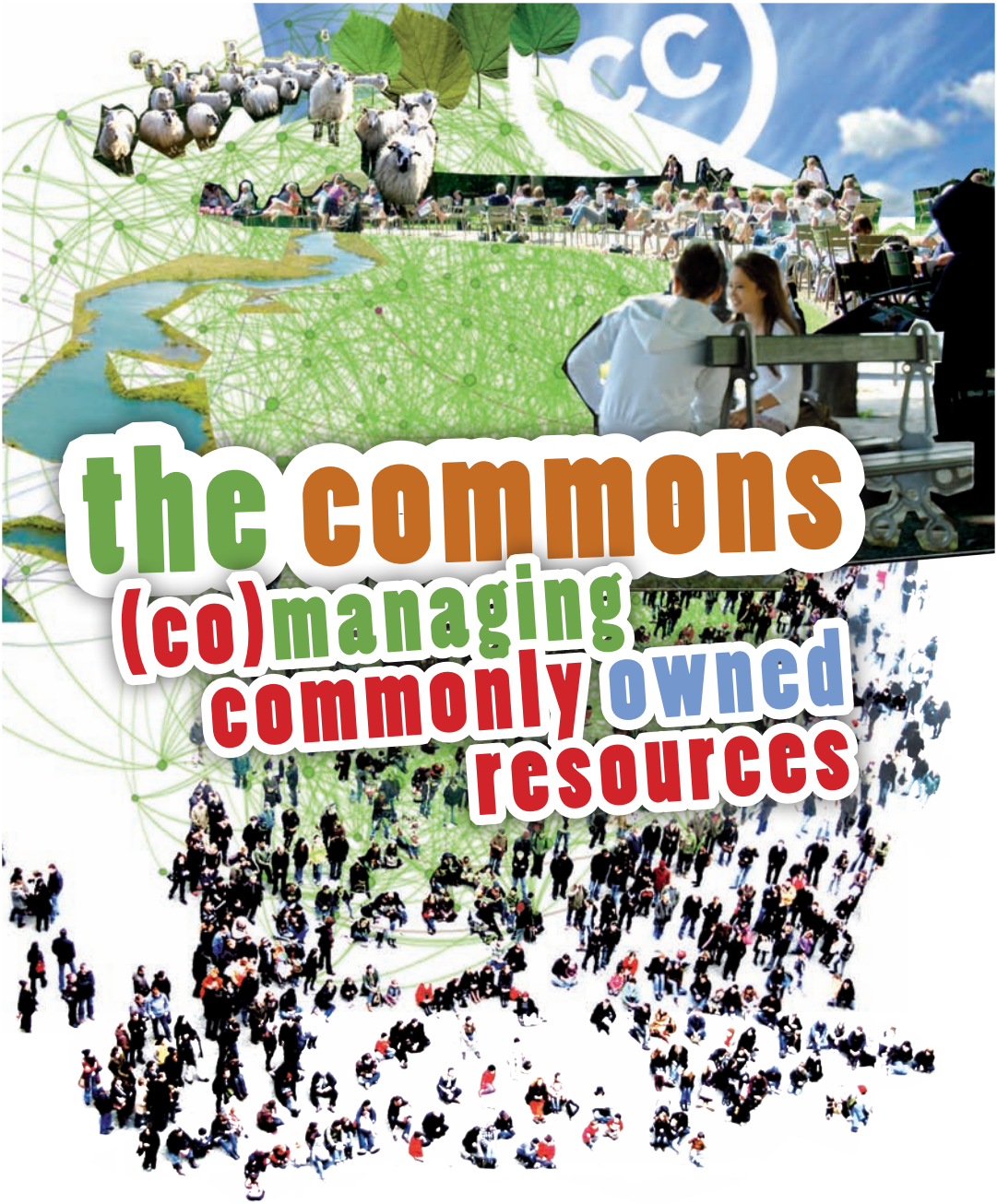
the commons

(co)managing commonly owned resources



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THE COMMONS : (CO)MANAGING COMMONLY OWNED RESOURCES

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INTRODUCTION

We know it from facts; our civilisation is faced with multiple crises: environmental, social, economic, but also democratic and cultural crises. We have never been so rich, and yet social inequalities keep rising every day. We have reached a high level of scientific and technological development, but at the price of irreversible damage to the environment. The economic crisis, mainly due to some irresponsible financial actors, makes highly indebted Western countries unable to think about alternatives to the traditional creed of growth and austerity to finally see the light at the end of the tunnel. In that context, social withdrawal, weakening of social bonds and of democracy seems to thrive, while jeopardising our common prosperity.

Thinking in terms of commons gives us new horizons to overcome these obstacles. This approach has been developed over many years, made famous by Elinor Ostrom's work, the only woman to win the Nobel Prize in economics. Ostrom analysed the way communities across the world organise themselves to collectively manage natural resources (e.g. rivers, forests). In order to avoid excessive exploitation, communities adopt norms and rules, which they experience and improve over time, to finally succeed not only in protecting these resources in the long term, but also in strengthening social ties within the community.

Beyond natural resources, the commons are a way to rethink the production and management of other goods, (e.g. culture, transport, or housing), but also the collective reappropriation by the citizens beyond the traditional state/market dichotomy. At the crossroads between social, environmental and economic issues, the commons are a tool to collectively reinvent a shared prosperity.

Oikos, GEF and Etopia joined efforts to introduce this approach and to debate the several aspects of the commons, especially with insights from foreign experts. After a general introduction to the notion of

commons, each speaker will explore one particular scope of this notion: knowledge, natural resources, infrastructures, economy and genetics.

This conference is a first step in a broader reflection process. What do we consider as commons? What is the role of citizens, politics and private firms in their production and management? How could we connect the commons with the mainstream economic model? Which management scheme should we adopt? What are the political issues at stake? These are some of the numerous questions that would be raised today to engage a large debate on this promising theme for our future and that of our planet.

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CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

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WHAT ARE THE COMMONS ?

The commons cover a wide variety of goods and resources, from the most tangible ones (e.g. water) to the most virtual ones (e.g. freeware), including a city bicycle sharing system. The commons are characterised by a diversity of modes of production and of management, administered either by communities, public authorities but also by mixed regimes. What is fundamental is that commons always involve collective action, which emerges from a community or a network of citizens. When handling commons, users collectively make a decision on the way these goods are produced and managed. The overall aim is to ensure environmental, social and economic sustainability.

ONCE UPON A TIME, THE COMMONS...

ONCE, A USUAL PRACTICE IN ORDER TO RUN AND TO USE LANDS COLLECTIVELY

The roots of the notion of commons can be traced back to Europe in the late Middle Ages (12th-13th centuries). At that time, competitive uses of lands between farming, pasture and woods were at stake, especially when demographic pressure implied intensive agriculture and grazing. The notion of commons therefore served as arbitration in case of conflicts between lords and villagers. As a result, shared rights on a same land were put in place.

The commons are a historical institutional form that enables the collective action through which stakeholders themselves define what constitutes the common and the institutional structure which ensures its durability, as well as access and use rules based on mutual trust and sanctions in case of infringement.

PEAT BOG, A COMMON

Peat bogs were used in the past to provide inhabitants with fuel to heat their houses. Since this resource was scarce and took time to reconstitute itself, strict rules were established to maintain a certain amount of reserve to spread among the inhabitants. One of these rules was: "No one has the right to sell or to give peat to anyone living outside the village" (Arendonk, Flanders, 15th cent.).

A CONCEPT NEGLECTED FOR A LONG TIME, BUT WHICH RECENTLY POPPED UP AGAIN

Several evolutions pushed away citizens' involvement and local anchorage. Firstly, the Age of Enlightenment made liberated individuals the centre pieces of society. Then, the invention of nation-states gathered power in a centralised state. Hence it was up to the State to define the legitimate institutional and economic framework. Last but not least, the market economy led to overexploitation of resources. In the middle of the 19th century, these three evolutions resulted in the dissolution of communal lands throughout Western European countries.

In 1968, American biologist Hardin gave the world a strong metaphor in an article entitled "The Tragedy of the Commons" published in Science magazine (see box). According to him, the inevitable destiny of a pasture land abandoned to common management was overexploitation, which could only be avoided by the recognition of private property or by the use of public management.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE COMMONS

The metaphor put forward by Hardin is the one of a pasture land where farmers bring their flocks. Each farmer has an interest in letting his flock graze more than the other farmers would. If each and every farmer behaves like that to maximise his profit, the pasture land will progressively deteriorate, in a way that could not even be noticed at first sight, but which would be irreversible at the end of the day. This is what is called overexploitation. And this is, according to Hardin, the inevitable destiny of a pasture land abandoned to the collectivity.

A few years later, Hardin had to look back to his article and added that his analysis was about "the tragedy of non-managed commons". Hardin's metaphor is actually wrong about three points: (1) Hardin confused commons with no man's land – or open access –; (2) he started from the fact that farmers did not talk to each other, whereas people who use and manage commons usually exchange a lot. They collectively establish access and use rules for the commons in order to preserve them; (3) he considered that people only produce with the purpose of making profits, whereas the rationale of commons is actually about satisfying subsistence needs for all the users.

Elinor Ostrom proposed a very exciting approach of the commons in her book *Governing the Commons, The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*[1], published in 1990. Her extensive work over years of research has been awarded with the 2009 Nobel Prize in economics. Elinor Ostrom analysed numerous types of commons. She chose to scrutinise only those which were in good shape despite their intensive use. She identified seven similar characteristics to these goods that could act as principles to maintain commons in a good shape: (1) clearly defined and recognised boundaries; (2) access and use rules appropriate to the local social and environmental conditions; (3) collective rules that enable users to participate to the decision making; (4) a monitoring of the use and the shape of commons by users mandated by the community; (5) a set of progressive and flexible sanctions in case users abuse these common rules; (6) conflict resolution mechanisms that are sufficiently easy to understand and to use; (7) the self-determination of the community should be recognised and fostered by hierarchical levels of authority.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM RESEARCH ON THE COMMONS?

