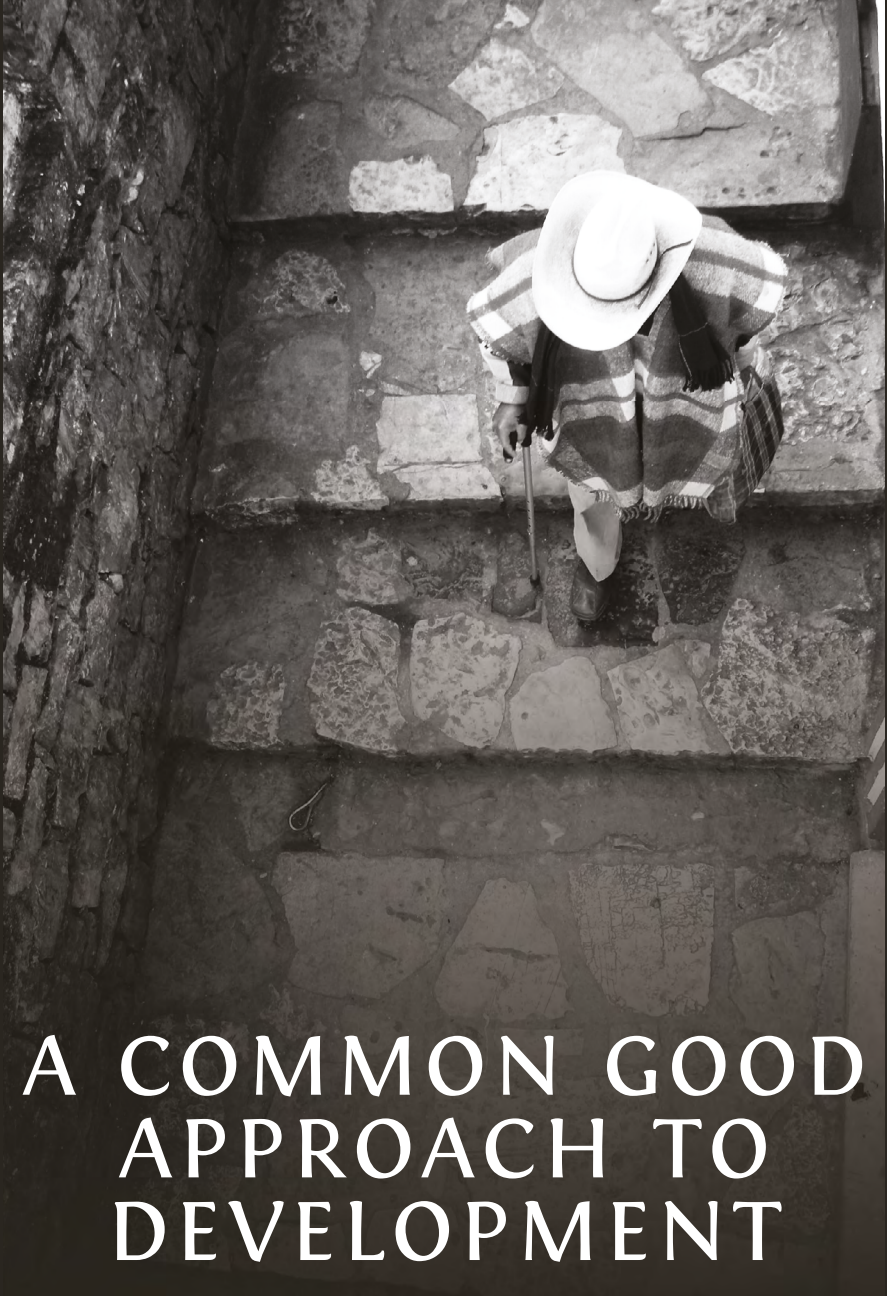


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A COMMON GOOD APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT

Collective Dynamics of
Development Processes



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Introduction

Mathias Nebel and Oscar Garza-Vázquez

1. The Research Question

‘[A] misconceived theory can kill’, wrote Amartya Sen more than two decades ago (1999, p. 209). Certainly, the terrible (and unequal) human cost of the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated crushing economic impact, which has pushed thousands of people into subsistence levels (or worse), painfully reminds us that the ideas we use to organise our societies can result in an unbearable toll of human lives. We could also consider the millions of lives that are threatened everyday by injustices such as extreme poverty, rampant inequality, discriminatory practices; the continuing deterioration of natural life due to our climate irresponsibility; and the disproportionate burden that populist rhetoric, technocratic recommendations, ‘development’ policies, and power imbalances, pose for many. In line with Sen’s quote, our failure to address the systemic and interdependent nature of all these concerns threatening our common humanity does suggest that our current development thinking does not seem to be fit for purpose. Yet, this rather crude and dismal verdict should not be one of defeat, but one of hope. We may change and enrich mainstream ideas about development or envision new ones to face our current social ailments and procure a better future for all (see Chapter 9). This is what this book is about.

It proposes an alternative way of assessing our social realities that we conceive as ‘a common good approach to development’. We certainly maintain that development is about people, and about how each person is able to live, but we contend that it is also—and more importantly for

today's problems—about how we are able to live together with others. It is about cooperation, about the common goals that we pursue together and about the kind of social life that we are constantly creating and sustaining. In a nutshell, our approach to development is about how systems of commons are generated and maintained over time.

