which cares for the collective.

Abstract

Ostrom's eight design principles for governing the commons were originally created to prove that a common-pool resource can be effectively governed by the collective. This project aims to understand whether these principles can be applied to functioning intentional communities. Two four-day visits to two intentional communities revealed that the systems that both community's used were closely aligned to the eight design principles. Problems that the communities were having were directly linked to a failure to follow a particular principle. This indicates that Ostrom's theory can be used to better understand how to create a thriving intentional community.

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Keywords:

Commons, common-pool resources, intentional communities, Ostrom, communes

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Introduction

In Mediaeval England, under feudalism, the common was central to the livelihood of peasants. In the inner commons, peasants had access to strips of the manorial lord's land which they could use for grain cultivation. Every year a locally elected council would meet to redistribute the land and set the fee for pasteurising animals to prevent over-grazing (Rosenman, 2012). The uncultivated outer commons (mountainous regions, heathlands, bogs that were beyond the manorial land) was where peasants obtained natural products such as wood and wild fruits (Greer, 2017). The right to the common was so central to English society that it was included in the original text of the Magna Carta. The Charter of the Forest, within the Magna Carta, retained the rights to the commons for the people and suggested that collective control over the means of production (i.e. land) was central to both political and economic freedom (Linebaugh, 2009).

In the 17th century, enclosure, the act of privatising the common and charging rent to the peasants, began. Between 1750 and 1850, approximately 4000 Enclosure Acts were passed converting commons into private property (Rosenman, 2012). As commodity and private property replaced the common in the 17th century, the Charter of the forest was separated from the Magna Carta (Linebaugh, 2009). Enclosure was central to the transition to early capitalism as privatisation allowed for increased yield and the dispossession of peasants to emerging urban environments to become manufacturing labourers. Wage relations and rental agreements governed the access to products previously available via the common. To justify enclosure, theory at the time argued that privatisation, as a form of governance, was best for the common. For example, John Locke (1689) stated that the value of land is determined by the labour added to the land to make it productive which is maximised through privatisation, not a collective common.

The idea of privatisation being the most effective way to govern a common or common-pool resource is an idea maintained by the modern economic theories of Olson (1965) and Hardin (1968). A common-pool resource is defined as a resource which is challenging to prevent people from accessing and where one person's use of the resources depletes it for others. Hardin (1968) argues that environmental degradation and over-use is to be expected if a common-pool resource is governed by a collective. He uses the example of an open pasture, arguing that each herder will be encouraged to increase their herd on the pasture without limit. This is supported by 'The logic of collective action' in which Olson (1965) argues that without coercion, individuals within large groups will not act to achieve their common or group interests. Central to both arguments is the concept of free-riding where individuals benefit from the common resources without participating in their production or maintenance. Even though if all participants chose to free ride, the collective benefit would not be produced, the temptation to free-ride dominates in the decision-making process. This has shaped modern governance of common-pool resources (CPRs), as most policy supports State or private ownership of commons. However, this theory was challenged by Elinor Ostrom (1990) in 'Governing the commons: the evolution of institutions for collective action', winning her the Nobel prize for Economics in 2009. Ostrom used specific case studies of successful commons to challenge the notion that commons cannot be governed by the collective. Ostrom argues that there are 8 design principles for a successful common (more detail of these principles is provided in the findings).

Within the social sciences, academics are aiming to expand the definition of the common beyond both a traditional mediaeval common and the CPR to illustrate how commons are more ubiquitous than is appreciated. Gibson-Graham (2013) argues that a common is a 'property, knowledge or practice shared by a community' where access to the common must be shared and wide and community members are the ones caring for the commons. They use

the example of a local football club where the committee and club are run by community members to illustrate how private property can still be a common.

Using this understanding, an intentional community can be defined as a common. An intentional community is a residential community who chose to live together, sharing land and space cooperatively. The two intentional communities I visited: Oak House and Redberry Community (not their actual names), both ate communally, taking turns to cook food and clean up. In the case of the Redberry community, responsibility for farming and gardening was distributed between the community and discussed in community meetings. In Oakhouse, whilst there were two central gardeners, the overall maintenance of the house and different tasks was still distributed amongst the community, and decisions were made as a collective.