Self-management can efficiently work. It aims at letting the management of the common to those who are directly concerned. For instance with regards to agriculture, those who work in the fields are the ones who are the most knowledgeable. But there are some preconditions to the good management of commons, especially the recognition and the

1 Cambridge University Press

support of hierarchical levels of authority, which can rely on the fact that such a mode of management can deal with pressures from the market economy and even interact with it in an effective way.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

www.collective-action.info

Read also: «The Commons – Prosperity by Sharing» Report by the Heinrich Böll Foundation, which you can download here: www.boell.de/economysocial/economy/economy-commons-report-10489.html

THE COMMONS, DNA OF A REVIVAL OF POLICY CULTURE

DAVID BOLLIER, BLOGGER AND ACTIVIST, THE UNITED STATES

It has become increasingly clear that we are poised between an old world that no longer works and a new one struggling to be born. But it's not at all clear how we can find some new paths to the new order of things. I wish to suggest why the commons holds great promise for helping us imagine and create a more humane, equitable and functional world. The commons can serve as a kind of DNA for reinventing our economy, politics and culture.

The commons is not about nursing sectarian identities and resentments, despite our obvious and deep differences. It's about the collaborative spirit and tactics that we bring to a shared, urgent task of rebuilding our societies as the contradictions of neoliberal capitalism become unavoidable.

We are surrounded by an archaic order of centralised hierarchies and predatory markets, especially the financial sector. The giant corporation is the chief form of governance, with the active collusion of the nation-state. The many deficiencies and internal contractions of this system of governance are becoming painfully evident – practically, politically, intellectually and spiritually – and yet the citadel of neoliberal capitalism has remained notoriously resistant to political challenge.

The beauty of the commons is both its generality and its particularism in building a new order. It can speak to the broadest collective concerns and principles, such as democratic participation, transparency and social

justice -- but it also can speak to the Indian villager trying to share seeds to avoid Monsanto's Terminator GMOs, to Amsterdam hackers trying to create new forms of digital money, and to communities fighting to protect forests and fisheries from global investors.

The DNA metaphor works so well in describing the commons because it captures the artful blend of the general and the particular. Scientists will tell you that DNA is deliberately under-specified precisely so that the code of life can adapt to local circumstances. DNA is not fixed and overly prescriptive. It adapts to local circumstances. It takes account of the geography and weather, and the culture and practices of a given community.

That is why there is no comprehensive single inventory of commons. The commons are as diverse as life itself. A commons is created whenever a particular community decides that it wants to manage a given resource collectively, with a special emphasis on social access, equity and sustainability. In this sense, the commons functions as a kind of template for a new political and economic culture. Its very incompleteness is what allows us to make the commons our own and adapt it to the particular circumstances and resources in question. We can co-produce things and co-govern ourselves according to our own needs and interests. In this sense, the commons is not a rigid blueprint, but rather a flexible scaffolding for building a new future for ourselves.

Interest in the commons has grown because market culture has become so aggressive and all-pervasive. It dominates modern life. Human genes and physical matter at the nano-scale can now be owned. Words can be owned as trademarks. Musical notes can be owned under copyright law. Lifeforms can be owned as patents. Biomass can be owned through securitised financial instruments.

What capitalism generally calls *progress* is increasingly experienced by most of us as *enclosure*. Enclosure is about dispossession of the many by the few - and the privatisation or destruction of shared wealth: the common wealth. Right now, for example, a massive international land

grab is seizing millions of acres of farmland and pastures and waterways in Africa, Asia and Latin America, displacing the commoners who have managed the land as commons for generations. By the logic of the market, this is enormous progress – because landscapes in which people live in sustainable harmony with nature are considered "undeveloped." They haven't been put to use for market exchange and profit.

The commons gives us a political vocabulary for naming and reclaiming these resources that are being stolen. It helps us to step outside the madness of market logic and develop a new perspective. It invites us to re-think some of our familiar words and turn in new directions. Instead of ownership, for example, the commons focuses on stewardship – on protecting collective social and ecological interests over the long term, and not merely maximizing short-term financial interests.

For me, the greatest value of the commons is its ability to help us assert a different value proposition. While the market sees the commons as inevitably leading to over-exploitation and ruin – a "tragedy" as Garrett Hardin famously claimed in 1968 – I see the commons as highly *generative*. It creates all sorts of value – material resources, social connection, a sense of identity and belonging. But to the market, of course, these things are nearly invisible.

It is important to stress that the commons is not just a resource. It is a resource *plus* a community *and* its social protocols and values for managing their shared resources. The commons is a socio-economic paradigm. It is a social system for co-production and co-governance. This blending of production and governance through the commons is quite significant because it addresses some of the most vexing problems of market capitalism.

It can help us:

- *Control market externalities*. Markets can't help but externalise costs because that is essential to maximising profits. Markets like to disguise actual costs by displacing them onto others, and then jiggering the accounting so that you can mostly ignore them. To

talk about the commons is to name these externalities and begin to reduce and control them.

- *Limit monetisation*. Market capitalism has a nasty imperative of monetising all forms of value into a single metric known as price. Once you collapse all value into prices, you don't really have a need for ethics any more. The commons asserts that certain things must be inalienable, and that value is a much richer concept than price.
- *Move toward a steady-state economy*. The market takes from the commons and wrings whatever profit it can by pushing resources through the market machine. Then, whatever can't be monetised and made profitable is simply dumped back into the commons as waste. The commons is about interrupting this cycle and building more stable, non-destructive models of provisioning. It's about cultivating a logic of sufficiency.
- *Provide for the common good, not just individual good*. Modern capitalism is focused on individuals, individual property rights and short-term market gains. Accordingly, there are strong prejudices in western law against collective stewardship and long-term commitments. But the commons is about developing the legal instruments and social norms for protecting collective interests, such as the General Public License for free software, Creative Commons licenses for digital content, and land trusts.
- *Reconnect people to Nature and each other*. We fancy that human beings are ahistorical super-creatures that stand apart from Nature and can control it with a dispassionate Cartesian objectivity. The whole mind-body dualism also leads us to believe that objectivity and subjectivity are different. If we are ever going to learn to work respectfully with Nature, rather than merely exploit it as an Other, we need to acknowledge that humanity is part of nature and its processes. The commons helps us do this.
- *Reconceptualise "development"*. For generations, "development" has been seen as a challenge of bringing the West's markets and materialism to poorer countries, and remaking everyone as Homo economicus, the rational, utility-maximising consumer. But the

commons offers a framework for redefining development. It asks us to re-integrate production and governance so that there is greater responsibility and accountability.

If "*another world is possible*", the commons helps us give that slogan a plan with some specifics and some philosophical coherence. It gives us diverse models of working alternatives – from P2P urbanism to seed-sharing to free software to open educational resources to Slow Food to Transition Towns to commons of fisheries, forests and farmlands.

David Bollier's blog: www.bollier.org/

THE COMMONS AS A SPACE FOR CO-CREATING A TRANSFORMATIVE FUTURE (PUBLIC LECTURE FROM DAVID BOLLIER)

Today's enclosure *movement – a large-scale process of imposing property rights on hundreds of resources that we collectively own – is the tragedy of the market more than the tragedy of the commons.*

The Market/State alliance is largely incapable of setting limits on itself or declaring that certain elements of nature or culture or community should remain inalienable. By contrast, the commons gives us a vocabulary for developing a richer narrative about value than the one sanctioned by neoliberal economics and policy. It helps us recognise socially created wealth as a distinct species of wealth that is embedded in distinct communities of interest. The surprising fact is, the commons is generative in its own right – but the wealth is not measurable in a price or bottom line, if only because it is a kind of shared, non-monetised value that includes ecological, social and qualitative forms of wealth.

At a time when the existing order has reached a dead-end, I immodestly believe that the commons paradigm can help us re-imagine politics, governance, economics and culture. It has several important virtues. First, it is not an ideology; it is a world view and sensibility that is ecumenical in spirit and analysis. Second, the commons has a venerable legal history that stretches back to the Roman Empire and the Magna Carta[2], which is highly instructive for our times. Third, it is a serious intellectual framework and discourse for critiquing market culture and rediscovering human cooperation and community. And fourth, it consists of a rich array of successful working models that in many instances are out-competing the Market and out-performing the State.

Fortunately, a great many commoners *around the world recognise the power of the commons to nourish new modes of governance, self-determination, social stability and ecological stewardship: a trend that is likely to grow in coming years.*

2 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magna_Carta

FREE SCIENCE : THE COMMONS AND KNOWLEDGE

VALÉRIE PEUGEOT, PRESIDENT OF VECAM,
(REFLECTIONS AND ACTIONS FOR THE DIGITAL CITIZEN), FRANCE

THE COMMONS AND KNOWLEDGE, A NEW HORIZON UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Can we really stop the water flowing? This is the question that comes up when reflecting upon the successive dams that are built up by the fervent defenders of intellectual property rights, who exert themselves to prove that one can impose boundaries and exclusive rights to knowledge. For more than 50 years, a collective tale has been spread around. A tale that says that information and knowledge are the "new gold" of the 21st century. A tale that claims that only intellectual property rights can stimulate innovation and creativity, while at the same time generating profits. This is a collective narrative which pretends that intellectual work is like other goods that only property rights and free markets can prevent us from damages.

To that fairytale we oppose history and economy. History shows that, at all times and all over the world, alternative modes of management and of diffusion of knowledge have existed. It has always existed in culture[3], in design[4] and of course in the field of agriculture and medicine, while seeds and drugs have been transmitted over generations and incrementally improved over time. Economy teaches us that digitised

3 Think about Picasso s « Las Meninas », reinterpreting Diego Velázquez.

4 Thomas Chippendale wrote a entire manual to describe how to design and build the furniture he designed himself, to inspire new personal creations and interpretations of his pieces: translate.google.com/translate?u=http%3A//www.internetactu.net/2009/06/24/les-enjeux-de-la-fabrication-personnelle/&hl=fr&langpair=fr|en&tbb=1&ie=ISO-8859-1

knowledge has peculiar characteristics: it can be reproduced at a zero marginal cost, and does not deprive its primary owner of its holding when it is shared (non-rival good). In that sense it considerably undermines the core principles of rivalry and scarcity on which our whole mainstream economic theory is based since Adam Smith and Ricardo.