The common good traditions are multifarious.¹ For centuries they were the main frameworks for understanding social processes and shaping policies. As an architectonic concept, the common good articulated the practice of government, law, tax administration, and merchant guilds, as well as monastic communities. The concept was not considered theoretical, but rather practical. It was a way to understand and govern the many 'commons' around which societies gathered. Gradually, the emergence of the modern state, coupled with the shift toward social contract theories, displaced the concept to the sidelines of political philosophy and of development thinking—so much so that today the notion of the common good appears to most people as outdated, fuzzy, and ambiguous, and certainly not something that would help us move toward a more efficient development practice. It is this understanding that our book wants to challenge. It focuses on the *practical relevance* that a common good perspective can have for development issues.

Our research question is quite straightforward: *How can we assess and measure common good dynamics?* This question obviously involves several others: What do we understand by 'common goods'? Is it meaningful to adopt a common good perspective on development? Should we really add a new metric to the ever-growing list of development indicators? What are we really looking for through a common good indicator, and what advantages can we expect from such a perspective? This book can't possibly answer all these questions and does not pretend to do so. It rather starts a discussion we hope may lead to new insights in questions of development, both from a theoretical and from a practical perspective. In particular, we defend a common good approach that aims at assessing *the quality of a given system of common goods* — *what we call 'the nexus of common goods'—at the local level.*

1 The historical development of the notion is now better understood than previously, see for example, Kempshall (1999), Hibst (1991), Lecuppre-Desjardin and Van Bruaene (2010).

This book is the result of a research project that has spanned over four years, gathering together a group of international researchers to try to build both a robust matrix and a metric of common good dynamics. The *Instituto Promotor del Bien Común* (IPBC) at the UPAEP University (Puebla, Mexico) founded the project. The IPBC is a research institute dedicated to the notion of the common good and furthering the capability to use the concept as a robust analytical tool. The UPAEP officially launched this effort in December 2017, and three research seminars took place in Puebla, Barcelona, and Notre Dame between December 2017 and October 2018. Each meeting gathered around twenty-five invited scholars to work on the design of a matrix of common good dynamics. An IPBC discussion paper would focus the debate during the two-day seminars and lead to a revised proposal for the next one. In February 2019, a first version of the matrix and metric of common good dynamics was presented at an international conference organised by the UPAEP (a revised version of it provides the content of Chapter 2). In the following months, the IPBC research team came up with a questionnaire, which was discussed in regular meetings of the local committee, tested during cognitive interviews, and verified in a pilot project involving 180 residents of Atlixco, Mexico, in May 2019 (see Chapter 3). The questionnaire was then duly revised and successively applied in three municipalities between July and December 2019. The results of these empirical applications were published in the form of a special issue on the common good approach at the end of 2020 (*Rivista Internazionale di Scienze Sociali*). In contrast, the content of this book investigates the theoretical and practical foundations of our common good approach and discusses its expediency for development topics.

The book is divided in three parts. Part I presents the conceptual framework that the IPBC proposes for operationalising a common good approach to development. This theoretical part introduces and justifies the rationale of a matrix of common good dynamics composed of five key normative drivers (collective agency, justice, stability, governance, and humanity) (Chapters 1 and 2). It then presents a possible metric for capturing common good dynamics in municipalities and considers the extent to which this can give us an edge in policy-making and governance (Chapter 3). This conceptual framework serves as the backbone of the book, with all other contributors referring to it. In Part II

several scholars of different academic backgrounds discuss how each of the five elements composing the common good matrix can be justified, enriched or criticised from their own discipline (Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8). Finally, Part III explores the relevance of a common good approach through different case studies (Chapters 9, 10, 11, and 12).

The uniting theme throughout the book is the shared recognition of the need to devise an alternative framework to understand the interdependency of our lives, the collective nature of the social world in which we experience our lives, and the transformatory potential of human cooperation. Given the rich interdisciplinary outlook on these urgent matters, this book should be of interest to a wide audience dealing with development issues. Despite its strong theoretical orientation, we believe this book to be equally relevant for academics and researchers involved with development issues, as for practitioners and policy-makers looking for a new approach to inform their actions.

2. Why Do We Need a Common Good Approach?

The world as we 'knew' it is no longer the same. The COVID-19 pandemic came to disrupt our everyday reality and its apparent normality. It unveiled the social structures and collective dynamics that underlie the functioning of what seems to be the natural order of the world. It revealed that our societies are built around some essential goods, and it forced nations and individuals out of their illusion of autonomy towards a recognition of our radical interdependency. It awoke our dormant sense that something was wrong with our beloved normality, an awareness of our unpreparedness to face the challenges of an interconnected world, and the need to recognise our shared social reality.

Throughout our recent history, we have been told an incomplete story about who we are, about how the world works, and about how we ought to solve humanity's problems (Bruni 2008). This is a story that starts and ends with individuals. It starts by conceiving of people as individuals whose interest can be reduced to their own self-interest, who live in a world of—and ignited by—individual competition, and whose common problems (including the satisfaction of individual human needs) are solved mainly through market interaction and individual efforts. Distilled from this individualistic outlook, social progress was thought

of as an increase in individual achievements, usually aggregated at a certain moment in time (either in terms of income, resources, utility, freedoms, rights, etc.). Social progress and development were to be measured as an increase in the autonomy of individuals.

