A Commons Paradigm:

Co-Constructing a New Set of Relations amongst Ourselves and with the Earth

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ABSTRACT

Why do we seem to be on a life-threatening path and yet appear unable to change our local and global behaviours to be more sustainable? This dissertation considers how this question and explores how the unsustainable path may be attributed to a deep and pervasive epistemology of separation. It explores how over a long period, we have socially constructed and institutionalized this framework of meaning into our habits of governance and economics. The dissertation poses another question: **can we socially construct a different path based on interdependence and shared values of sustainability called the commons paradigm, to guide our collective choices?** The philosophical stance of social construction in relation to stages of paradigm change in general is presented including the importance of language, relational systems, legitimacy, public discourse, and developmental processes that support collective decisions. Specific emerging principles and concepts regarding the commons paradigm are presented. Then four areas of inquiry, in the form of commons workshops, a conference, interviews and a think tank, are discussed and analyzed in regards to how they may reflect the stages of co-construction of this commons paradigm. The dissertation concludes with a summary, and key learnings. It also includes further questions and possibilities regarding building the knowledge and experiential base needed to operationalize a viable new paradigm that supports a more sustainable path.

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1. ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES ARE SYMPTOMS OF A SYSTEMIC DISCONNECTION BETWEEN NATURE AND HUMAN ACTIVITY

When we look at the state of our world, it is clear that our physical environment is under threat, our social systems are failing in many parts of the world, and our economic system is unstable. What is less evident, however, is that our current, potentially life-threatening situation is a symptom of our ways of perceiving or not perceiving relationships and has arisen due to the assumptions of separation that underlie our dominant worldview. Anthropologist and social scientist Gregory Bateson[1], in 1979, advocated for adopting a relational worldview, warning that society was operating from a fundamental "epistemological error" in which we assumed ourselves to be separate from each other and from the systemic workings of the natural environment and planetary systems. I will expand further on this theme of separation and relationship and its relevance to our current challenging situation in future chapters where I will present a model called the commons paradigm, It is based on a belief that nature and human activity are intrinsically in relationship. In short commons are defined as three interconnected elements: a pool of resources shared in common, the community of people who depend on those resources, and the processes they use to make decisions about the protection, management, and enhancement of those shared resources for current and future users. This is both an old and new framework. It offers not only a philosophical framework based on historic contexts and practises, but also, based on the context we currently are facing, a new set of principles and a methodology for transforming our economic, social, legal, and technical structures that support sustainability.

This first chapter explains why it is important to develop this new paradigm and describes how current beliefs and unsustainable behaviours are damaging the very conditions on which our lives our lives depend. Chapter 2 will also focus on assumptions about how social change occurs, with particular emphasis on the philosophical stance underlying social construction. This stance replaces a traditional emphasis on separation, individuality, and definitive truths, with an emphasis on relational processes for co-creating knowledge, values, and choices of action. The Commons Paradigm based on relational processes, proposes that we can coexist and co-create in collaborative and sustainable ways. Chapter 3 will provide further definitions of this emerging paradigm, providing an overview of some concepts and principles regarding governance, resources, and economics. In Chapter 4, four areas of inquiry will be presented and analyzed regarding situations where the construction of a commons paradigm is being actively engaged. The dissertation concludes in Chapter 5 with an overall summary and key learnings, plus recommendations for further inquiry and concluding remarks.

[1] Bateson, G. (1979). *Mind and nature: A necessary unity (Advances in systems theory, complexity, and the human sciences)*. New Jersey: Hampton Press.

OVERVIEW OF THE CHALLENGING SITUATION HUMANITY IS FACING

Despite our incredible potential as a species, humanity is facing multiple and cumulative life-threatening crises that could impede our potential to co-evolve or even create conditions for regression. This is evidenced by global economic collapse, partnered with increasing impacts of climate change such as ocean acidification, increasing amounts of methane release from melting permafrost in the Arctic, dust bowls forming in the US Midwest, floods in India and China, famine in Africa, forced migration, fear of epidemics, loss of habitat, militarist competition for scarce resources, and increasing threats of nuclear arms.

