

International Commons Conference (ICC)

Constructing a Commons-Based Policy Platform

Berlin, (October 31), November 1/2 2010

Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, Schumannstr. 8, Berlin

in partnership with **Commons Strategies Group**

Introduction

After the "economic crisis" of October 2008, it is clear that an epoch in modern history has ended. It is no longer credible to propose that privatisation, deregulation, lower taxes and reductions of social services will usher in a progressive future. It is also evident that the growth imperatives of market capitalism are endangering the planet's ecosystems, aggravating social inequality and failing to meet the needs of substantial numbers of people. Yet confidence in government as a capable and conscientious steward of the people's interests, in the face of concentrated corporate power, has also been shaken by the crisis, remember the „results“ of the Climate Conference in Copenhagen in December 2009.

A new path forward is coming into focus: An increasing number of activists, thinkers and academics see the commons as a powerful framework for reconstructing human societies and saving the planet's ecosystems. Particularly at a time when the Internet is showing the power of decentralized collective action as an intelligent, generative force in its own right. The commons has many manifestations and definitions, but in essence it is about reclaiming and sharing resources that belong to everyone and defending traditional or building new social and institutional systems for managing those resources in equitable, sustainable ways. It is about fighting corporate or even parliamentary enclosures of water, air, genes, culture, land and much else. The breadth of commons-based policy innovation, research and activism can be seen in the Nobel Prize in Economics given to Professor Elinor Ostrom; the continued growth of free/open source software, Wikipedia and all sorts of digital commons; the interest in the commons among indigenous peoples, NGOs, media and universities, the World Social Forum and many European institutions; and the embrace of the commons paradigm by activists and scientists fighting countless enclosures. These commoners see the commons as a practical means for re-inventing society in ways that markets and governments are unable or unwilling to entertain.

Seizing this moment of opportunity, our proposal to move towards the CONSTRUCTION OF A COMMONS-BASED POLICY PLATFORM will bring together about 150 leading figures in commons-based studies and activism for a multidisciplinary, international conference. The participants will share their understandings of the commons, explore the range of commons-based policy and social approaches that now exist and forge a new network of commoners who will collaborate on commons-based initiatives in the future. The gathering will also serve to incubate entirely new ideas and strategies that the participants will bring to the conference, including new communication strategies, prototype commons, funding models and research needs. And, last but not least: it will draw attention of some media and the blogosphere to the issue.

Objectives

The general objective is to emerge at the end of the conference with a set of principles and long-term goals that can foster the planning and development of commons based organisations and policy as well as their networking capacity.

The conference is designed to contribute to the following:

1. Assess the range of existing and potential commons-based policy approaches and their respective strengths, limitations and potential for wider application in future policy making.
2. Develop the fundamentals of a policy framework that supports the commons, both as a variety of alternative ways in reproducing our livelihoods and as an alternative analytical perspective for policy making and political practice.
3. Identify and explore specific strategic opportunities to advance commons-based approaches in coherent policy making to meet interlinked political, economic, ecological and social challenges on the national and international levels, including a multiplying communication strategy.
4. Provide excellent opportunities for the community of international commoners to expand their networks, share ideas and strengthen common ground.

Steering Committee:

Silke Helfrich (Germany) / Beatriz Busaniche (Argentina)
Michel Bauwens (Thailand) / Heike Löschmann (Germany)
David Bollier (USA) / Julio Lambing (Germany)

Support Team:

Stefan Meretz, Brigitte Kratzwald, Franz Nahrada, Felix Stein, Stefan Tuschen, Mayo Fuster, Martin Pedersen, Marco Berlinguer, Gudrun Merkle, Benedikt Aretz, Lena Kunze

Languages:

Conference language is **English**

Simultaneous translation **English/Spanish – Spanish/English** is provided throughout day one of the conference except for world café sessions (translation has to be self-organized or work in language groups)

Simultaneous translation **English/Spanish – Spanish/English** is provided on day two in one of stream II or III only depending on majority decision and in one of the workshops, additional translation has to be self-organized

Simultaneous translation **English/German – German/English** is provided only during the public evening event on November 1, 7.30 pm – 10 pm.

Agenda

Sunday, October 31

Arrival international and national guests

2 pm – 5 pm

Commons alive: project visits in Berlin

with: Elisabeth Voß, Lena Kunze and Arfasse Gamada

The meetings will allow for on-the-ground insights into different commons-based projects in Berlin. They vary greatly in the types of resources they manage, their institutional structures and legal rules. They connect to the market economy in different ways, and are driven by different concepts of solidarity. But all of them are thriving, functional commons.