Two contradictory trends are emerging. On the one hand, individuals – in the North and the South – are more and more equipped, especially with mobile phones with many applications that enable to both at the same time get, create, and diffuse information. Together with social networks, these new devices encourage new practices of sharing, as well as "horizontal co-creation". These new practices do not come from the sudden emergence of altruism, but are explained by different motivations such as: the pleasure to be part of a collective project; the gratitude received in return; the answer to a need that market economy cannot fulfil; or the need to invest free time in a meaningful project. To collaborate in designing a piece of software; to correct a post on Wikipedia; to design an open-source electronic platform[5] ; to recommend a movie to a friend; to lend an e-book; or to collectively invent from a distance an energy-efficient car[6] ; all these actions, from the tiniest to the most ambitious ones, draw on the collaborative economy concept, which is exempt from the traditional principle of scarcity.

Reacting to these new practices that destabilise "old industries" (especially the cultural industry and the software industry) and public authorities, there is a backlash towards the "old" concept of scarcity. To do so, industries and public authorities are armed with three weapons: guilt (sharing is stealing!), technical measures (e.g. Digital Rights Management which lock CDs and DVDs after sale), and last but not least the law. Legal rules are expanding and tend to become universal, including in countries where there is no traditional culture of intellectual property rights such as India. Among the widespread measures adopted have been copyright extension; narrowing of the public domain; international

5 www.arduino.cc/

6 www.wikispeed.com/

harmonisation of intellectual property rights so that each and every country is concerned, even the least developed ones; adoption of national and supranational restrictive measures against sharing practices – IPRED[7] –, and the secret negotiation of a treaty – ACTA[8].

These defensive approaches seem both inefficient (new technical devices are quickly cracked), anachronistic (they stand against the new radical approach of the digital economy), a killer of liberty (for the sake of intellectual property, surveillance measures are put in place), and above all counter-productive from a strictly economic point of view. Instead of collectively inventing new business models that could fit the sharing economy, fanatics of intellectual property desperately try to limit the flow of creativity and knowledge.

Yet functional and conceptual tools exist. Some economic sectors, such as the freeware sector, have successively invented legal tools adapted to their special needs (e.g. the General Public License[9]), and managed to demonstrate their economic robustness[10]. Others have tried to invent sustainable alternatives, such as the concept of universal licensing, or creative contribution[11] for music and cinematographic sectors.

Broadly speaking, the school of thought brought by the commons, as it has been built up notably by Karl Polanyi[12] and then further developed by Nobel Prize winner Elinor Ostrom – who recently passed away[13] –, offers the necessary framework to give coherence and strength to these alternatives, which are both necessary to incorporate the commons in our cultural and political model.

This theory draws its strength from two characteristics. Firstly, the commons are not contradictory to the concepts of market economy and

7 www.laquadrature.net/en/anti-sharing-directive-ipred

8 www.laquadrature.net/en/ACTA

9 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GNU_General_Public_License

10 www.april.org/indicateurs-economiques-du-libre

11 Sharing, Philippe Aigrain, 2012, paigrain.debatpublic.net/?page_id=2356&lang=en, paigrain.debatpublic.net/?p=2155&lang=en and paigrain.debatpublic.net/?p=4451

12 The Great Transformation, Karl Polanyi, Beacon Press, 1944

13 Elinor Ostrom Remembered www.bollier.org/blog/elinor-ostrom-remembered-1933-2012,

public authority. Moreover, the commons shed light on the excesses of these two concepts (e.g. the commons were put forward at the Rio+20 Peoples' Summit as an alternative to the mercantile solution to the ecological crisis which seeks to impose capitalist values and principles to natural resources and environment[14]). The commons also add to their insufficiencies (e.g. the inability of the mainstream approach, already mentioned, to invent an alternative business model for culture), as well as highlighting their blind spots (e.g. the risks for culture to become impoverished by the narrowing of the public domain[15]). But in any case the commons do not aim at replacing these two concepts of market economy and public authority. Thinking in terms of commons is the contrary of any "totalitarian" theory; it entails a diversity of approaches, and would diffuse through society only if it is progressively conveyed by a multitude of actors. This progressive diffusion in the society does not exempt the commons theory from being thoroughly contested, as has been the case at the EU level with regards to the patentability of computer programs[16], and as is currently the case with the numerous protests against ACTA[17].

What also makes the commons theory powerful is the fact that it is highly demanding. Thinking in terms of commons not only means a general care for a resource and the way it is shared and provided, but also requires management systems which ensure this resource is protected against all kinds of threats – corruption, free-rider practices, etc. – and business models which ensure the durability and the development of this resource.

All different forms of knowledge and information are potentially concerned by the framework of the commons, from the article published in a scientific review, to the music database, via the teaching aid material, the genetic code of a plant, the molecular description of a medicine,

14 rio20.net/en/documentos/the-green-economy-a-new-stage-of-capitalist-expansion

15 communia-project.eu/final-report/

16 bat8.inria.fr/~lang/ecrits/liste/brevet.html

17 www.pcinpact.com/news/71531-acta-manifestations-juin-opposition.htm

the design of a technical device, the micro-invention of a farmer[18], or the data collectively gathered by a crowd of people[19].

It just has to be feasible and desired. Commons are feasible thanks to a set of rules which will ensure protection against third parties that are not involved in the sharing community. These rules of management are currently being built up. Licenses are one well-known solution: together with freewares, open-source hardware[20], or open-source databases (e.g. licenses of the Open Knowledge Foundation[21]), new licenses are imagined to protect creative works while providing them a large diffusion (e.g. Creative Commons). But these rules can be imagined and set up within a much more restrained community, with less codification, as within a village or a rural community.

Commons are also feasible thanks to a business model that allows taking into account the use value more than the exchange value. Freewares have been based both on the fact that it brought reputation[22] and services. Firms that developed freewares are making profits not on the access to the freeware but on the services that it entails: training, adaptation to the specific needs of the client, distribution, etc. The "software as a service" business model tends to spread around in other economic sectors, including the tangible economy (e.g. sharing a washing machine in exchange of a modest price to be paid[23]). Membership, donation or voluntary contribution practices are key concepts for the commons. But the commons are also based on mixed approaches, such as public or private subventions to complement other sources of funding already presented (e.g. Google is a donator to Wikipedia).

Yet, is it always desirable to develop a resource in a collectively shared model? To answer this particular question, one must think through three

18 As trigger watering his fields with a mobile phone

19 As the collaborative cartography of open street map openstreetmap.fr/

20 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open-source_hardware#Licenses

21 opendefinition.org/licenses/

22 Volunteer contributors take advantage of the contribution he/she made to the commons by the reputation he/she built and he/she can thus benefit professionally.

23 www.lamachineduvoisin.fr/

other issues. Firstly, what is the model that would better enable this resource to be durable in the long term, to be protected, but also to regenerate itself? The answer is not always straightforward. Considering the size of the community, or the importance of the necessary investments to develop the resource concerned, public authorities – the state, local authorities – or the market may seem more suitable in some cases. Secondly, what is the model that would promote the most contribution, participation, social cohesion, innovation, thereby leading to societies that would be more creative and rich in human relations? Last but not least, which, among the commons, the state and the market, would be the most suitable to ensure the greatest distribution of the resource, in line with social justice objectives?

When the approach in terms of commons gives a positive answer to these three questions, there is no doubting the utility and richness of this concept. Yet our common political and economic imagination still has to be mobilised, because one cannot "order" commons to exist. They have to be built through a permanent and collective innovative approach.

You can find numerous articles on this topic on the website of the association Vecam: www.vecam.org/

THE KNOWLEDGE COMMONS, FOR A RENEWED WAY OF THINKING

There is no progress for humankind without sharing knowledge. In the digital age, knowledge is flowing and shared easily, which enables cooperation between different communities, sound emulation and production of new knowledge. The knowledge commons aim at renewing the economic and political thinking. In that sense, the knowledge commons are a challenge for the future, a «pragmatic utopia» to which the 21st century should offer a progressive answer.

Health, culture, software, scientific contributions, seeds, and judicial issues are some of the fields concerned by the knowledge commons across the world.

One can identify four main options for action:

- *Intellectual production, and especially scientific contributions, should be accessible to the greatest number of citizens. Many research institutes and scientific foundations benefit from public subsidies. In exchange, these "producers of knowledge" should be required to make their contribution free of access.*
- *Public authorities should set an example by using freewares, considering that they are no less efficient than commercial software, if not the other way around. Besides, it is a way to save a considerable amount of public money, while promoting a progressive use of these tools at the same time.*
- *The "right to be forgotten" on the web is a concern expressed by a large majority of citizens. The omnipotence and the superpower of Google frighten and question the limits of the protection of privacy. The law should guarantee the "right to be forgotten".*
- *ACTA seems to be the most urgent issue on the political agenda. Everyone agrees that the citizens' protests should be continued so that pressure is kept on the European institutions about this draft international agreement that threatens public liberties.*

NATURE FOR ALL, AND BY ALL, THE COMMON RESOURCES OF ENVIRONMENTAL INFRASTRUCTURE

PABLO SERVIGNE, ASBL BARRICADE, LIÈGE

How can we take care of the Earth, its forests, its streams, its biodiversity, its climate, its wind, its silence, etc. ? These resources that are so complex and so fragile; these dynamic processes are constantly renewed and we use them freely. What should be done to protect these resources from our bulimic economic model? Should we go the privatisation route? Should we establish more rules and norms? Should we organise more international summits? Should we change school programmes?

A NEW PARADIGM

There is a more credible solution. This solution is based on a new conception of science, which explores the complexity of nature, analyses its instability, its laws of chaos, its principles of self-organisation, of emergence, of systematisation. This solution is entitled the "new alliance" (Prigogine and Stengers, 1978). This new paradigm has influenced political sciences through the work of Elinor Ostrom, who devoted 40 years of her life to take the myth of the tragedy of the commons apart. According to this myth, individuals in charge of commons – and who presumably only think about maximising their profits – always exhaust these resources. The message conveyed by this myth is clear: the solution to this tragedy is either to privatise this resource, or to put it under public management by an omnipotent and omniscient organisation. But both

of these solutions are based on a pessimistic vision of human beings, who are egoistic and incapable of cooperation. In reality, human beings talk to each other, and are able to organise themselves to handle their commons. Ostrom's work proves the above. We must now focus on this intellectual gap.