These crises and their impacts on future generations and other species are escalating even as I write this and you read it. And yet, even with the evidence becoming more and more extreme, and the challenges potentially irreversible, we, especially in the developed world, seem to be stuck in a "business as usual" trance, unable to change our behaviours and effectively respond. Although some individuals or small groups have been sounding the alarm for decades, people collectively are not seeing the implications of the situation, or are so overwhelmed by its complexity that, as a society, we are not using our creative evolutionary potential to change the destructive direction. This is extremely serious and, as climate reporter, Joe Romm asserts "Inaction means humanity's self-destruction. We must pay any price or bear any burden to stop catastrophic climate change" [2]

The frog in the beaker metaphor, although overly clichéd, so aptly names our current experience that it is worth using. The frog, whose limbic system is reportedly not fine tuned enough to notice a slow but life threatening rise in the temperature of water, floats unconcerned until it is too late to jump. Our atmosphere is now heating up rapidly, above the "safe zone" of two degrees centigrade to a potentially runaway six + degrees[3] and we are still not jumping to action. If we were to jump to action, what actions would the collective "we" decide to take and implement, and at what costs, and to whom? Climate change, or more specifically the unchecked rise of CO2 and methane due to human activity, is but a symptom of a deeper and very complex situation originating from our cultural ontology and epistemology, making this question hard to answer from a superficial level of methods alone.

Small, short-term, uncoordinated "jumps" do not seem to work in this very complex interconnected and historically created situation. New technologies have created clean efficient options for energy such as the solar energy, but we are seldom utilizing them. This indicates that the locus of change lies in a deeper layer than a technical fix can reach[4]. A complete transformation of the very roots of our current operating system that

[2] Romm, J. (2012). An illustrated guide to the science of global warming impacts: How we know inaction is the gravest threat humanity faces. *Think Progress*. Accessed at http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2012/10/14/1009121/science-of-global-warming-impacts-guide/?mobile=nc January 30, 2013

[3] Lynas, M. (2007). *Six degrees: Our future on a hotter planet*. London: Fourth Estate

[4] For more information see http://thinkproghttp://thinkprogress.org/climate/2012/03/28/453122/fact-sheet-6-things-you-should-know-about-the-value-of-renewable-energy/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+climateprogress%2FlC

influence priorities and choices is being called for.[5] By operating system, I am referring to the values, beliefs, and structures with which our social, economic, and ecological relations have been operating for over a century. This transformation will require us, in a very short term (under extreme pressure of environmental foundations dissolving under our feet) to create a new operating system or paradigm from which to live in relationship with nature and each other. Are we capable of this transformation? What examples of this kind of meta system change have there been in history?

How I got to this point.

It may be useful to take some time to share how I came to be generating new ways to approach global economics that is so removed from anything I had any interest or aptitude for. More than just being self-indulgence, offering this background provides some basis and transparency for my motivations, biases and perceptions as well as being an example of the processual nature of changing beliefs. I grew up in a very rural part of the Canadian prairies on a farm in the 50s and 60s and went to school in a three room school house. Our closest town had no library, museum, art gallery or even a craft supply store. Taking part in after school recreation was difficult due to distance and it was harder to engage socially. My father promoted the cooperative movement modeling the importance of civic responsibility and collective action. Although few of my classmates went on to university, it was somehow assumed that my sister and I would. Thus in many ways the cultural beliefs that were formative for us were different than those of the mainstream culture. University provided a different milieu with an exposure to different ways of thinking and I dove into sociology, philosophy, and psychology with a desire to figure out "how the world worked". Eventually I gravitated towards a career in occupational therapy and a setting that also afforded me an in-depth look at how different people and their support systems responded to challenges facing them, whether physical or psychological. I was very curious as to why some people energetically took on the challenges presented by strokes, spinal cord injuries or mental illness, and sought adaptations, while others became passive, seeing themselves as victims. I became more and more aware of how our perceptions both resulted from, and also created, the reality we experienced. This pulled me to want to understand these phenomena in more depth, and how this valuable source of transformation could be mined and applied elsewhere. I engaged with others in the study of somatic psychotherapy taking up a private practise as well as teaching postgraduate therapists.