Project 1: A womens housing and working project: Genossinnenschaft Schokofabrik eG

Project 2: AKB – Community based nursing as ambulant care

Project 3: NKL Karlshof – Non-commercial agriculture

Monday, November 1

8.30 – 9.30 am **Registration**

9.30 – 9.45 am **Welcome**

Barbara Unmüßig, President, Heinrich Böll Foundation
David Bollier, Commons Strategies Group (CSG)

9.45 – 10 am **Conference Design**

Silke Helfrich & David Bollier

10 am – 12 pm **An Overview of the Commons as a Transformation-Paradigm**

Keynotes & Debate

Ruth Meinzen-Dick, President, International Association for the Study of the Commons, USA
Michel Bauwens, Peer2Peer Foundation, Belgium/Thailand

Moderation: Silke Helfrich

12 – 2 pm **Lunch, networking & CommonoPolis**

Commonopolis is an open space – close to the place we'll have lunch and dinner - where each participant can present its work, projects and publications, and can share ideas, broaden networks and continue conversation. Pinboards, tables and some online-facilities will be available.

Stream I

Hosts: Silke Helfrich, Beatriz Busaniche

2 – 3 pm **The Commons as a challenge for classical economic patterns & thinking
and a new narrative of the 21 century**

The Commons offers a powerful critique to classical economic thinking and a public discourse that enshrine the market as the only serious system for meeting human needs. Its critique is not just intellectual, but practical: There has always been a cornucopia of natural, cultural and social common pool resources and there is a cornucopia of self-organised Commons – as ancient as community irrigation and as contemporary as the Internet. They are demonstrating that people can successfully manage shared resources over the long term for the benefit of all. As a new (or newly discovered) paradigm of governance, the Commons has the potential to address multiple crises – economic, environmental, social, civic – while confronting the larger „growthist“ paradigm.

There are many questions and uncertainties about actualising the Commons as a new narrative, however. It's relationship to the market and the state need to be re-imagined. And if the commons is going to supplant the market in certain respects, people must be open for developing new means for reproducing their livelihoods. Therefore, they need appropriate policy support and physical infrastructure. Unlike the market order, which is build upon strict separations between production and reproduction, individual and collective interests or the social and the ecological, the Commons seeks to bridge these divisions and bring them into closer alignment. But that will be impossible unless we first invent a coherent new narrative and policy framework that can be readily understood.

The question is: Can the commons be a new, promising narrative for the 21st Century?

Keynotes & Debate

Alberto Acosta, Economist, FLACSO, Ex-President of the Constituent Assembly of Ecuador:

Yasuní-ITT Initiative, an opportunity to rethink the world

Philippe Aigrain, La Quadrature du Net – Sopinspace, France:

New economical foundations for the commons

Can we imagine an economy that would be compatible with the commons? What support infrastructure would the commons need? What policy mechanisms and resource pooling are necessary to maintain the commons?

3 – 4 pm

Speed project presentation of exciting commons projects

Moderation: Beatriz Busaniche

Project 1: **Open Hardware:** Arduino, Massimo Banzi, Italy

Project 2: **Commons – Spaces of the Poor:** FES, Jagdeesh Rao, India

Project 3: **Housing Commons:** Mietshäusersyndikat, Axel Burkhardt, Germany

Project 4: **Traditional Knowledge Commons:** Natural Justice,
Gino Cocchiario, Australia/South Africa

Project 5: **Reputation Based Exchange Commons:** Digital Trust Platform, John Clippinger, Gr
The Law Lab, Harvard University, USA

Project 6: **Digital Cultural Commons:** José Murilo, Ministry of Culture, Brazil

Project 7: **Urban Commons:** Transition Town Movement, Gerd Wessling, Germany

Project 8: **Credit Commons:** Thomas Greco, USA

4 – 4.15 pm

Coffee Break

4.15 – 5.30 pm

World-Café (3 x 25 minutes)

- Which are the fundamentals & key principles of a generative commons paradigm?
- What do those fundamentals need to unfold their potential?
- How to make sure, that people take from the commons and reproduce commons without harming somebody else's commons?
- What do we need from the legal and societal sphere to support a shift towards the commons?

