

Making Waves 3

research workshop

BEYOND POLITICS? AESTHETICS & SOCIETY

Table 2 IMAGINATION & DEMOCRACY

Short impression of the table conversation by Loran van Diepen.

We started our discussion with the notion of trust. How we trust someone that we know, often because we recognize ourselves in that person. Then we wondered how trust could be scaled up? How can you make the step from mutual trust at the micro level (you and me and a neighbourhood society) to an alternative to the current political system? In any case, we noticed that there are various options. For example, there is the business model of booking.com, which cleverly responds to our trust in others. The recommendations of others are usually decisive in our choice for a certain apartment.

Within the diversity of possibilities, commons are perhaps the most important alternative. Commons are founded by citizens who organize themselves between the state and the business community. Sometimes commons grow into institutions, such as Rabobank, but in the construction phase, they are vulnerable and sometimes illegal. Whether they survive depends heavily on mutual trust and on the trust that they gain from the system.

Possibilities for cooperation with the system depend on the method of decision-making: if this is transparent and all stakeholders are familiar with the procedures (high trust), exciting futures are possible. If there are hidden agendas or information is withheld - as is the case with investment funds that steer the economy too much - then distrust arises.

Journalism, or the media in a general sense, plays the role of gatekeeper in this; they must stand between 'power' and the public and thereby represent the interests of the public good (commons). If they do not do so, more distrust is the result. The media, therefore, provide the framework for citizens to transfer from the ING bank to Triodos, for example. A bank which not coincidentally does not invest in the arms industry, but in commons initiatives. Commons must be transparent. That fits in a time of shifting power relations. We are no longer law-abiding citizens but want to understand the protocols of power and the institutions that hold sway over us. Public institutions must then acknowledge and recognize people during decision-making. Perhaps the counterpart to all neoliberal policies is to recognize people as individuals. One that you can trust because he / she is just like you. In this way, commons initiatives can be a very necessary addition to the democratic system that we now have. In several countries, people are experimenting with these initiatives, for example, under the name of the G1000 movement. The most concrete and most successful results are achieved by citizen assemblies, where the citizen is brought back to the centre of the political conflict. While referenda ask citizens to vote anonymously 'for' or 'against' something, citizen assemblies have the advantage of small-scale and real public confrontation. This, therefore, invites members of the citizens' assembly to jump past their 'puberty' and pursue the general good (commons).