In this fictitious world, the common good rhetoric tends to disappear. Even inherently collective goods are thought to be better appraised—so the argument goes—through the language of individual human rights. Social choice theories replaced the common good discourses in development economics, with the provision and distribution of public goods becoming the main concern, while in general the focus of political philosophy and public discourse shifted toward procedural justice and liberal democracy.

Of course, this is an oversimplification. But it highlights the fact that this dominant narrative curtails part of who we are as human beings, of our common life, of the collective goods we produce and enjoy together, and of our belonging and interdependency. We are also social/relational beings who care, share, interact, and cooperate with others. We define who we are, and experience wellbeing, in relationships. We inhabit a social world, we belong to groups, we share identities and goals with others; our whole existence as individuals is embedded in a web of collectively-generated meanings, values, and goods. Even market production is a collective enterprise, which is in turn embedded in an institutional arrangement of formal and informal institutions (e.g., judicial systems to enforce contracts, property rights, reputational effects, coordination and routines between economic agents, social norms, etc.).

These are all relational and common goods which are central to the dynamics of our social reality and to development processes. The effect of omitting these elements from the story goes beyond a simple misrepresentation of human life. It limits our capacity to fully grasp the nature of a true *human* development, and more importantly, it limits our way of thinking about how we do development (e.g., see Andreoni et al. 2021). Hence, although there are excellent reasons to account for individual goals of development, the narrow individualistic approach has non-negligible shortcomings. It fails to tell us anything about *how* and *why* development happens, and thus about how to solve our common problems. This would require an understanding (1) of the commonality

of meanings, (2) of common behaviour and shared practices—the way people cooperate and coordinate to produce something collectively—and (3) of the interdependent and systemic nature of results.

(1) *Commonality of meanings.* As early as 1983, criticising John Rawls' *Theory of Justice* (1971)—one of the main theoretical arguments along the mainstream line of thought in justice and development—Michael Walzer (1983) highlighted the importance of collective goods. According to Walzer, the production and distribution of any social good entails a preexisting shared understanding of the value of this good by the community involved. In India, for example, beef can't be produced and distributed in the same way as in the United States. The communal meaning given by the Hindu faith to animals—and especially to cows—does not allow it. Good distribution is embedded in the historical reality of a living community and heeds the social meaning of the good itself. That is, development goals *are only* common goals as long as they build upon the shared meaning and value given to some *social* goods.

(2) *Common behaviour and shared practices.* Elinor Ostrom's pioneering work (1990) revealed the ubiquitous existence of commons such as collective pasture grounds, irrigation systems, or cooperative fisheries, whose sustainable efficient management could not be properly understood from a self-maximising individual rationality. Her work made clear that the economic dichotomy between state and market—between public goods provided by state institutions and private goods produced by a free market economy—was definitively too narrow. We were missing something important, namely the strength and capacities of civil society, the social capital imbedded in society (Putnam 2000; for an overview of social capital theories, see Joonmo 2020). The very existence of these common pool resources implied some forms of collective collaboration framing competitive individual behaviours so that they may not threaten the very existence of the common pool resource (Ostrom 1990, pp. 8–17). Indeed, commons are frameworks of governance mechanisms, rules, and roles commonly agreed upon and collectively managed. They set the ground for economic behaviours that allow for a sustainable use of the common-pool resource by all and its preservation for future generations.

All in all, Ostrom's work pointed toward our obliviousness and ignorance of the many *practices of commoning* existing in our societies.

How do commons arise in a society? How can they be sustained? How do they change and adapt through power struggles? How do we 'do' commons? These are no trivial questions limited to local pastures and fisheries, but also relevant queries for global issues like climate change, education, or human development.

Climate change may indeed serve as an example to illustrate the two previous points. Part of the difficulty in addressing this urgent matter is that the international community needs to agree not only on the goals and procedural elements of a technical solution to CO₂ emissions, but on the very *meaning* and *value* of the environment. The latter is not a question that can be sidelined forever, for it is precisely the meaning and value given to the environment that commands the very social practice sustaining the constant increase of CO₂ emissions. If climate change has to be effectively addressed, it necessarily entails a change of our social and economic practice, which in turn means that we will need to review the way we collectively conceive of and value the environment. Let us stress this point: It is *we* who have become acutely aware that *our* patterns of production and consumption must change if *we* want to avoid a catastrophic increase of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

(3) *Interdependence and systemic nature of results.* The previous example puts into sharp relief the systemic and interconnected nature of our lives. For climate change unveils first that our freedom is not an individual trait at all: it is a shared good. We are not safe until everyone is safe. Our life depends on others and the lives of others depend on us, literally. Fighting climate change requires us to reconsider the way we behave collectively, that is, how we enter into institutionalised cooperation with others. What is more, climate change is not a challenge that can be resolved without at the same time considering other social issues. We certainly need to address it, but without undermining other commons, such as the economy, human rights and freedoms, or solidarity. Likewise, it also implies that we cannot pretend to offer a proper solution to a specific problem if we isolate it from the multiple factors that—in conjunction—produce a certain result. As Beretta and Nebel recognise (2020), it is not enough to acknowledge the multidimensionality of development through a list of goals or objectives, we also need to understand how these interrelate as an '*integrated process* of this multidimensionality'. Development is a systemic, 'dynamic process unfolding in time and

space. It cannot be reduced to checking whether basic preconditions are in place, nor to measuring achievements on a predefined list of desirable outcomes.’ (both quotes p. 372; emphasis in original).