This work aims to merge geographical understanding of the commons, shaped by geographers like Gibson-Graham, with traditional economic theory on common-pool resources by asking 'what can Ostrom's eight design principles contribute to understandings of intentional community living?'. The merging of theory across multiple disciplines is deliberate, as the hope is for future multidisciplinary research, with the aim to strengthen overall academic understanding of how to live collectively. Whilst there are many intentional communities across Britain, there is limited understanding of what makes their systems function and how intentional communities deal with free riding. What my study revealed was that Ostrom can potentially serve as a specific framework to help reveal how intentional communities function. This could encourage the proliferation of cooperative living practices in all their forms.

Methodology

The data that has shaped the findings in this report was based on two four-day visits. The first, to Redberry Community, and the second, one month later, to Oakhouse (both are described in more detail below). I chose these two communities because they both emphasised cooperation and particular forms of commoning (the everyday actions that allow the commons to function). They eat together, share most facilities, and work the land together, which some intentional communities don't do. Equally, the differences between them, with Oakhouse having paid employees and Redberry Community centring itself around its land, would make for insightful comparison.

Whilst this isn't an ethnography, due to the limited timeframe available to live embedded within these communities, I used ethnographic methods to shape my data collection and analysis. To collate information based on participant observation and informal interviews, I kept a field diary. For formal interviews, I recorded them on my phone and wrote reflections on the interviews in the field diary as well. I took photographs and drew diagrams of the layout to aid my understanding visually.

Before visiting, I emailed the communities, outlining the nature of my research and how I would like to be involved in the community during my visit. The communities decided in their weekly meetings whether they were comfortable with me conducting research, so when I arrived there was already an understanding of why I was there. I made residents aware of what I was researching throughout my time in the community, and I asked for explicit consent from residents whose conversations I wanted to be included in my report and informed them of how this would work (pseudonymisation etc).

During my time at the communities, I tried to integrate myself into the lived experience of community members as much as possible, participating in conversation during dinner, joining social activities, and helping volunteers out with work. It was not my intention to mirror the

exact daily life of community members, which would involve larger amounts of time working in the fields and gardens. In both communities, I was able to complete at least 4 interviews (see appendix for more detail).

It is important to acknowledge how my role as a researcher has shaped the findings of this report. Haraway (1988) argues that often in scientific analysis there is a failure to acknowledge how the scientist's own position will shape the outcome of the experiment. She argues that the solution to this is ‘feminist objectivity’ which centres itself around situated knowledge. This requires ‘contestation’ and ‘deconstruction’ to occur during the research process. By placing the knowledge in its context, this allows new knowledge systems to be built that effectively disentangle the issues of research.

Following Haraway's instructions, I will attempt to highlight how my position has affected the outcomes of my research. Firstly, my positionality has shaped how the data was collected and understood. It shaped the questions I asked and how I interpreted the information I was given. Applying Ostrom’s principles to shape my analysis, rather than attempting to create a new hypothesis, helped to mitigate some degree of my positionality as it meant I was basing my understanding on a pre-existing framework. This was especially important given the limited timeframe I had to collect data.

Equally, how I interacted with the communities was shaped by their perceptions of me. Redberry Community members noted how I was the youngest researcher to ever be allowed to live within the community, as they usually only accept PhD researchers. This could have influenced the degree to which they were willing to be open with me and how I was treated. That said, many of the members of both communities had a similar background to my own, as many had higher education degrees and were familiar with ethnographic research. This will have also influenced my experience, as it was easier for me to integrate into the communities.

The information I was able to gain from my visits to the intentional communities will also be shaped by the participants situated understanding of the world, and their constructs of reality. I aimed to mitigate the potential for certain people's perspectives to narrate my understanding of the community by cross-referencing and asking multiple people the same questions to confirm whether one person's perspective was a unanimous feeling or a personal one. This is where having a combination of formal and informal interviews was particularly useful, as in more structured interviews I could ask multiple people the same questions, to gain direct comparison. In informal conversations, I could pick up on whether other community members were mentioning the same things that were raised in the formal interviews, to gauge how prevalent certain ideas were.