Example: in 1998, at the border between Mongolia, Russia and China, a satellite picture clearly shows significant differences in terms of overgrazing. Traditionally, pasture lands were handled by collective and nomadic property in this region. However, in Russia and China, the governments nationalised the pasture lands; and later in China these were privatised. In Mongolia, the pasture lands remained handled collectively by nomadic communities. As a result, in Mongolia, the degradation rate is about 9% on average, whereas in China (private management) and in Russia (public management), the degradation rates are about 50% on average (and as high as 75%).

PLENTY OF EVIDENCE

Ostrom arrived at her conclusions by assuming that the Homo economicus hypothesis is wrong, and that human beings can communicate, that they are rational and sensible to norms and reputation. When analysing management systems of natural resources across the world (e.g. irrigation, forestry, ground water), Ostrom and her colleagues developed principles that guarantee the proper functioning of commons of local natural resources on a small scale. These findings are summarised in a book published 22 years ago, entitled *Governing the Commons* (Ostrom, 1990). These principles are presented above by Tine De Moor, and have been enriched by decades of experiments and field research.

Recent example: in 2010, a group of researchers observed 39 local communities in the Ethiopian mountains that manage forests as commons. They first tested the stake-holders with economic games (to determine their inclination to cooperate and/or to commit fraud). Then they compared the results with the yield of the forest of each community. The best managed forests were the ones that had the

most co-operators, the ones that had a close market access point, the oldest ones, the ones that had a high-quality local leadership, as well as the ones where the co-operators invested the most to control fraud (because it has a direct and costly impact on them) (Rustagi et al., 2010).

EASY AND ONE-FIT-ALL SOLUTIONS ARE TO BE AVOIDED

Nowadays one can easily consider who individuals that manage a common local natural source can cooperate among each other, organise themselves and behave for the common good. It is not a utopia; alternatives to "all market" or "all state" solutions exist. Indeed these two options lead to disastrous management of the commons. One of the main contributions of Ostrom was, at the end, to show that nothing is either black or white, and that easy, one-fit-all solutions do not exist. Hence it is not about forbidding the market economy or abolishing the state, and making everything managed as commons instead. What we must understand is how these three pillars – private, public and common – can interact, complement each other and coexist.

Examples: seeds in a (private) garden that are shared with the neighbourhood contribute to biodiversity as a common. The state can also promote local community management of commons such as streams (e.g. through stream contracts).

At a larger scale (e.g. climate, biodiversity, oceans), problems are much more complex. In this context, Vincent and Elinor Ostrom put forward the so-called "polycentric governance", i.e. a dialogue between official and scientific stake-holders; complex, redundant and bureaucratic institutions; a mix of different organisations; and newly invented institutions that make experimentation, traineeship and change easier (Ostrom, 2005). To put it simply, it is about preserving institutional biodiversity.

TO REMEMBER

Between radical pessimism and naive optimism, Ostrom's work has been a breakthrough. Elinor Ostrom has stimulated our imagination and has encouraged us to dive into the complexity of human behaviour. We now

have to understand why and how some factors encourage or threaten cooperation between and among communities. This is the major issue at stake for our generation. Because without any cooperation, there will be no governance, therefore no commons... and soon enough no natural resources anymore.

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See also the articles published on www.barricade.be/

WHO SHOULD BE IN CHARGE OF WATER MANAGEMENT?

"All human beings are originally (...) in a possession of land that is in conformity with right, that is, they have a right to be wherever nature or chance (...) has placed them. This kind of possession (...) is a possession in common because the spherical surface of the earth unites all the places on its surface", said philosopher Immanuel Kant.

Streams do not care about States' borders or property. The former preceded the latter, and will certainly survive them. The question is: which management system could ensure the quality of these transverse and cross-border goods, their durability and their availability for all?

It is not so easy to dissociate the use of the commons - to which every individual is entitled - from the property rights linked to these resources. The concept of property right is so firmly anchored in our practices that it covers at the same time both the exclusive right to use a good and to destroy it (e.g. the Amazon rainforest), as Hardin's tragedy of the Commons put it. The practice of the commons has nothing to do with property rights. The commons can be private, either individual or collective, public or even both at the same time. What matters is the community which is built around the management of one particular resource, and which defines access and management rules to enable its durability.

Who should be in charge of water management? It is not easy to answer this question, particularly since each case is different in terms of community and of topographic situation. Therefore there is not one universal "best practice"!We have to reach a collective answer with all the persons concerned. The following main features can still be highlighted: the fountain in the centre of the village belongs to the local community; the supply of water to the valley is a matter for the riverside residents, the regional or even the supra-regional authorities. As for the global water resources, the global community and international organisations are responsible for their management.

Read further on the website of the Alternative World Water Forum, www.fame2012.org/

CONSTRUCTING A NEW SYSTEM: COLLECTIVELY PRODUCED COMMON RESOURCES

MAARTEN ROELS, STEUNPUNT DUURZAME ONTWIKKELING, GHENT UNIVERSITY

HOW THE COMMONS MAY OFFER ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS TO A DEAD END AGRICULTURAL MAIN STREET (TERRE-EN-VUE, A CASE-STUDY)

While agriculture is probably the world's most critical economic supporting service to the resilience of our societies, the current dominant economic and agronomic model on which it has come to be based is extremely precarious. Its far-reaching dependency on external inputs such as chemical fertilizer, fungicides, pesticides, terminal seeds, and massive amounts of non-renewable energy and its relentlessly ongoing delocalisation are at the heart of this situation. In this context three tendencies in the agricultural field deserve special attention: (i) the ongoing fragmentation between urban and rural zones, (ii) the growing length of the food supply chain (iii) the increased seeking of benefits in the economies of scale.

Much (rural) sociological research points out that the clear distinctions between the city and the countryside have become blurred in the postmodern era. From a citizen point of view this clearly is the case. Mobility and information technology indeed allow us to ignore the distance between the city and its hinterland. The ever growing suburbanisation is a clear symptom of this situation. However, from an agricultural point of view the situation looks very different. Production is situated in the rural

sphere, consumption in the urban sphere. The result is that few citizens are aware of how their food is produced, processed and distributed. The lengthening of the supply chain further adds to this state of affairs. Since 2009 more than half of the world's population lives in an urban environment. This means that the majority of the planet's inhabitants live in the ideal conditions for a far reaching ignorance about the way the most basic natural resource is being used, i.e. the earth's soil.

Farmers who strive to develop alternatives ways to grow food and use the soil in a sustainable way, largely inspired by the principles of agroecology meet obstacles that can only be tackled when related to the tendencies mentioned above. A major obstacle is the continuously decreasing primary income at the farm gate. This causes a decrease in economic viability, lowers the willingness to experiment with new agroecological farming types and decreases the attractiveness of the agricultural sector. The decreasing income is closely connected to the lengthening of the supply chain in which an ever bigger part of the final price will be attributed to the growing number of intermediaries between the producer and the consumer. The growing distance between the sphere of production (the rural south) and the sphere of consumption (the urban north) accelerates these evolutions as well as the ever growing size and reduced production diversity of modern farming. The search for more land is one of the driving forces behind the process of land grabbing that seems to be unstoppable though its existence, causes and consequences have now become widely known. Rising land prices due to land grabbing further contribute to the de-localisation of production towards the south where arable land is often cheaper. This accelerates the stretching of the supply chain and the "rationalisation" towards large scale single crop production. The different tendencies are clearly intermeshed and catalysing each other.

What role may states play in the development of more sustainable forms of agriculture? When tackling this question it may be relevant to bring to mind the current hollowing out of state power. As political scientific discussions pointed out since a few years, states witness a

combination of vertical and horizontal power shifts. Vertically centres of power are both moving towards on the one hand European and international bodies such as the European Commission and Parliament and the UN institutions, and on the other hand cities and municipalities. The horizontal shift refers to the fact that decisive power is being shared by an increasing number of actors from different fields, entrepreneurial, citizen driven, etc. These parallel shifts are often aligned with the shifts from (good) government to new modes of governance, i.e. multi-level and multi-actor governance. As the eloquent Elinor Ostrom elaborately described in Governing the Commons, what is really at stake is the governance of the access to natural resources.

For agriculture three types of access are essential: access to knowledge and know-how, access capital and access to the market. In this reflection paper we focus on access to land as a form of natural capital.

The issue of access to land is a highly complex matter. In order to make it intelligible in the frame of this paper, we will focus on a particular case-study, namely the emergence of the *Terre-en-vue* Movement in (French-speaking) Belgium. Three factors are key in the issue of access to land: (i) rising land prices, (ii) the lack of legal frameworks that allow for innovation, and (iii) a European policy that encourages the catalyses land grabbing.

The core of rising land prices is economic speculation on agricultural land. As urbanisation, 'gardenisation' and 'horsification' continues and industrial plants and transportation infrastructures keeps on spreading, every agricultural piece of land carries the promise of an official land use change and thus change of economic value in the absence of a legal framework that fixes the land use to feeding the people. Land owners who do want to offer exclusive land use rights to organic growers also lack the legal means to do so as the renting legislation offers no space for conditions to be added to the renting contract. A landowner cannot determine any access rules such as the requirement to grow organically, use a high diversity cultivation plan, develop short supply chains, and other agroecological principles. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)

of today further aggravates this situation, though some positive changes also seem to be in view. Apart from the fact that the current EU and state financing of agriculture has created farms that are extremely fragile micro economies because of their fundamental dependency on state aid, an essential problem in the CAP functioning is Single Area Payments Scheme (SAPS) that couple aid and land area which encourages large farms to grab even more land in order to benefit from this aid. The lack of adapted pension schemes for farmers also contributes to land grabbing as this offers a form of social security.