Models based on aggregated individual rationalities are not well equipped to account for the social, interconnected world in which we live. Crucially, they cannot provide proper solutions to real-world problems and more often than not have ‘unforeseen’ and ‘unintended’ adverse effects (Tirole 2016). We need therefore new ideas to guide our actions. Neither the states, nor markets, nor the international community have been able to give a convincing answer to this necessary change of social and economic practice. We think that a common good perspective is not only pertinent, but may hint at another model of society, another way to understand development. In particular, the common good approach we advance takes up these points: that questions of justice and development are linked to the meaning and the shared value given to social goods; we understand development as a process embedded in communities and in how people produce and distribute social goods like security, education, and mobility.

Thus, the common good approach we defend here focuses on the *processes* through which local communities create and maintain a specific set of social or ‘common goods’. It understands these goods as *irreducible social goods*. As Taylor (1990) argues, these are good that are immanent to the *cooperation* of people in a community; immanent to *collective organisation* that allows the achievement of a social good; immanent to the *shared understanding* of their value. However, taking the local community as the locus of the development process does not mean that a common good approach sacrifices the universal to the particular. Rather, such an approach understands the universal common good as a dialectic that progressively sees the many systems of common goods becoming larger in scope and deeper in humanity, in an eschatological hope that the universal common good can be real and possible.² Similarly, we will sustain that the three features

2 The French Jesuit Gaston Fessard (1944) introduced three distinctions in the vocabulary of the common good that have inspired most of the reflections in this book. Fessard distinguishes between the ‘*good of a community*’ (le bien de la communauté), the ‘*community of the good*’ (la communauté du bien) and the ‘*good of communion*’ (bien de la communion), which is the universal and eschatological

identified above underlie any development dynamics at any level (from household dynamics, organisations, communities, states, nations, to global issues). Wherever there are people interacting with each other to produce something—as is the case in every development process—these elements are present to a greater or lesser degree. Each of these processes implies a shared background of action, a coordination and cooperation, and an interdependency.

Therefore, the question of the commons and how we produce, sustain, and govern them is one of the crucial questions of the twenty-first century. We can state it this way: while the twentieth century focused on the protection of individual rights and capabilities, the big challenge of the twenty-first century may well be communal life. How can we build a shared, common, human future for all? This seems to us a sufficiently important question to dedicate a book to.

3. A Common Good Approach to Development. Where Do We Stand?

The notion of the common good is enjoying a kind of resurrection. It almost died out, suffering constant decline during the nineteenth century and a brutal rejection after the sixties. The notion however now finds itself back at the forefront of discussions. We may quote, among others, the works of Michael Sandel (2020), Alain Badiou (2019), Robert Reich (2019), Daniel Finn (2017), Jean Tirole (2016), Christian Blum (2015), Catherine Hudak Klancer (2015), Patrick Riordan (2014; 2008; 1996), Hans Sluga (2014), Axel Kahn (2013), Tim Gorringer (2014), Robert K. Vischner (2010), Dennis McCann and Patrick Miller (2005), David Hollenbach (2002), Herfried Munkler and Harald Bluhm (2001–2004), Inge Kaul, Isabelle Grunberg, Marc Stern (1999), and Elinor Ostrom (1990).³ Together these authors have decisively added to the sense that the notion of the common good is not only pertinent for the twenty-first century, but that it offers a real and complementary way forward.

common good. He therefore shapes the common good as a dialectical dynamic toward the universal common good (2015, pp. 83–85, 102–105, 123–129).

3 Still very relevant are older thinkers such as Fessard (1944) and Maritain (1949). In addition, a whole set of studies has been dedicated to the history of the notion: Kempshall (1999), Hibst (1991), Lecuppre-Desjardin and Van Bruaene (2010), and Collard (2010).

Its revival seems closely linked to three topics: (1) The limits of *political liberalism* (Blum 2015, pp. 7–9; Hollenbach 2002, pp. 3–16), (2) the definition of *new public goods* (Kaul et al. 1999, Deneulin and Townsend 2007, pp. 19–36) and the rediscovery of '*economies of the commons*' (Felber 2015, Bollier 2003, Bollier and Helfrich 2015, Ostrom 1990), and (3) a need to reassert the *goals of governance* beyond technical criteria and mere democratic procedures (Crowther et al. 2018, Giguère 2004, Whitman 2009). All in all, it is a pragmatic revival, linked to the preservation or the creation of 'common goods' whose social value is essentially intangible, such as health, education, and enjoyment of cultural heritage, wellbeing, or the environment. This is remarkably evident when the World Bank proposes to define good governance as the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised for the common good (World Bank 2004) or when UNESCO suggests using the paradigm of the common good to understand education (UNESCO 2015).