Self-organized discussion groups according to the World-Café dynamics

5.30 – 6 pm

Rhythm is a commons, A join-in concert

with Johannes Heimrath, Lara Mallien and Massimo de Angelis

6 - 7.30 pm

Dinner, Networking & CommonoPolis

7.30 – 10 pm

Public Event: The Commons as the Template of Our Future

In a world dominated by predatory markets and unresponsive governments, the commons is emerging as an attractive alternative form of governance, resource management and social equity. It can be seen in free software, countless digital commons, indigenous people's social charters, community managed water, alternative currencies, Transition Towns, and countless other examples. In this public event, a distinguished panel of leaders in the commons movement addresses the larger political and economic implications of the commons, as well as the new cultural ethic that is emerging worldwide. Special attention will be paid to the challenges that must be overcome in developing a "commons sector" and the future of the movement.

Keynotes

María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, Minister of National Patrimony (MNP), Ecuador

Silke Helfrich, Commons Strategies Group (CSG), Germany

Replies

Richard Pithouse, Rhodes University, poor people's movement activist, South Africa

Barbara Unmüßig, President, Heinrich Böll Foundation

Moderation: Christiane Grefe, Die ZEIT, Germany

Tuesday, November 2

9 – 9.15 am **Wrap-up and Conference Design**
Silke Helfrich & Beatriz Busaniche

Parallel Sessions Stream II & III

Stream II Hosts: Michel Bauwens & Heike Löschmann

9.15 – 10.30 am **The Commons challenges the market/state duopoly**

The history of industrial society is one of subsumption of civil society under the dominance of both the market and the state, with a regular pendulum swing between periods of stronger regulatory states (the welfare state paradigm of social democracy and the New Deal, as well as the soviet and fascist state forms), and period of 'market-dominated' states (the corporate welfare state of neoliberalism). However, both the market and state are suffering from a strong systemic crisis, particularly since the meltdown of 2008, it seems that civil networks are undergoing somewhat of a resurgence, under the guise of trends such as the emergence of peer production, the resurgence of the commons paradigm, and a return to sharing practices and infrastructures. Stream II will evaluate the significance of this trend for the autonomy of civil movements itself, for the market and the state, and for the local and global governance issues generated by this new triarchical situation.

Keynote and discussion

James Bernard Quilligan, Chairman of the Secretariat, Global Commons Trust, USA

Global citizens, social charters, and multilateralism 2.0:

what are the conditions for the emerging global commons?

10.30 – 10.45 am **Workshops: methods & content, presentation of self-organized workshops**
workshop selection by participants

10.45 – 11 am **Coffee Break**

11 – 12.30 pm **Consolidation workshops**

Workshop II/1: **Recovering the Autonomy and Primacy of Commoners**

A flourishing commons sector requires a new set of rights and institutions. In this session we examine the emergence of new social charters, open licenses, access rights, the general demand for openness and transparency as well as the need for equality in the new

opportunities being created, the aim is to identify the set of (design) principles which allow for a commons-based making of rules, guidelines, laws and institutions.

Kickoff speakers:

Denis Jaromil Rocio, free software programmer and media artist, Italy/Netherlands

Technical conditions for free infrastructures

Maude Barlow, Council of Canadians, Canada

Elements for a Social Charter for Water Commons

Workshop II/2: **Multilateralism 2.0: The Commons and the State, towards a global partner state**

Since it is unlikely that the State will wither away, and yet the commoners are inventing new modes of governance and autonomy for themselves, what should be the proper interrelationship of the Commons and the State? What differential principles and design mechanisms might apply at different levels of governance, but specifically, at the global level?

Kickoff speakers:

Benjamin Coriat, Paris Nord University, France

Ana Valadéz, Otros Mundos, Mexico

Workshop II/3: **The Commons as a Trust for Protecting the Earth: The polycentric governance approach**

Professor Elinor Ostrom and her colleagues have shown the effectiveness and versatility of natural resource commons in various contexts. But how might the lessons of that scholarship be combined with popular activism and politics, and build support for commons as a respected policy option for protecting and managing natural resources? What are some of the most promising design paradigms for such commons? What are some of the more intriguing emerging commons for managing natural resources?"

Kickoff speaker:

Frank van Laerhoven, Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development, Utrecht University, Netherlands

More workshops can be self-organised. Proposals to be submitted during the conference.

Stream III Hosts: David Bollier & Julio Lambing

9.15 – 10.30 am **The Generative Logic of the Commons**

In the commons there is abundance and freedom for all. This stream will explore three aspects of the "generative logic" of the commons which are essential for their specific sort of creation and conservation of wealth. The value produced in the commons is deeper and comprehends much more than only exchange-value for the market. The prosperity of commons and a commons based policy depends on a basic understanding what sort of value they generate. Appropriate institutions are needed to empower commoners to cultivate the commons. And the commons must also strike a prudent balance between openness and control.