Before I explore my findings, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of my research. Ethnographic studies in social science typically take around a year, and shorter ethnographies will often have a very directed focus (Webster and Rice, 2019). As I had one week to complete my fieldwork, the data I collected is much more limited than a conventional ethnography. For example, at neither community, was I there for long enough to participate and learn from their community meetings. Moreover, whilst both communities were welcoming, the limited time prevented me from gaining the trust and social connection to feel comfortable interviewing a wider range of community members (and many were too busy). At Oakhouse, I interviewed mostly female participants. Whilst at Redberry Community, I interacted with more of the younger, newer members. This limited the range of voices represented in the report. Formal interviews helped to somewhat mitigate against this as it allowed me to interview members that may be less likely to interact in the everyday activities of the community, ensuring I had a more diverse range of voices.

Understanding the Communities

Intentional communities vary greatly in their structure, demography and layout. To help contextualise the findings I have provided a summary of the two communities I visited.

Oakhouse:
Oakhouse is a social research park and a registered charity founded in the 1950s. It describes its resident community as a 'living experiment'. Oakhouse has a renting system which often means a higher turnover of residents. It also has a volunteer scheme. Volunteers live within the community for up to three months and often go on to become residents. Every resident has a room in the house, and all other facilities are shared.

Oakhouse produces lots of its food in its gardens and gets additional food from Fairshare. The garden is run by the head gardener and her apprentice. They also have volunteers from the local area who help in the gardens.

Oakhouse has paid employees, mostly residents, who cover most of the logistical parts of the system. For example, there is a kitchen coordinator (who organises cooking and buying food), and a community coordinator (who navigates the trustee to resident relationship). As it is a registered charity, it has a board of trustees who make more challenging decisions on behalf of the community in executive meetings. Only two members of the trustees are residents, and they are recent additions. Community decisions are made in weekly community meetings. Oakhouse also has weekly sensory meetings, where discussions about decisions are made but no actual decision is allowed to be made.

Where commoning comes most into play is in the everyday activities of the community. Chores (cooking, cleaning etc) are spread among residents, who sign up to tasks on the rota in the morning meeting. Decisions about the community are based on consensus.

Redberry community:
The Redberry community was founded in 1974. It is a registered housing association. The Redberry community produces a large amount of food in its gardens and farms. Redberry Community are not entirely self-sufficient, and purchase certain foods (e.g. oat milk, peanut butter) from beyond the common. It is registered with Woofers, an organisation which pairs volunteers with organic farms, and so has temporary volunteers staying with the community and helping with the food production. Food production is distributed amongst the community, with members volunteering to take control of the production specific crops or the care of the specific animals.

Cooking and cleaning are distributed between the community on a rota sheet in the kitchen. There are certain members who sort larger jobs such as finance and admin; these members volunteer to do so in community meetings. Weekly community meetings are where decisions are made, based on consensus. If a decision cannot be made, then the conversation continues in specialised sub meetings e.g. a housing meeting. The commoning occurs in the food production, decision-making and everyday care of the house.

In Ostrom's and Hardin's analysis of common-pool resources they look at commons where there is a risk of over-extraction through free-riding. This is partially applicable for intentional communities. If too many people eat the food or use the facilities without contributing equally to the amount they take, they free-ride, and the system cannot continue. However, intentional communities have the benefit of remaining in contact with external society, which can provide additional provisions if needed, reducing the damage of free-riding. This helps to explain why free-riding can occur in intentional communities and they can continue to function.

Findings

In this report, the findings will be structured around Ostrom's eight design principles, with a discussion around whether each principle aligns with the system of the communities.

1. Clearly defined boundaries. *Individuals or households who have rights to withdraw resource units from the CPR must be clearly defined, as must the boundaries of the CPR itself.*

At Oakhouse, withdrawal of resources is limited to residents. Residents are expected to do 8 hours of community work and this ensures that extraction of resources (food, water, shelter) is in balance with production and maintenance of resources. There is also a limited number of volunteering spots that is in line with the number of available rooms in the house.