As we briefly mentioned in the previous section, in her landmark book Ostrom proposes a set of guidelines needed for commons to exist and be sustained. *Governing the Commons* (1990) is about cooperation to achieve and sustain common pool resources. It is about the agency or freedom of a group. It is about organising this agency through roles, rules, sanctions, and goals. Her work highlighted some key elements for a dynamic of the commons to be sustained over time. While highly focused, her practical research revealed a blind spot in economic and political literature for which she would ultimately be awarded the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences in 2009.⁴

First, she highlighted the *political dimension* of the commons, that is, the fundamental decision made about the *value* of a common (Ostrom 1990, pp. 38–45). The local community would hold 'in common' that the pastures, irrigation systems or fisheries had a value that exceeded the private individual interest. It was vital for the community to reach an agreement on the way these resources could be used *by all* while preserving at the same time their very existence in the long run. Such agreements, held at the local level, are political in nature but eschew the logic of the free market or state institutions. They are agreements

4 See https://www.nobelprize.org/uploads/2018/06/ostrom_lecture.pdf.

about the collective meaning and value of commons to each and every member of a community. This process is complex. It entails at least two steps: (1) the determination by a polity about how it *understands itself* and (2) how it defines *legitimate use* and *handles resources* in accordance with this self-understanding.

Second, Ostrom's work put into sharp relief a 'world of commoning' that neither the state nor the market recognised (1990, pp. 7–28). Mainstream conceptions of the polity and the market take the commons as a given, with their existence supposed to be unlimited and stable, like natural resources. Yet the 2008 financial crisis, for example, revealed this notion to be delusional. The crisis shone a light on the fact that financial markets need trust to function but do not produce it themselves. Two major blind spots distorting the lens of modern politics and economics are therefore the understanding of commons as a given and the failure to understand the political dimension of the same.

A wide range of development practices have enthusiastically built on her findings ever since. For example, the World Bank finances the so-called 'Community-Based or Community-Driven Programs', which are structured around three elements: (i) adopting processes that strengthen the capacity of a community to organise and sustain development; (ii) supporting community empowerment through user participation in decision-making, and (iii) reversing control and accountability from central authorities to community organisations (Narayan 1995). These Community-Driven Development (CDD) projects are thought to (a) increase the efficiency, cost effectiveness, and sustainability of development projects; (b) increase the empowerment of the local population; and (c) change the behavioural patterns of the population. These three points are intuitively tied together; you can't achieve results if you don't get the population to participate in the project, and the project doesn't last long if consistent patterns of behaviour do not sustain the result.

These efforts already highlight the importance of expanding development thinking to include collective goods and to involve the local community in this process. Yet, while this revival of the commons for development is welcome, it is also problematic: *welcome* because it proves the practical need for such a notion (as the common good cannot be reduced to individual interest or utility) but *problematic*

because the notion of ‘commons’ is too narrow, and it still lacks a systemic approach.

First, Ostrom’s conception of commons inherited by CDD projects focus on tangible things (e.g., construction of roads, schools, or health clinics, collective resources such as irrigation systems, fisheries, pastures, etc.). However, commons go well beyond these material goods to include intangible goods such as cultural goods, knowledge, language, and the like. We ought therefore to understand commons as a social construct inherently related to the social practice underpinning it (Helfrich 2012). Second, the revival of the commons still lacks an overall coherence that would link specific ‘common goods’ (education, health, governance, etc.) into a system or nexus of common goods. In other words, the dynamic *coalescence of common goods into a shared striving for the common good* is lacking as these approaches tend to see each common good in isolation, as detached from other social goods and detached from the social structure holding all of them together.

Hence, a common good approach to development (see Chapters 1 and 2) extends previous efforts to revive the commons. It focuses on social action and is radically practical, starting with a community and the common goods it values and produces. It sees development as a process; as a systemic equilibrium of collective values, meanings, and actions embodied in social institutions and social practices that together generate a social dynamic that co-creates and sustains a particular way of social life—this is what we call ‘a nexus of common goods’. Therefore, the approach we investigate here centres mainly on the equilibrium created by that community among the many social goods and tries to capture the way this equilibrium—‘the nexus of common goods’—is generated, maintained, and enriched over time. The research question framing this book is therefore as practical as possible, focusing on the quality of this nexus and the possibilities of assessing it empirically.

4. Does a Common Good Approach to Development Undermine the Plurality of Modern Societies?

Anyone who wishes to advance a common good approach to development faces an uphill battle and must confront a series of widely held assumptions pushing back against any attempt to do so. Some of these objections are justified, other less so. Let’s briefly review some

of the arguments usually held against the use of the common good language in development studies.

Two major claims are regularly made against revivals of a common good approach. The most usual is that the concept is lofty, mostly rhetorical, and certainly not precise enough to be practicable. It is said to be an empty shell, a meta-discourse used to cover other, usually darker, intentions. What is the common good? Everything and nothing in particular, say skeptics. A concept meant to show that one's intentions are noble and generous, rather than selfish and self-interested. But then certainly a mere protest of altruistic intentions does not add up to a vision of society or a set of public policies. Thus, to reason on the ground of the common good is at best naïve, at worst deceitful—or at least so say the skeptics.