How may a citizen initiative as the Terre-en-vue Movement offer a pathway towards a more resilient food system? In the charter[24] of this movement we find that the concept of the commons is one of its major sources of inspiration. Before evaluating this initiative according the eight governance principles as defined by Ostrom (1990) proposed, I will briefly describe the historical, philosophical and organisational features of this initiative. These features will then be further developed in the evaluation scheme. The analytical grid we will use may be represented as follows:

Principle 1. Clearly define boundaries (user rights and CPR)
Principle 2. Congruence between appropriation & provision rules and local conditions
Principle 3. Collective Choice Arrangements
Principle 4. Monitoring
Principle 5. Graduated Sanctions
Principle 6. Conflict resolution mechanisms
Principle 7. Minimal recognition of rights to organise
Principle 8. Nested Enterprises
(Ostrom 1990, p. 90)

In 2010 a growing awareness about the extreme pressure experienced by Belgian peasant agriculture grew in the minds of the members of more than 20 NGO's that directly or indirectly where involved in food, agriculture and wider socio-economical issues. They constituted a reflection and action network called Plate-forme pour le soutien à

24 The charter may be found on the website www.terre-en-vue.be

l'agriculture paysanne (Platform for the Support to Peasant Agriculture). The network soon identified two fields of action on which it wished to work: seed autonomy and access to land. In February 2011 a core group given the task to set up tools would lift the barriers to land access in all its complexities. The so-called Dynamo group was set up. It counted seven people with different backgrounds: agriculture, law, alternative financing, geography, cooperative enterprising and local food systems. This core group was strongly inspired by the initiative of Terre de liens[25] in France, but also studied German, Dutch and English examples of land trusts. It sets as its goals, the development of a NGO, a cooperative enterprise and a foundation that would mutually enforce each other in the quest for freeing agricultural land from speculation and giving it back its status of a common good, determine the rules of governance and give agroecological projects access to the land. Independently from this process a local group of citizens prepared the buying of 7 ha for their village farmer in order to prevent the land to be bought by an agro-industrial investor. The local initiative looked for supra-local support, the supra-local Dynamo for local embedding. The two processes merged a few months later. The NGO was set up on October 19th 2011 and the cooperative enterprise on March 21st. While looking through the glasses of Ostroms theory we will present the project in greater detail.

Clearly define boundaries. Boundaries are clearly defined at several levels of this case. First of all the boundaries between the different actors: farmers, investors, project managers of the movement, state institutions. In different documents the autonomy of the farmer is confirmed. However, clear boundaries are also set to frame the type of farming that will be allowed on the Terre-en-vue land, i.e. farming that respects the principles of agroecology[26]. Investors, i.e. shareholders of the cooperative enterprise, all have one vote independently of the

25 See for more info: www.terredeliens.org

26 For more information see: www.agroecologie.be. The basic principles can be found in Altieri (1987): Agroecology, The Science of Sustainable Agriculture. Wezel (2009) and Francis (2003) offer a clear overview of the history of agroecology. The UN report on agroecology by Olivier De Schutter (2010) is also very instructive.

number of shares they hold. They can demand from the farmer and the project managers of the movement to respect the principles of the charter that is their common vision, but their power reaches no further. State institutions can invest in the movement but have no particular power compared to other investors. The statutes of the cooperative enterprise preview clear boundaries to the power of investors by the provision of two types of shares, A and B. A shares can only be held by NGO's with a social goal that is compatible with those of the Terre-en-vue Movement. The majority is held by the NGO Terre-en-vue. B shares can be held by anyone who respects the charter and the statutes. A shareholders have veto right in decisions that touch the fundamentals of the movement. Clear boundaries are also drawn between the local and the supra-local level. At the local level, citizens can form a group around a particular project. They bring in at least 50 per cent of the needed investment and have complete organisational independence, though they will be helped by the project managers to obtain this autonomy if they ask for it. Both the horizontal and the vertical independence are guaranteed in this project. These distinctions are further developed by the provision of spheres of collaboration. Each of the legal structures of the movement (NGO, Co-op, Foundation) have their own board. "Dynamo" groups members of the different boards. Decisions are taken collectively and by consensus. This group prepares work that is later shared with a large citizen network in a sphere called "the forum". The forum amends proposals from the dynamo and helps in the refinement of its actions through its collective intelligence. More practically, the borders of the land owned by Terre-en-vue will also be clearly defined.

Congruence between appropriation & provision rules and local conditions. This design principle seems to be applied in at least two ways: by the requirements of the agroecological design principles and by the local embedding of the farmland acquisition projects. One of the requirements of agroecology is the development of a strong connection between the production and the consumption pole, i.e. the development of a local food system. This approach is prioritised in the Terre-en-vue project. In fact what happens through this approach is that shareholders become

a co-manager of one of the most fundamental natural resources for the well-being of our societies. Supra-local shareholders encourage re-localisation of the food economy and local shareholders apply this process with supra-local help. Land will only be bought by the co-op if at least half of the needed investment will be brought in by the local group. This ensures a strong local embedding and ratifies the need for a strong connection to local needs. One of the main objectives of the NGO Terre-en-vue is to accompany local project leaders. Understanding local food and employments needs and potentials will be at the heart of its functioning. The NGO will thus enforce the needed congruence. From an economical point of view this embedding is essential for the well-being of the farm activity. Today the group of smallest farms (less than 5 ha) is disappearing at a very rapid pace in Belgium. The most viable model that offers a way out of this dead end agricultural main street, is the model of community supported agriculture [27].

Collective Choice Arrangements. Since its very first steps the Terre-en-vue Movement has applied new forms of collective governance and has inscribed this approach in its statues. Sociocracy shapes many of its collective action moments. As Ostrom suggests the movement distinguishes constitutional, collective decision and operational rules. Constitutional rules, such as those contained in the statutes were carefully prepared by the dynamo group and than further developed the forum. Collective decisions are prepared by an active core-group and than further developed by the dynamo. Operational rules are defined by those who apply them but they are directed by the constitutional frame that was collectively and organically constructed. In order to guarantee the balance between local autonomy and supra-local coherence each level is defined, collaborative spheres are organised and inter-scale solidarity is encouraged. In its long term action plan the movement chooses to work together with different public institutional scales. It clearly steps beyond public vs. private dichotomies and strives for multi-actor and multi-scale arrangements.

27 See www.csa-netwerk.be for a concrete example in Belgium. The basic principles of this model may be found in Henderson (1999)

Monitoring, Graduated Sanctions and Conflict resolution mechanisms cannot be evaluated yet as these features are not yet put in place in the Terre-en-vue Movement. However, studies are actually being prepared in order to integrate these elements in the most optimal way in the movements' functioning.

Minimal recognition of rights to organise. The movement's openness to public-private collaborations have facilitated the willingness of public officials to recognise its pertinence and legitimacy. Further collaborations are being prepared.

Nested Enterprises. Since its beginning networking has been the strength of the movement. Network is the substrate on which it grew and this substrate contained different geographical scales, or holons, from the outset. Necessity will allow this nested structure to persevere. Supra-local actors can do nothing without the support from local actors who materialise a re-localised economy and local actors need support from supra-local actors to remove legal, financial and other obstacles that are too hard to tackle at the local level because of their interconnectedness with many other issues. Apart from this horizontal nested structure, the movement actively looks for collaboration with other fields, such as for instance social inclusion and the energy sector. This also creates a horizontally nested structure.

What conclusions may be drawn from this reflection paper? There are indeed no standard, clear-cut rules for a perfect management of common goods. The design principles are merely suggestions and may help us to think further. We may also want to reflect on common goods as processes rather than as products. From this point of view the Terre-en-vue movement seems a promising process. It carries the basic principles in its genes. What we have witnessed is the creation of different spheres of collaboration where behaviour is shaped by new, adaptive social contracts. Terre-en-vue, however, stands at the cradle of its project and collective action around major questions still has to occur. For instance, several farmers are now waiting to collaborate with the project and when a new plot will be accessible to

be movement the question may emerge at who it may be attributed. The question of access attribution will be complex as it is situated at the heart of governing the commons. An other question that may be essential is that of social antagonisms. Terre-en-vue indeed chose to set the price of its shares at 100 euros in order to allow a large public to invest in the movement. However, if the communication strategy of the movement will not anticipate the fact that many population groups are excluded from the alternative communication networks on which it relies, it will never reach these groups. Providing access is not enough. Many people will not know about it as they do not have access the same communication networks. This adds an extra challenge to the project, but also extra opportunities, because the mentioned groups may harbour much valuable know-how and ideological viewpoints that may be surprisingly close to those of the commons.

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THE COMMUNITY LAND TRUST (CLT), A DIFFERENT KIND OF HOUSING

At the crossroads between territorial and social issues, a large spectrum of concern is growing. From urban farming to housing, an insisting question is to be raised: how to make these elementary goods available, though they are costly, especially for the poorest people?

The word «Trust» refers to the alliance between land property and building property. According to this concept, the community – or CLT –, a public authority, or any other actor buys a land, in order to indefinitely own it but make it available to targeted disadvantaged people, either individually or gathered in an association, to assume ownership of the existing or coming building under favourable conditions. The building can serve as housing or other utilities (e.g. market, nursery), depending on the needs identified by the CLT.

The owner of the building pays the price of its construction, as well as a leasing allowance to the CLT for the provision of the land under specified conditions. These include keeping the building and the land in good shape, respecting the use conditions as defined with the CLT, and avoiding speculation by ensuring in advance a fair price in case of selling the building so as to enable new targeted people to benefit from similar conditions. These agreements are agreed upon by three types of actors: the owners of the building (individuals or groups), politicians – the general interest is at stake – and the co-operators that are local investors.

The challenges are numerous: this model implies a deep mindset shift – land ownership is anchored in our cultures –; our economic, political, legal and fiscal frameworks do not currently fit easily with the CLT. Considering legal aspects, different forms of social enterprises and cooperatives could be combined with not-for-profit associations to create a structure that could fit a CLT case. With regard to public authorities, public-owned lands should exclusively remain public, or at least be collectively managed. There is a whole new model to put in general use.

But opportunities are equally numerous: people desire change; alternative networks get broader and broader and their links stronger and stronger; knowledge and expertise can be shared based on accumulated experiences; public authorities bring support when they

perceive and recognise the usefulness and necessity of the approach; the CLT is a better investment for public funding and public lands than many other projects. Some exciting achievements such as eco-districts in Brussels and klimaat wijken (climate districts) in Flanders are promising for further developments.

WHICH ALTERNATIVES TO MAKE OUR NEIGHBOURHOODS ALIVE AGAIN ?

How to breathe new life into my neighbourhood? How to face the loneliness that elderly people experience, and the fact that they live in big houses that do not fit their needs? A city councillor highlights that the lands the city owns should not be simply sold. He proposes instead that the city remains the owner of the lands, while letting projects with a collective aim be carried out on these lands.