The keynote speakers will explore these themes, and the workshops will probe more deeply. Workshop I will look at the profound "crisis of value" that now afflicts market fundamentalism and the importance of commons-based subsistence models. Workshop II will examine how institutional structures can be critical to the success of a

commons - yet they may also weaken the social dynamics undergirding the commons. Finally, Workshop III will look at the deep tensions between the open-to-all model and a bounded commons of distinct members and rules.

Keynotes:

Roberto Verzola, agricultural activist, Philippines

Stefan Meretz, Keimform.de, Germany

10.30 – 10.45 am **Workshop presentation by moderators/kick-offs + workshop selection**

10.45 – 11 am **Coffee Break**

11 am – 12.30 pm **Consolidation workshops (Stream III)**

Workshop III/1: Understanding Value in a Commons Economy

The commons is a social and moral economy, which means that the value it generates is at once economic, social, cultural and moral, and rooted in a particular local context. The commons has struggled for so long to escape the myths about the “tragedy of the commons” that a basic truth is overlooked: commons actually generate wealth for people and not only value for the markets. To understand the proposition of the commons, it is important to ask: How does a commons generate what we need for our lives? How does commons-generated value differ from that generated by markets, and how does it vary from one commons to another? What means can protect commons-based wealth? This workshop will examine these questions from a “big picture,” macro-economic analysis as well as from the on-the-ground realities of subsistence commons.

Kickoff speakers :

Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences

Vienna, Germany

Adam Arvidsson, University of Milano, Italy

Workshop III/2: Institutional Structures and the Commons: Advantages and Challenges

Since protecting the integrity of relationships and shared resources is a preeminent challenge for any commons, it is natural to devise institutional, legal and policy structures to help maintain a commons. These structures are arguably essential, as seen in such examples as cooperatives, land trusts or the General Public License for software. For decades, there have been two competing strategies: One part of commons activists mainly concentrate on changing cross-societal institutions and infrastructures by building up own complex administrative institutions. Others focus on changing *micro-practices* and concentrate on building up networks of small grassroot institutions with slim infrastructures. In many cases, both parties accuse each other of acting in a futile and ineffective way, especially when it comes to the question which strategy is apt to establish a more commons sensitive economy. But is there something that can be learned from the new p2p-movement of the last years? This workshop will explore the design principles of successful commons in general and for specific types of resources. It will also evaluate the strategic effectiveness of different approaches.

Kickoff speakers:

Brian Davey, FEASTA, GB

Marc Mascarenhas-Swan, Jas-econ, Bay Area economics cooperative, USA

Workshop III/3: Limits and Boundaries vs. Openness and DIY approach:

Digital technologies and networks have given rise to two very similar types of commons – the open platform and the bounded commons. While the two share many functions and ethical values, there are also deep tensions

between the open-to-all model and a bounded commons of distinct members who impose certain rules, oversight and sanctions. For example, how can safety be assured in open-design automobiles and can the practitioners of DIY synthetic biology be trusted to prevent irreversible biological harms? Some people question Wikileaks' disclosures "state secrets" as putting lives at risk. Others believe that disclosures about the sacred knowledge and practices of indigenous peoples is culturally disrespectful and destructive. This workshop will examine whether the idea of openness is compatible with the bounded commons – or whether open platforms and commons necessarily serve different goals and values. Can hybrid business models successfully bridge the gap between the two? Is openness vital for maintaining control of our lives and preventing corporate misbehavior?

Kickoff speakers:

Pat Mooney, ETC Group, Canada

Glyn Moody, Open Source, Open Source, Open Genomics, Open Content, USA

More workshops can be self-organised. Proposals can be submitted during the conference.

12.30 – 2.00 pm **Lunch, Networking & CommonoPolis & grouping for innovation workshops**

2 pm – 4.00 pm **Elements for a commons based policy platform**

Innovation Workshops (self-organised, bar-camp style)

Suggested issues

- Social Charters
- (Net-) Working for a commons based policy platform beyond the conference
- commons oriented multilateralism 2.0/ meta-governance approaches
- How to „commonize“ legal frameworks in different areas of concern?
- communication strategies
- others to be sorted out during the conference

(including coffee break)

4.00 – 5.30 pm **Plenary (reciprocal sharing of conference discussions and results)**

core ideas + conflicts + challenges for streams I/II/III

5.30 – 5.45 pm **Conveying the spirit of the commons**

6.00 – 9.30 pm **Concluding Session**

Barbara Unmüßig, President, Heinrich Böll Foundation

David Bollier, Commons Strategies Group (CSG)

Out of the box surprise followed by Dinner, Networking & Farewell

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