This rhetorical use to justify one's intentions is well attested and can't be denied. Most politicians do sooner or later fall into this self-justified protest of altruistic intentions. But this can hardly be considered an argument against the common good. Few words have been more misused by crooked politicians than 'freedom,' 'democracy,' or 'solidarity' but nobody argues in response that the value of such concepts is thus null and void. Misuse by itself is not enough to discard a concept.

A second claim frequently made against the common good is that it is rooted in theology or metaphysics. And according to this argument, this can't be tolerated anymore. Do we not live in a pluralistic society? Why should we want to relapse to any forms of theocracy? For these critics, to argue from a worldview in which groups and collectivities take a central role is a practical rejection of pluralism. A widespread assumption is that whoever picks up the discourse of the common good is thus trying to impose on the rest of the society a religious or metaphysical view of the good. To defend the pluralism of the public square, to defend both religious minorities and agnostic citizens alike, we therefore ought to avoid a discourse based on the common good, preferring either a Habermasian or Rawlsian approach to democracy.

This whole argument is however based on a double assumption: (1) that any conception of the common good is paramount to a comprehensive and metaphysical conception of the good; and (2) that liberal views of the polity are free of similar preconceptions and can accommodate pluralistic views of the good. Both statements can be challenged. Nebel (2018) addresses the second claim at length

in a previous publication and will not be repeated here, but we will briefly state why our approach does not contradict the pluralism of our societies nor its focus on individual freedom. First, we will propose in Chapter 1 to understand the common good as an *open* and *dialectical political process, inherently plural and conflictual*, that requires a constant political debate to discern which commons we may value together and how to achieve them. By differentiating between the universal common good as a normative horizon of politics and the many, complex, and ever-changing historical systems of common goods, we open the space needed for pluralism to exist.

Second, the common good perspective introduced here is as practical as possible. It puts its emphasis on the empirical fact that development outcomes (good or bad) and the social order of a particular society are always the result of social and collectively sustained practices. It is these collective dynamics that the conceptual framework proposed in Chapters 1 and 2 aims to grasp. Bringing these collective *processes* into our assessment of development need not be incompatible with individual-based notions of development (Chapter 4); it can complement it and render it more truly human—as we briefly argue in the subsection below. Our main interest is to shed light to the *common* aspect of our social lives—which is often obfuscated in mainstream development literature—and not on a metaphysical *good* that ought to be pursued universally. The common good perspective developed hereafter, is that there is not a ‘one size fits all’ universal system of common goods, but a necessary and legitimate plurality of common good systems, within the limits of the normative key drivers of common good dynamics.

5. Why Measure Common Good Dynamics?

There is no shortage of metrics that try to measure development. Yet, most development approaches capture development through a list of items for which they provide indicators and metrics relying on individual-level data. These may be the extent to which individuals succeed to satisfy a list of basic needs, human security, capabilities, human rights, or selected features of human flourishing. But most of them focus on either *preconditions* of wellbeing development or a selected set of *achievements* or *functionings* (see Chapter 2 and Chapter 3).

While a common good approach recognises the need and value of individual-based indicators, we contend that they do not fully explain the social processes involved in development. They leave out the *structural dimension of development*, i.e., how a social environment shapes these individual functionings or achievements. As mentioned, a growing literature argues that we also need to include group or community data in order to grasp and measure ‘collective achievement’ of goods or services that are essentially ‘shared’ or ‘common.’ Indeed, different approaches to development, including social capital (Putnam 2000), public goods (Kaul et al. 1999), the commons (Ostrom 1990), social rights (Ulrike 2013), and collective capabilities (Ibrahim 2017, Ibrahim 2016), are currently making advances in this direction. Moreover, many development indicators try to capture what are best regarded as collective goods, like health and education, through individual data.

Our approach is different. It adopts the point of view that development is not first and foremost a matter of individuals but of groups, communities, or nations. It is only together that development can be achieved, not only as a means to an end, but as an end in itself; there is no human development without a shared, common development process. Only development attained in common can be truly called *human* development. Hence, we focus on the *commons* and the social *process* through which a community achieves common goods and the way these build up in society to create a system or *nexus of common goods*. By concentrating on this ‘common good dynamic’, our aim shifts from focusing on outputs and results (i.e., a set or list of basic common goods) to the social drivers of this dynamic equilibrium.

Indeed, a focus merely on outputs would have led us to verify the delivery of a list of basic common goods and whether or not they exist. While interesting, such an approach fails to answer the *why* question. *Why* do precisely this set of common goods exist? *Why* are they arranged in this specific equilibrium, and not some other one? *Why* did such dynamic equilibrium emerge, and how is it maintained? The *why* question is under-addressed in development literature. We are usually much more interested in the provision of specific common goods—education, work, housing, mobility, etc.—leaving open the question of how (and by whom) these specific common goods will be arranged and of how they will work together. Generally, development literature

assumes that providing income, housing, education, and health to a population will somehow add up to trigger development and raise people out of poverty. This is rather naïve. Complex social systems do not function under a logic of mere aggregation. To tackle the question of how common goods ‘build up’ to form a “nexus of common goods” we have to focus on the process rather than the outputs, on the dynamic of the nexus rather than on its components.

