



**GENDER STUDIES AND ACTIVISM IN 2022:
(RE-/DE-/?-) INSTITUTIONALIZATION IN
CHANGING REALITIES**

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**Ready for Change? Points of Vulnerability and
Resilience to Polycrisis Among Latvian Women**

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Weronika

- Evaluator (decolonial)
- feminism lecturer in sociology
- women's sexual health promoter
- Women's Circles founder in Latvia
- co-founder of ecocommunity
- Catholic feminist
- mother of four



Elgars

- Sustainability researcher
- Ecocommunity co-founder,
- Degrowth activist
- Progressive party politician
- feminist partner
- father of four

Research Background

(1) Written in a different reality (prepandemic), (2) very traditional approach initially, other focuses: common resources management - among ecofarmers, among foresters, in GNP region without gender as a lens for the research

FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE ON COMMONS

The management of common resources can also be defined as a process of making and remaking **community**, and a feminist perspective pays particular attention to everyday practices, social relations and spaces of creativity and **social reproduction** in which people come, share and act together

(after Federici 2011, 2019 in Clement et al., 2019)



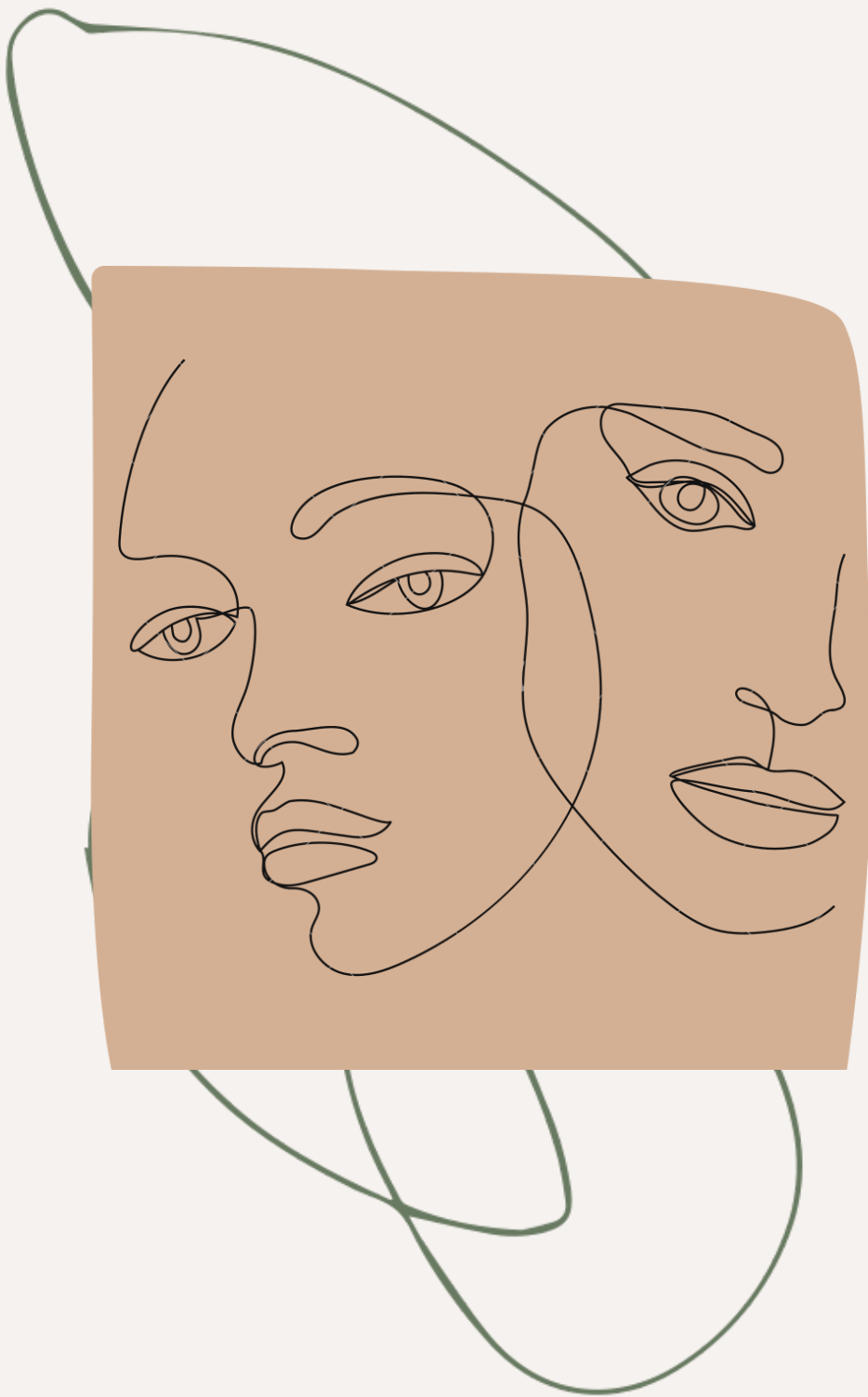
Theoretical framework

- 1) Ulrich Beck - World Risk Society
- 2) Elinor Ostrom - management of commons
- 3) Ecofeminism
(In a sense, women are seen as common resources, and common resources are seen as women" (Mies & Bennholdt-Thomsen, 1999: 157).)
- 4) Feminist Political Ecology

Some of the most meaningful writers: Ariel Salleh, Christine Bauhardt, Wendy Harcourt, Silvia Federici, Ingrid L. Nelson, Vandana Shiva



Assumptions based on literature review



Women* have different access to common resources

Jerneck Anne, What about Gender in Climate Change? Twelve Feminist Lessons from Development, Sustainability 2018, 10, 627; doi:10.3390/su10030627

Women are assigned to reproductive work which also can be considered as commons

Federici, S. 2019. Re-Enchanting the World Feminism and the Politics of the Commons. Oakland, CA: PM Press.

Social and economic pressures on women in times of breakdown are different than on men due to care work