Oakhouse hosts community events and invites visitors which are then able to withdraw resources. However, they usually must pay in exchange for food, and the number of visitors will be monitored by the event's coordinators.

The Redberry community also has clear boundaries through its membership process. Residents are expected to do 15 hours of work a week. Visitors can withdraw resources, however there is a board in the kitchen to track how many visitors there are.

Both are privately owned and so this creates a clear boundary of the CPR.

2. Adaptation to the local environment. *Congruence between appropriation and provision rules and local conditions. Appropriation rules restricting time, place, technology, and/or quantity of resource units are related to local conditions and to provision rules requiring labor, material, and/or money.*

In the Oakhouse and Redberry communities, the rules and system are in part a reflection of the particular resources that need to be maintained when living in an intentional community. The rules are adapted to the fact that within intentional communities it is not just land and food production that requires commoning but the wider needs of the community (e.g. house maintenance, cooking, and cleaning). This ensures a fully functioning common.
However, the differences in the two communities' rules (e.g. Braziers having morning meetings and more regular social events) did not seem a direct response to the local conditions, suggesting adaptation and difference was mostly coincidental not a direct response to the local conditions.

3. Collective-choice arrangements. *Most individuals affected by the operational rules can participate in modifying the operational rules.*

At Oakhouse this is mostly true. Angelina, a resident at Oakhouse, noted how in a community meeting it was the residents who created the 8 hours a week of community work policy. This supports the idea that central to their success is the fact that, through meetings, residents can participate in modifying the operational rules. However, a point of tension at Oakhouse is that trustees control certain decisions in the executive meetings such as whether community members should leave the community. Trustee members are either ex-residents or people with close ties to the community at Braziers and so are not affected by the operational rules of the community.

Derek, a trustee, explains how the purpose of trustees is to 'act on behalf of the Brazier's social research park as a charity', as this ensures the continuation of the founding principles created by Norman Foster. Whilst many residents dislike the 'external authority' influence, Derek argues that trustees can intervene in particularly challenging situations to the benefit of the community when interpersonal tensions are high. Recently, specific changes have provided the resident community with more autonomy. First, the formation of community meetings, where less important decisions can be made without trustees. Secondly, two residents have recently been appointed to the trustee board. What this reveals is that, although unintentionally, Oakhouse adjusted their system to be more in line with design principle 2.

In the Redberry community those affected by the operations rules can participate in modifying the operational rules. This is particularly essential as community demographics change over time, and this allows them to adapt the rules if needed.

4. Monitoring. *Monitors, who actively audit CPR conditions and appropriator behavior, are accountable to the appropriators or are the appropriators.*

In both Oakhouse and Redberry Community, the residents are the only monitors. They can observe the work that others are doing and there is no external authority monitoring their actions.

This is beneficial to the success of the community, as Ostrom (1990) argues that by monitoring others, the appropriator-monitor learns about the level of compliance in the CPR. If no one is breaking the rules, they will be less likely to as well, as they learn that everyone is complying, reducing the risk of free-riding.

For CPRs, Ostrom (1990) argues that the cost of monitoring must be low, but the benefit to the individual is high. In intentional communities, the cost of monitoring is very low, as monitoring occurs by participating in everyday activities. For example, you might make a cup of tea and whilst you are doing that you can see that the person who signed up to do the washing up, is in fact doing the washing up. Equally, the benefit of monitoring for the appropriator-monitor is high as it ensures the common is being maintained.

However, intentional communities require lots of different types of work to thrive. It is not just food production that needs to occur but cooking, cleaning, admin. Often certain work is not valued as much, by some residents, as other work. In the Redberry community, some residents value farming and gardening above domestic work, such as cooking and cleaning, which has led to certain residents accusing those who exclusively cook and clean of free-riding.