Why couldn't we do "CouchSurfing" instead of sleeping in hostels during our trips? In Ghent, the neighbourhood close to the abandoned Saint-Bavon Abbey has been appropriated by the inhabitants. They transformed it into a cultural centre with collective gardens.

Why couldn't we implement these practices elsewhere? The kitchen is a central room in a house, where environmental issues are at stake. Why couldn't we help people manage their kitchens in a more sustainable way?

What about creating places to fix bikes? You come with your bike and fix it yourself with the help of specialists and (salvaged) tools that are furnished by the organisation. You can also build a whole bike using salvaged pieces left there by former members of the organisation. There is a price for each kind of work.

If you want to find more sustainable consumption initiatives closed to your place, visit the website: www.asblrcr.be/

RECLAIMING FINANCE AND THE ECONOMY: ECONOMIC COMMONS

ARNAUD ZACHARIE, GENERAL SECRETARY OF CNCD-11.11.11

MONEY, A COMMON FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL LEVEL

The current crisis is daily proof that the global race for competitiveness might lead to economic, social and environmental disasters. In that sense, it strengthens the argument of those who assert that finance and production should serve other purposes than simply the never-ending race for profit. This is particularly the approach embraced by the theory of the economic commons. Examples are numerous, and emerged well before the crisis, such as ethical finance, social business and cooperatives. This is also true for currencies, which can represent under certain circumstances a common from local to global level.

MONEY, A LOCAL COMMON

Money is a core element in the organisation of the economy. It is traditionally issued by one or several governments, as in the case of the euro. However, local and complementary currencies have also existed for decades. Those experiences show that currencies can be issued independently from a government and be used alongside the official currency. Around 3,000 local currencies can be listed across the world.

The aim of those local currencies is either to relocate the economy and develop local networks of producers and consumers (e.g. local services, short supply chains), or to match non-satisfied needs with unused resources (e.g. local exchange networks).

Those experiences of local currencies are even more important in times of crisis. Between July 1932 and November 1933, the city of Wörgl for instance put in place a local currency as a response to the Great Depression. In 2001, 17 complementary currencies were created in Argentina, at a time when the country was heading to insolvency. Complementary currencies have also been created in Europe since the beginning of the Eurozone crisis.

These local currencies are one of many initiatives opposing the unstable international system based on short-term profit.

MONEY, A GLOBAL COMMON

Despite the effect complementary currencies can have at the local level, they cannot help stabilising the whole international monetary system, which has been liberalised after the abolition of the Bretton Woods system in 1971. Since then, global monetary competition has led to competitive devaluations and speculative bubbles, diving the world into chronic monetary and financial crises that have tremendous economic and social effects.

This state of play has made reform of international monetary system an urgent necessity. Alternatives to this system are inspired by the idea of an international reserve currency developed by John Maynard Keynes at the end of WWII. As the Expert Committee of the United Nations on reforms of the International Monetary and Financial System chaired by Joseph Stiglitz pointed out, "when Keynes revised his idea of a global currency in his proposal for an International Clearing Union, as part of the preparations for what became the Bretton Woods Conference, his major concern was the elimination of asymmetric adjustment between deficit and surplus countries leading to the tendency towards deficiency of global aggregate demand and a constraint on the policy space needed for policies in support of full employment"[28].

Indeed global financial imbalances soon became a major source of instability. It was already the case during the 1930s crisis – hence Keynes'

28 United Nations Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and its Impact on Development, op. cit., 24-26 June 2009, p. 100.

proposal – but the situation has seriously deteriorated since the 1990s. Global financial imbalances emerge when some states accumulate significant current account surpluses while others collect similarly significant deficits. In case a country, or a region, wants to absorb its deficit to become a surplus country, there will inevitably be growing deficits in return somewhere else in the world. When they are too many current account deficits, then the crises emerge. And when a majority of countries start making surpluses, if other countries do not agree on deepening their deficits in return, there will surely be deflationary pressures due to an insufficient global demand and overproduction.

The current crisis has followed this same path precisely. Since the end of the 1990s, several countries such as China, Japan, Germany, and a number of other emerging countries and oil exporters have developed growing surpluses, while others have accumulated deficits, such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Southern European countries (Greece, Portugal, and Spain). These imbalances show how asymmetrical global growth based on credit-fuelled consumption and private indebtedness in deficit countries was. When the indebtedness capacities of American, British and Southern European households have reached their limits, the crisis started. A considerable amount of savings from surplus countries was indeed invested in deficit countries' financial systems via uncertain tricks of globalisation. It was not until the revelation of these financial products (previously presumed secure by financial experts) as toxic assets that the whole global financial system became jeopardised.

In order to put an end to these global imbalances, the idea of creating a new international reserve currency hit the agenda again. In practical terms, it would consist of creating a new reserve currency that is not issued by any state, but by a new international institution created for that purpose only. This new currency would be a global economic common aimed at providing global monetary and financial stability. It could be exchanged with state currencies and be issued according to economic cycles and needs of the states. It could be granted in order to compensate excessive deficits, while surplus countries would be

encouraged to spend it in order to stop financial imbalances that could lead to crises. This new global reserve currency could also be granted to finance global commons.

Hence the new international monetary system would be based on multilateral cooperation with the aim of ensuring international monetary and financial stability. This is a "realistic utopia" that the G20 states could be inspired to consider.

READ FURTHER

About complementary currencies:

www.lietaer.com/

www.monnaie-locale-complementaire.net/

www.etopia.be/spip.php?article1977

About a new global reserve currency:

www.halifaxinitiative.org/sites/halifaxinitiative.org/files/(Web)15%20years%20is%20enough.pdf

www.un.org/ga/econcrisissummit/docs/FinalReport_CoE.pdf

DISCOVER SOCIAL ECONOMY AND COMPLEMENTARY CURRENCIES AT HOME!

The economic sphere puts a stranglehold on citizens, imposing efficiency costs, profit maximisation and growth as the ultimate goal. How to grasp economic commons again, after they have been colonised by the mainstream neoliberal model?

How to develop cooperative management models instead of competitive ones, which encourage creativity instead of standardisation, and which favour (bio)diversity and dialogue instead of turning over the single mindset again and again? How to build up cooperatives, create Local Exchange Trading System (LETS), develop new forms of association? What about traditional forms of enterprises and their internal functioning? Can we, and should we, change them? What about money? Should the euro become a common? How to take back control on creating money? What role for local currencies? These are the numerous questions that are raised talking about social economy and local currencies.

«DE BLAUWE BLOEM»OR THE SOCIAL ECONOMY

Old initiatives that are re-launched should be explored. "De Blauwe Bloem" in Ghent is one example. This local grocery store, opened in 1976, specialised in organic food is still taking care of its clients and the environment, while applying a social economic model.

The original concept of "De Blauwe Bloem" is to offer clients products that are not merely food ("voedingsmiddelen" literally means means of feeding, of surviving in Dutch), but also bearer of life going beyond survival ("levensmiddelen" could mean means to live). Caring about the quality of our food and of our lands, the grocery store favours products that come from organic farming.

Such cultivation methods do not fit a business model that always exerts more pressure on prices in order to get higher yields. Yet, this is actually how a free market economy works, requiring even more growth and more resources to fuel it. More and more products are replaced by lower quality products because the latter are much cheaper.

De Blauwe Bloem prefers the advantages of consultation, mediation and the social economic model rather than the worrying consequences of a competitive economic model. Firstly, when they gather around the table, clients, consumers and producers debate with the only purpose of finding an agreement. Consumers voice their needs in terms of products and quantities. As for producers, they announce the local production capacities. Then they fix a true and fair price, according to the amount of products that clients agree to consume. This association model does not seek always more profit, though traditional stocks and expenses remain necessary. At the end of the day, food waste and various intermediary costs are avoided, prices are not so high but not so low either, and exploitation of one group on another does not make sense anymore.

De Blauwe Bloem is an experimental initiative, which needs to be adapted according to various agreements between clients, storekeepers and producers. De Blauwe Bloem claims to be part of a change from an anonymous free market economy towards a social economy, by all and for all.

Read further : www.de-blauwe-bloem.org/ (available only in Dutch)

ECO-IRIS, A LOCAL CURRENCY PROJECT IN BRUSSELS

This currency aims at encouraging environmentally friendly purchases and behaviours from households, and at stimulating the local economy. Eco-Iris has been created in the context of the 4th waste framework of the Region of Brussels-Capital. Launched by the Ministry for Environment of the Region of Brussels-Capital, this complementary currency has been designed in partnership with inhabitants of pilot neighbourhoods in Brussels (Schaerbeek, Boitsfort and Forest). This pilot project managed by Brussels Environment was officially launched in April 2012 for a two-year period. If successful, it will be extended to other neighbourhoods.

The idea is simple: according to a list of environmentally friendly behaviours, citizens get a certain amount of Eco-Iris issued by the local Eco-Iris agency, which they can use in local shops. Sustainable

products and services are given priority, but all local shops are included in order to stimulate local economy and engage its transition towards sustainable economy. Local shopkeepers can either use Eco-Iris in return to buy goods and services in other local shops; or they can get euro coins in exchange, with an extra 5% fee as an incentive to use Eco-Iris back in the local network. Eco-Iris has been first issued in the form of bills, but it should be available in an electronic format in a second phase, in order to use them via phones, or even via the Internet. Eco-Iris is based on the Euro: one Eco-Iris equals 0,1 €.

This project shows that economy is only a mean, not an end in itself. It is a tool for a more sustainable economy, either by encouraging environmentally friendly behaviours or by relocating supply chains. It contributes both to the ecological transition and to strengthening social links within a neighbourhood.

Finance is too important to be left to the hands of bankers. It is only by taking action within the system (e.g. changing for ethical banking, backing financial regulation) and by creating alternatives (e.g. local currencies, cooperative economy, not-for-profit exchange) that citizens would really appropriate the economic and financial system, to make it fairer and more sustainable.