Gaard G., Ecofeminism and climate change, Women's Studies International Forum 49 (2015) 20–33
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2015.02.004>

Women co-create understanding and response to crisis with other women

Shiva Vandana, Reclaiming the Commons: Biodiversity, Traditional Knowledge, and the Rights of Mother Earth, Synergetic Press, 2020.

*Significant differences among women, based on nationality, education, work class and region will be analyzed in the project.

Ontology.

Gender is a crucial concept in constituting access to, control over, and knowledge of resources.

Epistemology.

Importance of ethical and political values in shaping practices and interpretations of evidence.

Methodological implications

Creating a support system for:

- 1) Respecting pandemic or post-pandemic reality of many respondents
- 2) Respecting the ways women share and open up
- 3) Respecting the role of social capital in women's resilience
- 4) Visual materials use

Feminist approach
to research



Our approach to qualitative research:

7 group conversations organized with 50 women by women
in Kurzeme, Riga region and Vidzeme

- The **atmosphere** homely, welcoming and relaxing.
- We prepared the possibility to **pay** for the participation
- **Childcare** during the discussions was an additional option.
- We also provided tasty, homemade **snacks and drinks**
- We **adapted the time** to the women's possibilities.

We got various confirmations that this approach works and many participants
praised the preparation of the discussion groups.

Ethical priorities:

- Research team shares **equal space**;
- **Reflecting on power relations** - not pressurising or exploiting the women participants (not going into too sensitive topics, letting them choose the level of sharing);
- Each theme was from **the women's perspective**
- **Building a shared understanding**
 - discovering similarities in their experiences,
 - validating their stories,
 - acknowledging their feelings,
 - creating space to support the group)
- **Co-creation of the results:**
 - examining possible conclusions,
 - allowing the group to reflect on common points;
 - examining arguments about wider, systemic institutional oppression,
 - stepping back if this is not relevant to their experience.