In particular, we focus on the social *drivers* of this dynamic. Chapters 2 and 3 will argue, as the literature on the commons does, that *drivers* must include justice, governance, sustainability, and what we can call ‘collective agency freedom’. It will then be argued that the quality of a nexus must allow people to live together as human beings, thus *humanity* should be recognised as the normative horizon of common good dynamics. This normative horizon is understood here as a set of *habitus*, describing our shared, common humanity through a set of collective practices. This is not a naïve regression to Aristotle, but rather builds on Bourdieu and Giddens’s reciprocity between social structures and practice. Each nexus commands a certain set of *habitus*, which will allow us to discern if the dynamic is heading toward a more human coexistence, or elsewhere.

6. Structure of the Book

Part I—A Common Good Approach. The first part of the book drafts the theoretical argument on which the matrix and metric of common good dynamics is based (Chapters 1 and 2). It also presents a specific metric of common good dynamics meant for municipalities (Chapter 3). These chapters will be of use for scholars interested in the theoretical background of a common good approach to development. They will however also be of interest to policy-makers and practitioners searching for new ways to address social realities.

Chapter 1 elaborates a possible understanding of a common good for the twenty-first century. Building on Foucault, Arendt, Bourdieu, Giddens, Ostrom, Taylor, and Riordan, Mathias Nebel proposes to understand the common good from the perspective of the interactions structuring our communal life. The chapter borrows from many of the antique and medieval insights into the notion but then reframes

the concept from the perspective of a philosophy of action, which epitomises the way we approach the concept. The common good is essentially linked to how our social interactions generate and thrive. A common good perspective on society is therefore neither totalitarian, nor conservative as some people assume. On the contrary, it is creative, and capable of novelty and inclusiveness; it embraces not only justice and law, but also the good life (*eudzen*) as the purpose of politics. For the sake of clarity, the chapter structures its theoretical insights around a vocabulary of the common good, which is then used by all other authors in this book. We distinguish between the many *specific common goods* existing in a society and coin the term *nexus of common goods* to explain the dynamic system of specific common goods in a given society. Specific common goods and the nexus of common goods are then differentiated from the *universal common good*, which is in itself a goal and a task, and whose content is our common humanity.

Chapter 2 proposes a matrix of common good dynamics that tries to capture the quality of the nexus achieved at the local level. Jorge Medina and Mathias Nebel build on the previous chapters and set the foundation for the metric that will be presented in Chapter 3. Most importantly, we decided to focus on a *metric of the nexus*. There are other measures or proxies for specific common goods such as health, education, or associative life; what is lacking is a metric of *how specific common goods link to one another—along a common good dynamic—to form a nexus of common goods*. We are thus interested in processes: the conditions required for a positive dynamic to exist within such a nexus. The descriptive and normative dimensions of this dynamic make up our matrix of the nexus. Grounded in empirical studies and the theoretical background, it identifies five key normative drivers of common good dynamics at the local level: *collective agency freedom* as the engine of common good dynamics; *justice, governance, and stability* as the social functions needed to drive the complex equilibrium of specific common goods toward an ever-more-human coexistence; and *humanity*, as the systemic outcome of common good dynamics.

Chapter 3 uses the theoretical developments provided in previous chapters to present the metric and indicators proposed to capture the quality of the common good dynamic at the municipal level. The chapter reflects on the challenges, and lessons, of translating the theoretical

framework into a practical instrument of measurement in order to guide policy efforts. Oscar Garza-Vázquez and Viviana Ramirez begin by discussing the importance of developing a metric to operationalise a common good approach and how such a metric may contribute to development practice. They argue that this metric adds insight to development practice by making visible and tangible two factors that have been neglected in traditional measures of development: (a) the socio-structural aspect of development and (b) the relational dynamic processes underlying social change. They then present and discuss each of the dimensions and indicators used to bring to life the matrix of the common good dynamic presented in Chapter 2. They conclude by pointing out future challenges if the metric is used to guide policy and decision-making at the local level.

Part II—Discussing the Normative Elements of Common Good Dynamics. This part sees experts discuss and reflect on each of the five dimensions identified as the normative pillars of our matrix of common good dynamics from their own discipline and area of expertise. They do this in a critical way, showing the strengths as well as the difficulties of such an approach to development. This second part critically situates our approach within this field, and will therefore be of interest to scholars and students familiar with current development debates.

Chapter 4 situates “agency freedom” as a normative element of development that recognises people as active subjects capable of forming, revising, and pursuing their own goals. Drawing on insights from the first part of the book and on Sen’s conceptual framework, Oscar Garza-Vázquez looks at people as agents capable of shaping their own development. He argues, however, that approaching development from a common good perspective brings to light some caveats related to the literature on Sen’s notion of agency: that (a) it tends to focus on the freedom of people to achieve goals unconnected to wellbeing; (b) it is primarily discussed at the individual level; and (c) its conceptualisation reflects this bias by over-emphasising the ability of individuals to make choices. Accordingly, Oscar proposes the notion of *collective agency freedom*, which can be broadly understood as the opportunity of a given population to self-organise and to act as a collectivity to achieve common goals. Finally, he proposes three possible dimensions to appraise the proposed conceptualisation of collective agency freedom: (a) *the freedom*

to imagine things together; (b) the freedom to organise around a common goal, (c) the freedom to achieve things in unison.