READ FURTHER

Local currencies in Mons:

financethiquemons.agora.eu.org/spip.php?article77

Information platform on complementary currencies:

muntuit.eu/thuis/ (in Dutch)

In Antwerp: a-kaart.antwerpen.be/ (in Dutch)

In Ghent : www.torekes.be/ (in Dutch)

SHARING WITHOUT OWNING: GENETIC HERITAGE AS A COMMON RESOURCE

TOM DEDEURWAERDERE, FNRS, PROFESSOR AND DIRECTOR OF THE BIOGOV UNIT OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF LAW DEPARTMENT, (UCL)

GOVERNING GLOBAL GENETIC RESOURCES: THE LAST FRONTIER OF GLOBAL COMMONS?

There has been a dramatic increase in interest in commons in the last 10 to 15 years, from traditional commons managing the use of exhaustible natural resources by fixed numbers of people within natural borders, to global information commons, dealing with non-exclusive knowledge goods used by a potentially limitless number of unknown users. The emerging global genetic-resource commons fits somewhere in between, shifting from small local networks of exchange of plants and animal genetic materials to global information commons as digital-information infrastructures allow physically disjointed initiatives to be networked in virtual global pools. The common-based management of our biological heritage is still largely ignored by policy-makers, even though the pools of genetic resources are the building blocks for any sustainable alternatives in future agriculture and medicine, such as for building alternatives to pesticides and other chemicals in agriculture, and have enormous value for livelihoods in developing and industrialized countries, for instance for developing appropriate responses to climate change.

In the past, it was difficult to imagine commons-based management and production of goods on a global scale, due to such factors as the costs

of exchange and the lack of global institutional frameworks. Arguably, the first major instance of commons-based management on a regional scale was the organization of modern scientific research during the seventeenth century in Europe, preceding by more than two centuries the contemporary open access movement for disseminating scientific research results. In recent decades, however, digital networks have dramatically expanded the opportunities for building and sustaining different kinds of commons on a global scale. As a result, vast amounts of human, animal, plant and microbial genetic material are collected throughout the world from various regions, habitats and populations and exchanged in collaborative research networks (cf. figure 1).

Figure 1. Examples of innovations that depend on sharing of genetic-resources on a non-exclusive basis by groups and communities: new kinds of beer (using yeast as a commons), adapted animal breeds in Brazil (using animal genetic resources from India as a commons) and old varieties of tomatoes (using old landraces).

The positive impact of the development of the global and regional genetic-resource commons has, however, been attenuated by a set of counterbalancing factors, which could jeopardize the whole enterprise. The important commercial value of a small subset of genetic resources, especially in the field of pharmaceutical product development, has put pressure on the sharing ethos that is at the basis of the exchange of resources within the commons. In addition, communalism and norms against secrecy in the scientific research communities have been eroded by

delays in publication and restrictions on the sharing of research materials and tools due to increased competition for research funding. Finally, the non-exclusive ownership regime has come into direct conflict with the expansion of the global intellectual property rights or other restrictive legal frameworks. For example intellectual property rights are now even claimed on genetic resources simply isolated from nature, as long as one can show a clear industrial use, such as illustrated by companies that attempted to claim patents over products from the ancient Neem tree[29] in India, which have only been revoked after years of debate and litigation. Another illustration of these pressures on the commons is the selection of old vegetable varieties in France by informal citizen networks through the association Kokopelli. Litigation has prospered against that association by seed companies, considering the commercialisation of non-certified conservation varieties to be illegal.

In this context of both opportunities and mounting pressures, we contend that the disaggregated assets of the global and regional citizen networks and communities must be combined and strengthened within institutional frameworks that would be organized and managed by the networks and communities themselves, on the model of the open source software communities (for the use of genetic resources as knowledge assets) or on the model of the natural resources commons (for their use as biophysical resources). However, at the same time, public policy is a need that would immunize those essential public assets from inappropriate proprietary claims and that would reinforce the underlying social norms that have been weakened by the proliferation of strong intellectual property rights and related policies.

On the one hand, these policies should establish basic access rights to the commons that provide clear social and environmental benefits, instead of enclosing them in market-like exclusive access regimes. Examples of the latter include exemptions in intellectual property right legislation such as that adopted in France and Germany, and access to limits on the ownership of living organisms such as is already the

29 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Azadirachta_indica

case for the human genome. On the other hand social networks that already promote stewardship over genetic resources commons should be recognized and receive institutional support.

GENETIC COMMONS AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION

In theory, there are four categories of commons: common resources such as nature and the environment ("common-pool resources"), collectively produced commons ("common-pool goods") such as genetic commons, pure commons such as knowledge, and private goods. The latter are managed by the market, whereas pure commons are managed by the state. The way common-pool resources and goods are managed is still to be defined. It would necessarily require some public management, while not being completely pure commons.

In the 1970s, these common-pool goods and resources were considered almost exclusively as private goods, therefore managed by the market. But the results were catastrophic (e.g. the Kyoto protocol and the privatisation of air). Neither is the state the best solution for the management of the commons, since these commons are cross-border. New management modes are therefore required. They should be inspired by non-state collective action such as cooperatives, or networks of citizens. The issue at stake was and remains the management the commons for the benefit of the community that needs these resources to live in a sustainable way, thereby invoking a long-term perspective as well as future generations in the management of the commons.

Arguing for non-state management does not mean that states have nothing to do with the management of the commons. Quite the contrary, states must bring their support to non-state organisations through staffing and financial means. In France for instance, the Maison des Semences[30] should get more support from public authorities to enable a proper defence of traditional seeds, which are really common-pool resources. Hence up until now, rules and norms are threatening this kind of organisation.

30 To go further, visit the website of the French network «semences paysannes» www.semencespaysannes.org/bdf/bip/fiche-bip-139.html

State involvement and governance innovation are two key aspects of the management of the commons. New legal bases and norms (social norms for instance) encourage innovation and non-state collective organisation, such as network of exchanges of seeds, producer-consumer networks, etc.

DISCUSSION

- In order to preserve the commons, shouldn't we use them as efficiently as possible, by making the market even more free?

  This ideology has dominated the agenda in the 1990s. But since the beginning of the 2000s, flaws of this mainstream framework have been revealed, and new forms of organisation emerge from citizens' initiatives (bottom-up, grassroots initiatives). These initiatives, though still fragile, are being institutionalised. The aim is to provide them with a strong legal framework.

- Is the classification of goods in economics according to their rival and excludable aspects a problem when considering the commons? Shouldn't we review the way we teach economy and the way we approach goods in economics?

  In theoretical terms, the commons are at a crossroads between several disciplines (philosophy, sociology, political science, law, economy). In terms of innovation, we do not need technological innovations so much (they are already well developed), but we do need social innovations. We need to rethink "human resources" – only defined in narrow terms nowadays – around key concepts such as "labour", "employment", "division and promotion of work".

- Can education and social innovation help put an end to the process of patenting living organisms?

  The current legal framework regarding patenting living organisms is truly horrifying. If a new system is to be built, a new way of managing goods, education and innovation is required. What we need is a new generation of scientists in universities, as well as new social and legal norms. For instance in the case of traditional or ancient seeds, it is forbidden to trade them because they do not belong to the official

list of tradable seeds. In order to overcome this interdiction, farmer organisations have been very creative, by offering seeds instead of selling them. Thereby they have built up a strong social network between consumers and farmers.

- Which approach should be favoured? The theoretical or the practical one?

  Of course, action is only the tip of the iceberg. At the roots of action, there is a rationale, a belief. Upstream, a conceptual framework is used to encourage others to act in a certain way. Downstream, feedbacks on the action or the experimentation can allow the conceptual framework to evolve and be improved. After all, action and thinking, theory and practice, gain to learn from each other, to be fuelled with one another.

  Research and academia are moving faster than we think. The mainstream neoliberal economic model is currently losing momentum. There is a whole new spectrum emerging, such as behavioural economics.

  In that context, one should not forget to expand the circle of stakeholders beyond intellectuals and managers. The management of the commons requires the inclusive movement of the sociocracy. The gender dimension is also a key issue to enable diversity and differences to interact.

- What management for the genetic commons? – the case of seeds

  Seeds are literally at the root of food. Everyone is therefore concerned by genetic commons. Thus we need to find norms and rules that include a maximum of seeds' "users" in the process of elaborating these norms. In the case of seeds in particular, there are two opposing approaches: the creative approach on the one hand – creating new hybrids varieties –, and the conservative approach on the other hand – preserving nature in preventing any human intervention. These two opposing approaches are particularly relevant in the case of GMOs and rural seeds. The fundamental issue at stake is the cohabitation of traditional seeds with GMOs. Yet the way these goods are managed should tend towards a cohabitation of both approaches, between creativity and conservatism, and with different forms of collective management.

  The French network «Semences paysannes» for instance has developed exchanges of seeds with respect to specific rules that ensure the sustainability of the approach (e.g. the seeds can be exchanged but

not traded; the producer should apply agroecological principles to the lands it is in charge of; there should be a local relationship between producers and users).

Concrete initiatives exist and they are promising. There are common grounds between the seed movement and the open source movement, or the alternative management of forests. A theoretical approach could be built on these initiatives. The key issue is to convey our message up to the political level. Put together, these initiatives could help build a new paradigm for the management of genetic commons.

CONCLUSION: THE COMMONS AND REINVENTING PROSPERITY

TOM DEDEURWAERDERE, PROFESSOR UCL, FNRS
ISABELLE CASSIERS, PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS, UCL, FNRS

The new literature redefining prosperity (SDC, 2003 ; Jackson, 2009 ; Cassiers et alii, 2011) and the one on the commons (Ostrom, 1990, 2010; Brousseau, Dedeurwaerdere, Jouvet & Willinger, eds. forthcoming) have not been confronted to each other so far. Yet both aim at engaging the transition towards a socially and environmentally sustainable socio-economic model. Therefore it seems logical to think that those two approaches could be combined and would reinforce each other. The commons could be a way to redefine prosperity, a shared prosperity without material growth.

The commons can be defined as goods (in a broad sense: material and immaterial goods, services) that require collective action to be managed for the general interest, often with a view of sustainability (in a broad sense: environmental limits, social justice). It often implies the simultaneous production of a good and the build-up of a community.

The way the commons are produced and managed (by collective action) makes them different from both private goods (produced by individuals for themselves or the market) and public goods (produced and/or managed by public authorities).