However my other foot was in the world of civic responsibility and I engaged in social change work regarding peace, social justice and environmental protection. One aspect of my work was as a therapist with individuals, behind the closed doors of the therapy room, seeing great change within personal lives resulting from inquiry and self-reflection. Most of these clients and students had little interest or awareness regarding

rX+%28Climate+Progress%29&mobile=ncress.org/climate/2012/03/28/453122/fact-sheet-6-things-you-should-know-about-the-value-of-renewable-energy/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+climateprogress%2FlCrX+%28Climate+Progress%29&mobile=nc

[5] Barnes, P. (2006). *Capitalism 3.0: A guide to reclaiming the commons*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers

the larger social context they were in, or concern for social justice or ecological issues. The other aspect of my work involved groups trying to make change in this seemingly "outer" world. Most of those involved in activism had little interest or awareness in self-reflection.

I found this split remarkable and perilous to both worlds. Neither aspect of my involvement in these disparate communities felt whole or satisfactory on their own, therefore I sought some way to integrate these worlds (i.e. to resolve this inner/outer split). Therefore, I sought means for engaging concerned citizens in thinking about both the issues they faced i.e. <u>what</u> we think as well as about <u>how</u> the ways of perceiving and talking impacted those issues. This initially took me through sharing in group facilitation and consensus training but eventually into Bohmian dialogue [6]and the field of dialogue and deliberation[7]. I became fascinated with how the collective could be impacted: not just what was happening within individuals but amongst us. Although I did not have any terms for some of the relational discourses circulating at the time, I was aware that we were not by any means disconnected individuals sitting in a room, but were formed by and forming cultural perspectives that both impacted and were impacted by choices of actions.

As the context of climate change loomed larger in my understanding, I became more and more motivated to learn if the kind of progressive stages of support that I saw benefiting individual clients in therapy, could be scaled up to support collective changes in perceptions and capacities. I was looking for a "cultural therapy"[8]. My study of adult development and of the naturally occurring differences in how our perceptions form and change, gave me a different perspective into how and why we are so locally and globally stuck in our ability to work together to respond to the complexity of issues surrounding climate change. I was able to understand why public engagement and decision-making processes cannot work with a one-size-fits-all design, but could benefit from processes that were developmentally designed to match the complexity of the issues. I also studied systems and complexity theory emphasizing the dynamic interconnected world in which we are always swimming. There was a huge "ah ha" at this point and a passion to be able to integrate and share this work regarding citizen engagement in response to complex issues.

However, it did not take long before inquiry into context, again pushed me to consider that even well designed public processes were still operating within a limited frame of deeply engrained cultural beliefs regarding how we relate to each other and the earth and that this was being reinforced in every exchange we had through our economic and governance systems. Therefore, it is at this level of complexity that I feel compelled to work. Anything less encompassing feels confined by this now-dysfunctional, ontological,

[6] Isaacs, W. (1999). Dialogue and the art of thinking together: A pioneering approach to communicating in business and in life. New York: Doubleday Dell Publishing Group

[7] Holman, P & Devane,T. (1999). *The change handbook: Group methods for shaping the future*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers

[8] Inglis, J. & Steele, M. (2005). Complexity intelligence and cultural coaching: Navigating the gap between our societal challenges and our capacities. *Integral Review, 1*: 35-46 .

epistemological and methodological framework through which our interactions are being unconsciously coordinated at local and global levels. Many masters or PhD students are chided for approaching their specific dissertation as if it will be the one that changes the world. I hope by taking on this large scope that I am not indicating such lofty claims. Nevertheless I do feel our human capacities to evolve in our response to these large challenges will occur by observing how our various endeavors are connected and influence each other. Our capacities are limited if we take a fragmented view. It is this emphasis on relational being that drew me to pursue a PhD through the Taos Institute and to dedicate the time to really explore and articulate relationship at so many levels, and possibly how there could be an institutionalized paradigm of relationship that could integrate personal, ecological, economic and governance relationships.