In Chapter 5, Clemens Sedmak addresses the difficult task of appraising the quality of our shared humanity. He first reminds us that the concept of humanity is at the same time pervasive and evasive in development literature. What does it mean to be human? Evident as it may be, the concept is nonetheless difficult to define in a positive manner. He assumes therefore a negative approach, through the experience of beings who are infrahuman or definitively not human. Four pairs of qualities can express our humanity, he says: (a) uniqueness and complexity; (b) vulnerability and socialness; (c) agency and the power to transform; and (d) equality and existential closeness. He translates these four points into the idea that living a life according to one's human dignity means living a life that allows for a range of experiences: the expression of uniqueness, the pursuit of complexity, the protection and cultivation of proper vulnerability, the fostering of relationships, the experience of agency, the cultivation of the potential to transform the world into a better place, and the experience of equality. He closes by proposing four practices as possible indicators for the 'humanity' dimension: (a) practices of reconciled pluralism; (b) practices of deep inclusion; (c) habits of integral ecology; and (d) patterns of permeability.

To grasp the polycentric governance of a nexus of common goods, in Chapter 6 Tom de Herdt and Denis Augustin Samnick focus on *reflexive governance* and the rule-setting processes that control commoning practice. There is a multiplicity here that is unavoidable, with each common good having its own dynamic and its own rule setting. However, based on the results of Ultimatum Game experiments, they suggest that recognition and 'cognitive empathy' appear as key aspects of a governance of commons within a set of institutions. Yet, following Sandel's *civic approach* and the notion of *commoning*, they shift from the question of which entitlements governance should secure to the question of *how* citizens secure entitlements and *who* participates in these processes. They identify voice and accountability mechanisms as key features of an indicator of nexus governance.

In Chapter 7, Rodolfo de la Torre explores a possible metric for the justice component of the common good matrix. He structures his reflection by elucidating three main points. First, justice cannot be

reduced to a separate dimension of its own, isolated from the agency, humanity, governance, and stability components of the common good. It does, however, make sense to distinguish this dimension for analytical and measurement purposes. Second, it is convenient to conceptualise the justice component of the common good as dealing with fair production of social goods and the possibility of shared benefits. Procedural and distributional aspects of justice are and must be involved. Finally, freedoms and rights offer ways to approach the procedural aspects of justice. Equality of results and equality of opportunity are key to its distributional aspects. Both elements play a role in the concept of justice and should therefore be the feature on which indicators for the justice dimension are based.

In Chapter 8, Flavio Comim starts with a conceptual discussion about ‘stability’, exploring its links with similar constructs such as sustainability and resilience. He then examines the normative character of stability, echoing Anand and Sen’s critique of the use of the sustainability concept, to assess the positive and negative aspects of stability. Next, he investigates measurement possibilities for this dimension, such as the issue of intertemporal rates of discount and the use of RBM (Results Based Management) to link common objectives to a single framework. Finally, he puts forward a tentative classification of stability indicators according to their usefulness in empirical common good nexus models.

Part III—Case Studies and Applications. This last part of the book presents different case studies showing how the matrix of common good dynamics may contribute to an understanding and assessment of different social realities. This part of the book will be of interest to development practitioners and social scientists wondering how to work from a common good perspective in practice.

Chapter 9, written by Helen Alford, introduces this last section of the book, bridging the previous theoretical part, and showing how it may translate to practical cases. Helen Alford shows first the relevance of a shift toward a common good approach to development, and how this can change our understanding of social realities. She then introduces her own work with business leaders, and considers the change in mindset brought about by the discussion of and agreement on a “blueprint for better business”.

In Chapter 10, Patrick Riordan offers a case study of Bangsamoro, a new autonomous region in the southern Philippines, from the perspective of common good dynamics. The common quest for autonomy must accommodate a complex reality in Bangsamoro, with an indigenous population composed of Muslims and animists and new, usually Christian, settlers. This case study analyses the construction of a complex equilibrium of common goods from the perspective of the five key drivers identified in the matrix. It shows that the quest for autonomy can be seen as the creation of a nexus of common goods, with the matrix highlighting the processes' strategic political and social priorities.

In Chapter 11, Valente Tallabs and Mathias Nebel apply the matrix of common good dynamics to a study of the municipality of Atlixco, in Mexico's Puebla state, as mentioned above. They identify and aggregate quantitative data to build each of the five key drivers of the matrix and then proceed to assess the dynamics of the Atlixco nexus in terms of a simple 'traffic light' for each of the dimensions of the matrix. The case study highlights the possibility of framing the socio-political analysis of a municipality in terms of a common good dynamic, pointing out some deep structural deficiencies as well as the municipality's strengths.

Chapter 12 summarises Simona Berretta's research on micro-social relations, discussing how they can contribute to our understanding of the nexus of common goods. Do transformative micro-social relations also generate a dynamic of the common good, and if so, how? What can we learn about the inner dynamics of the common good at the macro level by looking at the micro-dynamics of personalised relations of care involving vulnerable people? The author studies a faith-based rehab community in Italy and a programme for prisoners in the US. She shows that the common good matrix may help us understand the building blocks of sociality.

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