Amanda, a Redberry resident, discussed how she spends substantial amounts of time strengthening the social capital of the Redberry Community. She makes an active effort to conversate with all members of the community and to discuss their feelings on contentious community issues beyond just the weekly meetings. Amanda argues that the bonds created beyond meetings are essential to ensuring that consensus decision making can occur, as it allows people to feel heard. Whilst everyone may be able to monitor Amanda doing this, many residents won't necessarily classify this as work. This 'invisible labour' may not be considered when other residents are evaluating whether Amanda contributes enough to the community, despite this work likely being time-consuming and emotionally draining. What this reveals is that even if monitoring can occur, if residents have different understandings of what work is and value certain work above others, then there will be a lack of clarity on what counts as freeriding and who is freeriding. This is something that residents at both communities acknowledge is a problem. For example, Angelina, an Oakhouse resident, noted how there was discussion at a recent sensory meeting about what defines work in Oakhouse.

What also makes monitoring challenging is that lots of work is not physically visible to all residents because it doesn't occur in community spaces. Fiona, a Redberry Community resident, notes how there are lots of 'hidden things that people do'. She says that you are more likely to see someone 'wheeling a wheelbarrow' than completing a 'spreadsheet'. Freya, an Oakhouse resident, supports this and argues that making 'work more visible' in the community is central to its continuation as without it, some work is not acknowledged which leads to resentment. At Oakhouse and Redberry Community, the visible rotas on the wall help with this problem as it is easier to see who is contributing. At Oakhouse, morning meetings are particularly helpful. During morning meetings, people explicitly sign up for different jobs and so it is clearer who is contributing, and it encourages others to do similarly.

So, although both communities comply successfully with design principles four, certain work is often rendered invisible by certain residents, such as emotional labour (building social capital and creating social bonds), domestic work or work that is completed outside of community spaces (e.g. completing a spreadsheet). This makes monitoring a harder challenge than the principle alone reveals.

In 'Invisible work', Daniels (1987) notes how the tasks typically completed by women (domestic and emotional labour) are not considered work in Western society. What this report therefore also indicates, although cannot cover in enough depth, is how the issues that prevail in wider English society – in this case surrounding invisible work - are just as present in alternative spaces like intentional communities.

5. Graduated sanctions. *Appropriators who violate operational rules are likely to be assessed graduated sanctions (depending on the seriousness and context of the offense) by other appropriators, by officials accountable to these appropriators, or by both.*

In both Oakhouse and Redberry Community, graduated sanctions are extremely rare. Fiona, a Redberry resident, mentioned that the closest thing to a sanction was when one member 'refused to serve lunch' to a member that never did any rota jobs. In Oakhouse, some actions have been taken to prevent free-riding. Angelina, an Oakhouse resident, notes how one member was allowed to join but within their contract there was a condition that they spend more time with the community. In extreme cases, some members of Oakhouse have been removed for not contributing enough to the common, although this is rare. Most of the time, complaints about free-riding are just directed to the Community coordinator. However, Ed, a resident, notes how it is unclear what power the community coordinator has and as a result sanctions aren't implemented.

I argue that the lack of sanctions is primarily because of the issue of monitoring, as the two are so interlinked. Without clear clarity on how much work each member is doing, it is challenging to make accusations of freeriding and sanction appropriately. Moreover, as well as being a common, the intentional community is also a home. The bonds between people will make public accusations of freeriding challenging. Accusations within a meeting will permeate beyond the specific meeting, creating a hostile everyday environment. Amanda, a Redberry community member, argues that within a community sanctions risk creating a bullying and accusatory environment which is especially problematic when this is the residents' home.

This is the primary source of tension as a lack of sanctions allows residents to continue freeriding. Susan, a Redberry community member, even warns joining residents that they will have to get used to living with freeriders. Angelina and Freya, Oakhouse residents, mention how it has been discussed in meetings that many members feel that ⅓ of the residents do most of the work which leads to resentment.

6. Conflict-resolution mechanisms. *Appropriators and their officials have rapid access to low-cost local arenas to resolve conflicts among appropriators or between appropriators and officials.*

In Oakhouse, conflict-resolution mechanisms are embedded within the community's system as there are both sensory meetings and community meetings. The meetings are part of their weekly schedule and there is an expectation that members participate. However, conflict-resolution spaces for conflicts between appropriators (residents) and officials (trustees) are not a part of their system. Residents are allowed to sit in on executive (trustee) meetings but there is no specific meeting arranged for discussions between the trustees and residents. In the Redberry community, there are also weekly meetings for conflict-resolution. If issues aren't solved in the weekly meetings, then they dissolve into submeetings with specialist groups e.g. the housing committee.