More fundamentally speaking, the concept of the commons invites us to go ahead of the economic definition of a good (seen as an object of production and consumption) to put into question the philosophical meaning of good and life in common .

Over the last decades, Western history of societies clearly shows how the emphasis has shifted towards the opposition between private goods under the free market law, with a clear aim of individual profit and public goods managed by the state, on behalf of the general interest. The last three decades, profoundly marked by the fall of the alternative model to capitalism (in USSR and China), have paved the way to the apology of free market and the weakening of state intervention in the economy. But though the rationale of privatisation and individual profit have been extended to almost all aspects of individual and collective life, even more numerous and urging questions have been raised, to which the free market economy model does not seem able to bring any answer: environmental limits, inequality and poverty, weakening of social bonds, the very purpose of what we do.

The multi-aspect crisis we are facing reinforces the belief that these questions would not find any answer in the way prosperity has been defined in the West over decades.

Many collective initiatives have been developed in that context, sometimes inspired by very ancient customs and practices temporarily abandoned. There are as many opposition movements to the rationale of capitalism. These practices do not belong either to the category of market activities or the public action (regulations, incentives, etc.). It does not mean that they do not interfere with both. But they deserve particular attention since they obviously are a form of social innovation that might help meeting the challenges of the 21st century (ecology, social justice, aims).

It is therefore worthwhile to reassess the existing initiatives related to the commons, and to highlight their capacities to engage in a shift towards redefining prosperity. Different kinds of commons urban, environmental, economic, genetic, knowledge commons already

participate in redefining prosperity, because they apply some fundamental principles: emphasis put on the sustainability of the projects; particular focus on social bonds and the quality of life; participative experiences and learning of collective action; emerging values put into a pragmatic debate; going further than the traditional state-market opposition to invent hybrid forms of political action that imply public authorities, communities and networks of citizens all together.

In practical terms, redefining prosperity will require a continuous process of experimentation and assessment of collective action. This process will probably result in hybrid practices involving at the same time the commons, the market and the state. State intervention would be a key for the commons to deliver their full potential in participating to human development within the limited resources of our planet.

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ANNEX : PROGRAM OF THE SYMPOSIUM

program

9.15 Welcome **LEONORE GEWESSLER**, GEF, **DIRK HOLEMANS**, Oikos

9.30 Opening

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION TINE DE MOOR, prof. Utrecht University (NL)

THE COMMONS, DNA OF A REVIVAL OF POLICY CULTURE DAVID BOLLIER, blogger and activist (USA)

10.50 Break

11.10 Introductory presentations

A. FREE SCIENCE: THE COMMONS AND KNOWLEDGE VALÉRIE PEUGEOT (F), president of Vecam (Reflections and actions for the digital citizen)

B. NATURE FOR ALL, AND BY ALL: THE COMMON RESOURCES OF ENVIRONMENTAL INFRASTRUCTURE PABLO SERVIGNE (B), Barricade, non-profit association, Liège

C. CONSTRUCTING A NEW SYSTEM: COLLECTIVELY PRODUCED COMMON RESOURCES MAARTEN ROELS (B), Steunpunt Duurzame Ontwikkeling, Ghent University

D. RECLAIMING FINANCE AND THE ECONOMY: ECONOMIC COMMONS ARNAUD ZACHARIE (B), general secretary of the CNCD-11.11.11

E. SHARING WITHOUT OWNING: GENETIC HERITAGE AS A COMMON RESOURCE TOM DEDEURWAERDERE (B), professor and director of the BIOGOV unit of the Centre for the Philosophy of Law (UCL)

12.30 Lightfootprint lunch

14.00 Workshops with stakeholders working in the field (language : EN)

1. FREE SCIENCE: THE COMMONS AND KNOWLEDGE Knowledge is worth nothing unless it is shared by all. And yet, why and for whom is it being locked away for?

A. ACCESS TO DIGITAL NETWORKS AND FREE SOFTWARE The digital revolution has increased potentially accessible information whilst also increasing inequalities in terms of real access to this knowledge. How can we reabsorb these inequalities and prevent the few dominant actors from locking away knowledge and configuring it in their image?

B. CREATIVE COMMON RESOURCES, WIKIPEDIA, ETC: FOR SHARING CREATIVITY, CULTURE, INTELLECTUAL PRODUCTION AND RESEARCH In terms of knowledge, the growing appropriation of creativity, innovation and even living organisms ends up going against innovation and creativity. Even worse still is that it puts it at the disposal of markets rather than the most basic survival needs of a majority of the planet's inhabitants.

2. NATURE FOR ALL, AND BY ALL, THE COMMON RESOURCES OF ENVIRONMENTAL INFRASTRUCTURE Who is better placed to look after what belongs to us all? Do we not have to collectivize use and responsibility?

A. THE DEMOCRATIC MANAGEMENT OF WATER, PUBLIC SERVITUDE OVER PRIVATE ASSETS (STREAMS, FOOTPATHS), THE ENVIRONMENTAL INTERCONNECTIVITY OF RURAL AND URBAN SPACES Waterways do not care a hoot about State borders or ownership. They existed way before them and they will continue to exist after them. However, how can we introduce the management of this common and cross-border asset to ensure quality, sustainability and availability for all?

B. THE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, THE QUALITY OF SOIL AND UNDERGROUND WATER, AIR, CLIMATE AND FISHING ZONES When they are in the sea, who do fish belong to? And what about the air we breathe, if it is for everyone, does it really belong to no-one? Are there management methods to ensure sustainability of and fair access to these resources that are not supervised by the State or the markets?

3. CONSTRUCTING A NEW SYSTEM: COLLECTIVELY PRODUCED COMMON RESOURCES In a society that is increasingly individualistic and material, we need to reinvent collective ways of living that can promote social and environmental justice

A. A DIFFERENT KIND OF HOUSING: COMMUNITY LAND TRUST AND GROUPED HABITAT ; SHARED MOBILITY : SHARED CARS AND BIKES, COMMUNITY BIKE REPAIR WORKSHOPS, ETC. My car is my freedom. Is that so? Constantly repeated, this triumphalist maxim has led to stagnation and traffic jams. How can we preserve our freedom without each owning a car? How can we own a home without owning the ground that lies beneath it? How can we defeat the stranglehold of ownership and create a method of housing that liberates rather than confines.

B. URBAN AND RURAL AGRICULTURE, COLLECTIVE VEGETABLE GARDENS, THE PURCHASE OF SHARED AGRICULTURAL LAND ; THE CONGESTION OF FOREST AND PUBLIC SPACES Who will take care of natural parks? Civil-servants? Traders? Local communities? Is an alliance between different stakeholders possible in order to preserve these commons? Are they being reinvented on a small scale by new urban gardeners? How do we work together to buy land that can serve the environmental transition?

4. RECLAIMING FINANCE AND THE ECONOMY: ECONOMIC COMMONS We see every day the dangers in entrusting finance and economic production to the motivation of private gain.

A. ALTERNATIVE MONETARY EMISSION AND OFF-MARKET TRADING It is also true that one euro is worth one euro, one hour of my time is worth one hour of yours. New foundations can therefore be the basis of the exchange of goods and services: why should we remain wedded to the idea of one official currency? Why even settle for money? Furthermore, why settle for exchanging goods and services?

B. THE REVIVAL OF COOPERATIVES AND ETHICAL FINANCE Even with 'real money' issued in all seriousness and – as we see everyday –with the greatest relevance by the European Central Bank, economically viable projects can blossom, ones that don't have monetary gain as an objective. How can we put economic activity at the disposal of the society and the environment without losing too much money along the way and by involving citizens and workers in economic decisions.

5. SHARING WITHOUT OWNING: GENETIC HERITAGE AS A COMMON RESOURCE The present economic system has proven itself incapable of protecting nature's biodiversity. How can we create a system which values the invaluable contribution of the planet?

A. REINTRODUCING BIODIVERSITY IN AGRICULTURE BY EXCHANGING SEEDS; SHARING THE KNOWLEDGE AND THE INGENIOUSNESS OF NATURE IN FAVOUR OF THE SUSTAINABILITY OF OUR PROJECTS THROUGH BIOMIMETICS One of the lessons of evolution in terms of resilience is that diversified systems are more shock resistant than homogenous systems. But then why is the same type of courgette sold everywhere? Why is the same type of apples grown in all regions? It's undoubtedly because we aren't expecting any shocks.

B. THE FIGHT AGAINST THE PRIVATISATION OF THE LIVING ORGANISMS (GMO, PATENTS) We cannot stop progress, particularly when it serves the already well serviced interests of a few agrochemical companies that carry out gene sequencing for the good of their shareholders and humanity – in that order of priority. What effective action can be taken when confronted with the patenting of living organisms and the privatisation of common resources by transforming them in a laboratory?,

16.30 Conclusion: future challenges **THE COMMONS AND REINVENTING PROSPERITY**

What creates today's need for collective action? What is the role of the State? Do the commons constitute a plausible answer to globalisation? Do the commons contribute to new configurations and community strengths? Which social needs do they most aptly meet? What climate do we need to invest in all forms of collective production?

TOM DEDEURWAERDERE (UCL) and **ISABELLE CASSIERS**, professor of economy (FNRS - UCL)

Discussants:, Philippe Henry (B), Minister of Environment, Mobility and Spatial Planning, Wallonia

17H30 Closing

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THE COMMONS: CO-MANAGING COMMONLY OWNED RESOURCES

The Commons is a *vocabulary for re-igniting our imaginations*, a means of finding a successful path to an ecological and social transformation. These are neither *private goods*, exchanged on the market and subjugated only to the logic of individual profit making, nor *public goods* produced by the state. The Commons drive a different approach. They exist thanks to the will of *communities* that organise themselves to manage *collectively* a *resource* in order to guarantee the *sustainable access to all*, at times in connection with the market, at times with the state and at times with the two. Think of water, forests, air, public transport, languages, knowledge, genetics, the web, currencies etc.

The commons are a source of abundance – sustainability, social ties, quality of life and collective action to name but a few. This is why politics has an important role to play: that of recognising and supporting an ever increasing number of persons that ensure these common goods.

This book gathers texts resulted from a symposium organised on March 9th 2012 in Brussels, by three Green political foundations: the Green European Foundation, Etopia and Oikos..

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