

OLIVER RESSLER



Comuna Under Construction

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A film by Dario Azzellini & Oliver Ressler

94 min., HD, AT/DE 2010

"We have to decide for ourselves what we want. We are the ones who know about our needs and what is happening in our community", Omayra Pérez explains confidently. She wants to convince her community, located on the hillside of the poor districts of Caracas, to found a Consejo Comunal (community council). In more than 30.000 Consejos Comunales the Venezuelan inhabitants decide on their concerns collectively via assemblies.



"Comuna Under Construction", still

Omayra is supported by the activists of the nearby shantytown "Emiliano Hernández", which has had a Consejo Comunal for three years already. The inhabitants there managed to get a doctor from the governmental program "Barrio Adentro", who treats everyone free of charge. They also got money to renovate their houses and replaced over a dozen of corrugated-iron huts by new houses. All of these activities and a lot more have been organized via the Consejo Comunal. By local self-organization several working groups have been established on self-selected topics and decisions are made in assemblies.



"Comuna Under Construction", still



"Comuna Under Construction", still

Several Consejos Comunales can form a Comuna and finally a communal town. The film "Comuna Under Construction" follows these developments throughout the hillside of the shantytowns of Caracas and the vast and wet plains of Barinas in the countryside. The councils are built from below and alongside the existing institutions and are supposed to overcome the existing state through self-government. In a constituent assembly for the construction of the communal town "Antonio José de Sucre" Ramon Virigay from the independent peasant's organization Frente Nacional Campesino Ezequiel Zamora (FNCEZ) reminds the delegates of the participating Consejos Comunales: "Even if we definitely need the government agencies at the moment, we have to be independent tomorrow due to our development. We cannot depend solely on the state forever." For this reason the councils are to establish own structures of production and distribution in order to achieve autonomy.

The assemblies are a central element of the film "Comuna Under Construction". The film starts off in the well organized Consejo Comunal Emiliano Hernández located in one of the shantytowns of Caracas. It then shows the intentions of forming

Comunas and a communal town in rural Barinas and ends in Petare, a gigantic shantytown of the agglomeration of Caracas where there are 29 Consejos Comunales intending to build the Comuna of Maca.



"Comuna Under Construction", still

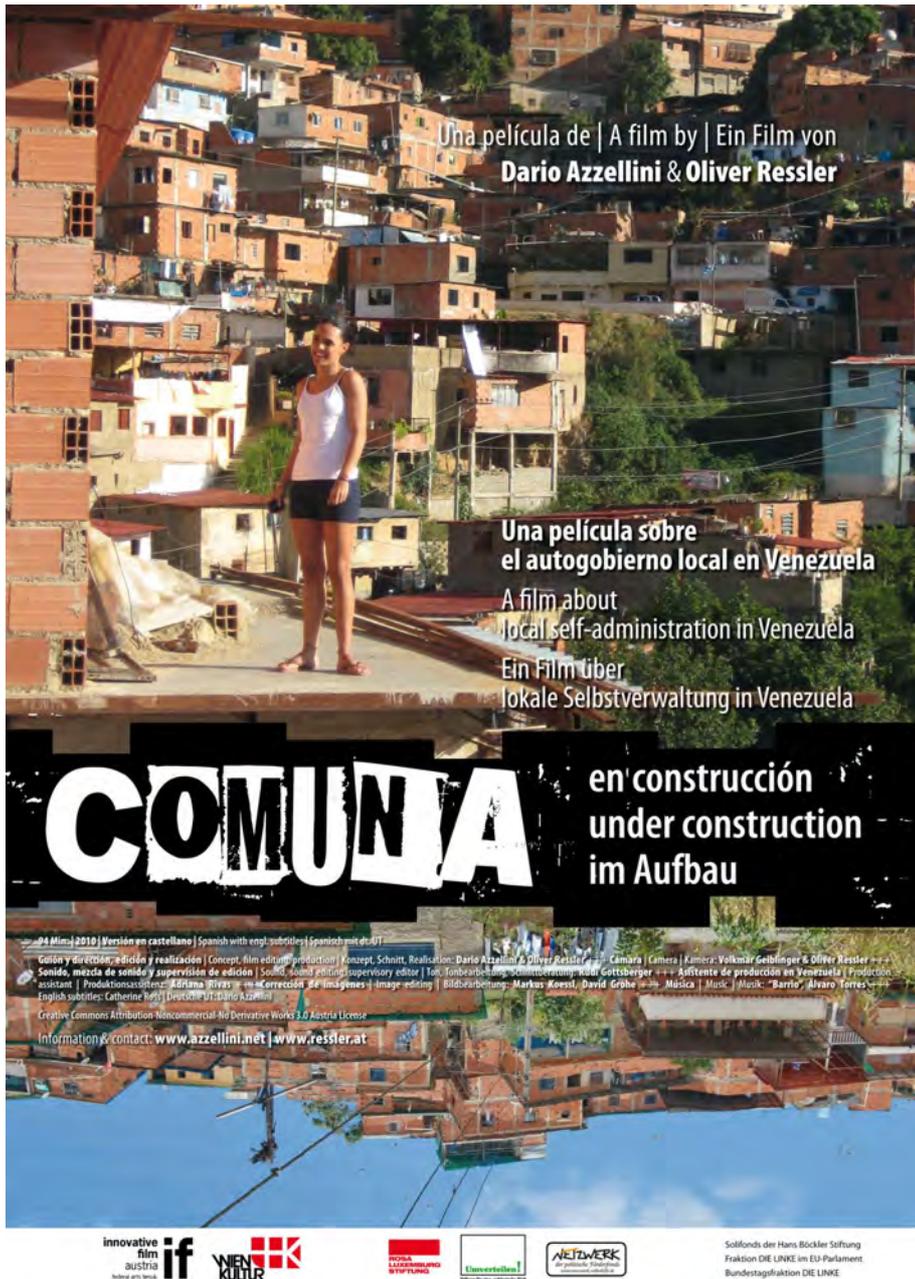


"Comuna Under Construction". Installation view: "Socialism Failed, Capitalism is Bankrupt. What comes Next?" (solo show), Bunkier Sztuki Contemporary Art Gallery, Krakow, 2011

Is it even possible to bring together state and autonomy at all? Every one of the Consejos Comunales spokes-persons has positive as well as negative experiences with the institutions in store to talk about. In an assembly in Petare the grass-roots activist Yusmeli Patiño blames a high government representative: "We are losing our credibility because of the incompetence of the state institutions". But there are also members of the institutions who make a big effort to accompany the basis in making its own decisions. Relations between the grass roots and the institutions are

marked by cooperation as well as conflict. But the Consejos Comunales also have internal difficulties; participation has to be learned.

Both progress and setback mark the difficult process of people actually taking the power of deciding on their own lives and environment by themselves.



Concept, film editing, production: Dario Azzellini & Oliver Ressler

Camera: Volkmar Geiblinger, Oliver Ressler

Sound, sound editing, supervisory editor: Rudi Gottsberger

Production assistant: Adriana Rivas

Image editing: Markus Koessl, David Grohe

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