Despite both communities following design principles six, living with these communities revealed that conflict-resolution mechanisms need to go beyond just having access to arenas for discussion. Both Oakhouse and Redberry communities' rule by consensus and so there is a preconceived decision-making system. This shapes the type of conflict resolution that occurs. Brandon, a Redberry Community resident, argues that 'self-education' and a specific 'awareness of consensus' is essential to the functioning of the meetings.

The style of the meetings can also influence the ability to resolve conflicts. Ed, an Oakhouse resident, argues that the rules of sensory meetings - the lack of decision making - allows for empathy and more open conversation which helps overcome some of these issues. Angelina, an Oakhouse resident, supports this, noting how 'vulnerability and honesty are respected' and residents are 'good at listening to each other.'

Equally, what Ostrom does not mention is how the interpersonal relationships between people will shape the extent to which conflict is successfully resolved. Amanda, a Redberry Community member, mentions how class, gender and the confidence-levels of an individual can influence the extent that certain members feel comfortable expressing their emotions. Freya, an Oakhouse member, describes how often in meetings it will be 'one person pushing something and everyone else just going along with it or one other person blocking it'. This suggests that although the conflict-resolution mechanisms are there, the dynamics of the group will influence the effectiveness of these meetings. Some Oakhouse members mention how there were points where the community was unable to talk to each other, despite having the spaces to resolve conflicts.

In the CPRs that Ostrom studied there is a clearer understanding of what conflict needs to be resolved – an infraction. For example, in a shared forest, a certain family could be logging more than their allocated amount. Similar issues of freeriding occur in intentional communities and are conflicts that residents attempt to resolve in meetings. However, intentional communities also have another form of conflict that Ostrom does not include in her understanding of conflict-resolution. Intentional communities also disagree on decisions that need to be made on behalf of the community. For example, in the Redberry community, there are currently discussions on what type of energy source should heat the house. Each resident has a very different opinion. This form of disagreement can be varied – from energy sources to pricing housing units – which often makes these forms of conflict more challenging to resolve. The two forms of conflict (freeriding issues and making decisions collectively) influence each other. What I noticed from discussions with both communities was that the resentment between members based on issues of free-riding would disrupt the ability for community members to listen to each other about wider collective issues (like the energy source) and so it made coming to consensus more challenging.

What become clear during my visits to these communities is that central to living in an intentional community is existing with the conflict and disagreement. Both communities acknowledged that conflict becomes problematic when it has permeated beyond meetings and created a hostile everyday environment.

7. Recognition of rights to organize. *The rights of appropriators to devise their own institutions are not challenged by external governmental authorities.*

In both Oakhouse and Redberry Community, the rules of their common are not challenged by external authorities. However, the way in which each community constitutes itself as a legal entity shapes both its purpose and operation. Oakhouse is registered as a Social Research Park and charity, which means that there must be a trustee board that acts on behalf of the charity. This has created trustee - resident tensions. Moreover, Oakhouse is a Grade II listed building. One of the central financial struggles of Oakhouse is the expense of maintenance. This requires them to run festivals on their site, camping, community events and Air BnBs which changes the demography and nature of the common. Redberry Community, on the other hand, is a registered housing association which Fiona says allows them to get 'reduced council tax'. This illustrates how the framework of the law isn't designed for living in intentional communities and communities must alter their structure to suit external expectations of how to live. This might also be discouraging the proliferation of similar communities across England, as they may struggle to navigate legitimacy through the law.

Moreover, both communities are not insular and operate within a wider capitalist system that shapes their functioning. In both Oakhouse and Redberry Community, lots of members have jobs (part time and full time) and so cannot commit all their hours to the community. This also creates an imbalance as some people can commit more to the community which can cause resentment and accusations of freeriding. Equally, both communities require residents to pay for accommodation. The style of payment shapes the dynamic of the community. Charlie, a volunteer who has stayed at both Oakhouse and Redberry Community, suggested that the renting system in Oakhouse creates higher turnover and a younger community. Those who remain at Oakhouse are motivated to stay because they want to continue living that lifestyle. Whereas, at Redberry Community the buy-in system means that people could be less likely to leave even if they are inhibiting the community. This reveals that expecting insularity within an intentional community is a falsehood, as the external capitalist system shapes how their common functions, despite their being no direct imposition by external authorities.