Inequalities in Latvia:

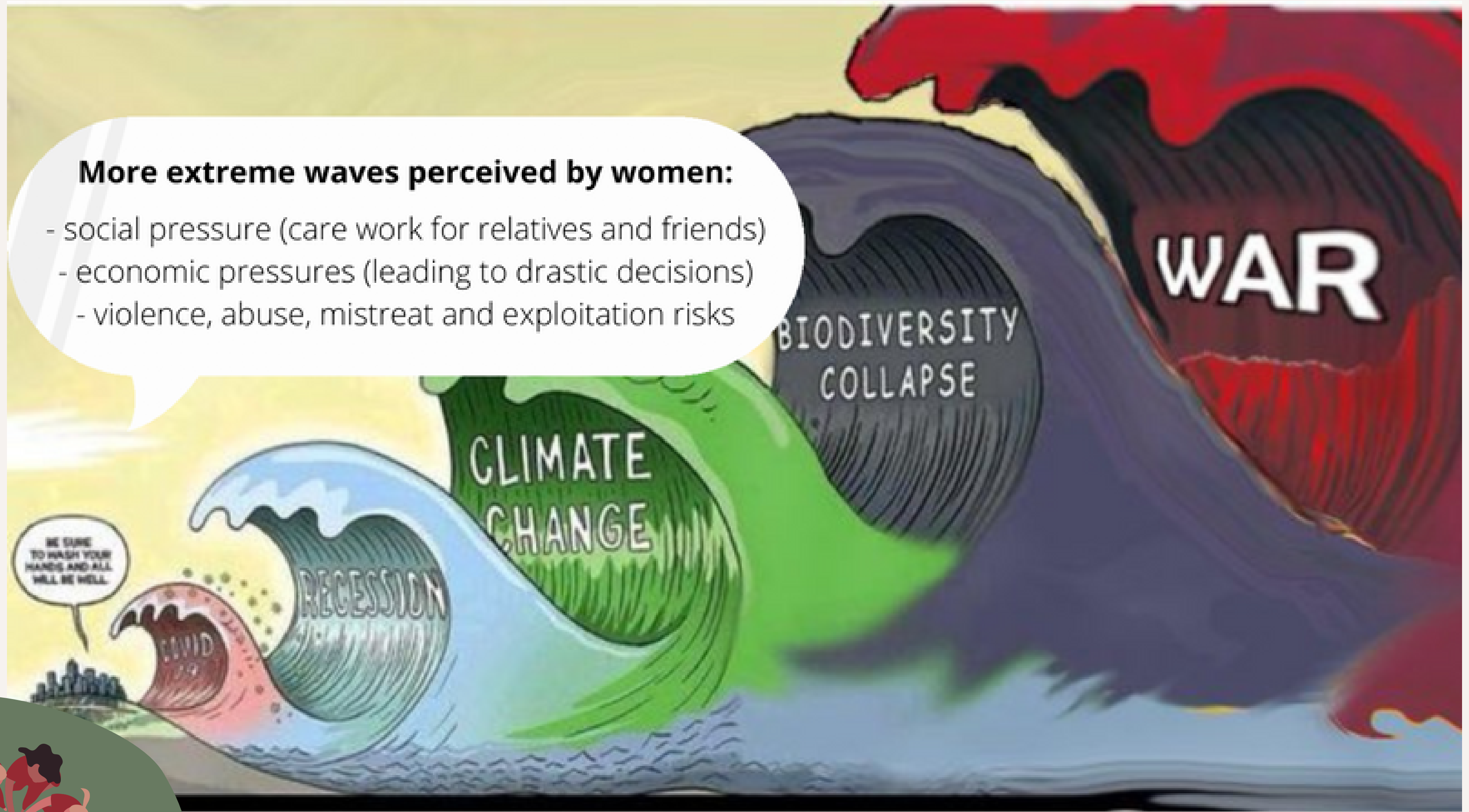
- In Latvia, the richest 10% together emit almost a third more than the poorest 50%.
- In Latvia, the richest 1% of the population together account for more than one third or 37% of the greenhouse gas emissions of the poorest 50%.
- Latvia's carbon footprint is 4 times higher than that of the poorest 50% worldwide.
- **Women in Latvia are the poorest of all EU Member States, with 23% of women at risk of poverty, compared to the EU average of 17%**
(Central Statistical Office, 2022b)

What makes women vulnerable in crisis:

- **paralysing psychological vulnerability** in post-Soviet Latvia in 2022
- **cultivating and idealizing stories about very resilient Latvian women who can survive almost anything and often have to rely only on themselves.** However, resilience is not the same as survival.
- **women's boundaries** - pressures of caring for what is and not fighting for what was or what could be; especially characteristic of Latvian women, where historically the boundaries have been violated so many times that it is perceived as something unwanted, unpleasant, but it happens.
 - **socialisation to the female role** - the 'good girl myth':
 - pathological feeling of being useful, therefore important and valued by others, even if harmful themselves (particularly true in rural areas)

More extreme waves perceived by women:

- social pressure (care work for relatives and friends)
- economic pressures (leading to drastic decisions)
- violence, abuse, mistreat and exploitation risks



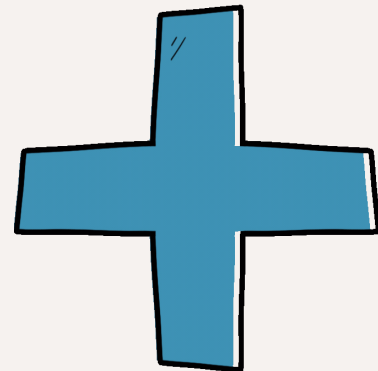
By Graeme MacKay. The cartoons were developed between March 2020 and March 2022 in several iterations with the original text in a bubble: "Be sure to wash your hands and all will be well".

In regards to men:

- For almost five decades, Latvian men were **expelled, imprisoned, threatened, psychologically and mentally oppressed**. This inevitably had an impact on subsequent generations of men, who often faced undetected post-traumatic stress disorder and other problems in various unhealthy ways - **violence and addiction**.
- In all the discussions, women tried not to stereotype men or see gender differences as black and white dualism. They openly shared their challenges and difficulties with their partners without attributing the same characteristics to all men. At the same time, they repeatedly praise men for their **technical skills** (rural changes!), **support** in the household, **long-term thinking** and **ability to take decisions** firmly.
 - They often expressed concern about **men's lack of skills in dealing with psychological problems** and their inability to express their concerns. Many said that they do not want to rely on men, but when they do, their help and support is perceived very positively

Key conclusion:

In general, women feel safer in rural areas in the context of a crisis of resources, but their safety depends on good communication and the ability to build a network of mutual support, as the people around them provide the most reliable support in any life situation.



- Living in Riga or nearby for the availability of social services and NGO projects
- Small garden availability
- Rural areas are more resilient to stress because of the strong support network (*it is impossible to starve to death in rural Latvia*)
- Activity on the labour market
- Children provide psychological support, love and meaning in life



- Age
- Loneliness in the city
- Living in a household without a helpful man
- Economic vulnerability increases with each child.

THINGS TO CELEBRATE

Introducing response to changing reality - health crisis which has significant pressures on women unassumed by the project application

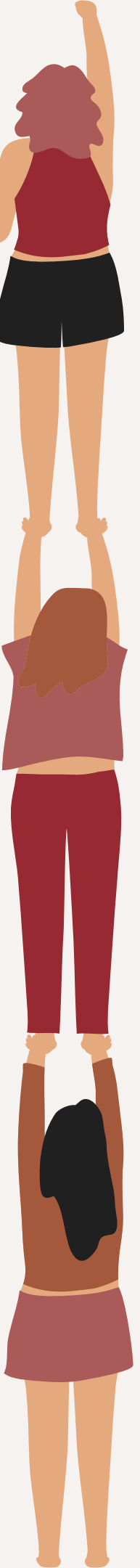
Changing mindsets of researchers, testing feminist methodology, introducing theoretical richness of feminist critical theory to practice

Work in practice - testing feminist approach to FGI and teaching feminism in practice in a BA course



CHALLENGES

- The University formalities have killed somewhat the idea of the support system
- Novice part of the research thus inconsistent throughout the project
- Not enough of time and data to explore women's involvement in commoning the natural resources in depth (introduced wider understanding of commons)




FUTURE ENDEAVOURS

Relevance of reaching out to different groups of women - especially those at risks (through help of specialized NVO) or Russian nationality

Decision making positions in common pool resources (water resources, forest etc.) management

Interdisciplinary research on women in crisis, including technology related inequalities





Your comments will help us
improve this and our future
research

Contact us

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