For CPRs that are parts of larger systems:
8. Nested enterprises
Appropriation, provision, monitoring, enforcement, conflict resolution, and governance activities are organized in multiple layers of nested enterprises.

Design principle 8 is not applicable for intentional communities.

Additional observations:

There are certain things that aren't explicitly mentioned in Ostrom's eight design principles that shape the community dynamics and the common. Amanda, a Redberry Community resident, notes that individuals often have very different motivations to join and so within the community there are ideological clashes. Amanda says that many joined because of a desire to remove themselves from state control and so dislike the regularity of meetings and having a specific system (rotas etc). Whereas others, who join for the desire to live closer to nature

or within a community, may not have as much of a problem with this. This difference can cause disagreement in how the common should be run.

Ed, an Oakhouse resident, noted how he joined Oakhouse because it was centred around social research and not environmentalism. As Redberry is more land-centric and Oakhouse is more centred around the community, this could shape the types of people who are motivated to join each community which could shape how the community functions.

Conclusion:

What my findings reveal is how closely linked the systems of intentional communities are to the design principles of Elinor Ostrom. Both communities followed, although not intentionally, most of the principles. When the principles weren't followed this was often a central problem for the community. For example, in both communities, difficulties monitoring (design principle four) due to a lack of clarity on the value of different forms of work and difficulty monitoring certain forms of work, made accountability challenging. This made following design principle five (delivering graduated sanctions) challenging.

Certain principles failed to fully reveal how the intentional communities were functioning. For example, design principle six - access to low-cost local arenas for conflict resolution - is essential for the continuation of the community. However, this doesn't reflect how the characteristics of certain individuals, or interpersonal relationships can shape the effectiveness of these meetings in resolving conflict.

Whilst the connection between commons and intentional communities has been made (see Lockyer, 2021), this work is the first to show how Ostrom's eight design principles can be used as a tool, in academia and beyond, to better understand intentional communities. This work also reveals how the current academic movement to expand the concept of the common, beyond CPRs and mediaeval commons, would benefit from including analysis from more 'traditional' economic theory and I hope this encourages increased interdisciplinary research in relation to the commons.

I define a successful community as one that can cope with the inevitable conflict that comes with collective decision-making without high levels of hostility and a disruption to the functioning of the common. What was not clear during my visits, was the extent to which the two different systems shaped this success within each intentional community, or whether it was the dynamics of the individuals within the community. Oakhouse members were willing to acknowledge that they were at a particularly positive point in their community's history and they were living together with limited hostility. Charlie, a volunteer who has been to both communities, noted how Oakhouse put much more effort into creating community social events. I would have assumed that the explicit effort to develop social bonds, as a commoning practice, was helping to create the productive environment the Oakhouse members were referring to. However, the extent to which actions like this were shaping the community's environment was not clear. Both communities acknowledge that there were points where tensions in the community were extremely high and disruptive. This suggests that interpersonal relationships and particular individuals can play a large role in influencing how a community functions, not just the system itself. To fully understand this would require an ethnography over the course of several years and across many demographic changes to each community.

Appendix

Oakhouse

Pseudonym	Sex	Age category	Type of interview	Type of connection
Angelina	Female	20-30	Formal	Resident - relatively new
Brandon	Male	30-40	Informal	Longer term resident
Charlie	Male	20-30	Informal	Volunteer
Derek	Male	30-40	Informal	Trustee
Ed	Male	20-30	Informal	Resident - relatively new
Freya	Female	20-30	Informal	Resident - relatively new

Redberry Community

Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Type of interview	Type of connection
Fiona	Female	70s-80s	Formal	Long term resident
Brandon	Male	50s-60s	Informal	Long term resident
Susan	Female	50s-60s	Formal	Long term resident
Amanda	Female	60s-70s	Informal	Long term resident

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