TRACING THE CONSTRUCTION OF OUR CURRENT OPERATING SYSTEM

> Planning for the future without a sense of history is like planting cut flowers.
> Daniel J. Boorstin (1914-2004) Historian and Librarian of Congress

History, especially economic history, can be boring, or at least that is how it is often perceived in courses taught in traditional universities. However, history also carries a compelling story of the twists and turns of human values and relationships. It is this underlying story that I want to track in this chapter in order to reveal how the current paradigm came into being. I will approach the writing as an inquiry into "Who dun it" although my motive is to ultimately show how "We dun it". My purpose in this chapter is to take a very broad look into the larger historical context to explore how we have, over time, constructed our current life threatening state. As Boorstin suggests in the quotation above, understanding our shared history is a necessary first step in considering new options.

Our current dilemma sits within a context, a very old context that we have constructed over time based on our responses to prevailing conditions. It is important to take the perspective that it is we who have constructed our current set of relationships as this underlines the fact that we have the ability, if we chose, to construct a different set of relationships (i.e., we as a humanity, are not victims of actions imposed on us by some outside force). Nor, as social constructionist Ken Gergen reflected, are our problems external facts that are fixed and unchangeable as if outside of our social relationships and multiple perspectives.[9] Deeper understanding of our historical roots and our past values also offers a place from which critical reflection on past strengths as well as pitfalls and patterns can inform and stimulate our next stages of construction.

"Operating systems" is a term that those familiar with computers understand to describe the set of instructions that operate somewhere deep in the hardware of a computer: the

[9] Gergen, K. (1999). *Invitation to social construction.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

code that organizes the users' daily activities but is unknown to them. The instructions were designed by programmers based on the best information they had at the time to respond to the assumed needs of the computer users. Although a mechanistic term, it has been considered useful[10] when describing the set of decisions impacting our relationships on the planet that lay deep within our governance and economic structures. These decisions organize our relationships while remaining hidden below the surface of our daily transactions. It is useful to bring these operating systems, or organizing values, beliefs and structures, into the light and into our discussions, so we can critically reflect on how they have shaped and are shaping our habitual ways of being.

The following fast track through the history of how we constructed our economic and governance structures is inadequate to cover the details and diverse perspectives of this long and complex process but hopefully it serves to offer some highlights of the radical shifts our meaning making has taken over time.

Changing Perceptions of Human Nature as Reflected in Market Relationships

Economic historian Karl Polanyi[11] might agree that part of the reason we cannot comprehend that we are warming up in the beaker is that we have been operating from a myth that occludes our ability to perceive the impact our operating system has on our relational and interdependent nature. The myth involves assumptions, which most of us (especially in democratic countries) make i.e., that healthy markets will result in social well-being. Polanyi turns this on its head and argues that our institutionalized social relationships have instead become instruments to serve the well-being of an artificially created market system. The implications of this arrangement on our current and future relationships with each other and nature are enormous so it is important to trace this transition.

Although many economists hold the view that early man was predisposed to compete through markets for personal survival, Polanyi offers a different, more collaborative sense of our economic roots. His research emphasizes the difference between trade (a relational creation of value that has always occurred based on need) and the market system (a utilitarian exchange, which is relatively new). Although, in the past, there were reciprocal trade relationships, these were not usually motivated by personal gain because the well-being of the individual rested in the well-being of the group.

> The outstanding discovery of recent historical and anthropological research is that man's economy, as a rule, is submerged in his social relationships. He does not act so as to safeguard his individual interest in the possession of material goods; he acts so as to safeguard his social standing, his social claims, his social assets. He values material goods only in so far as they serve this end. Neither the process

[10] Barnes.P. (2006). *Capitalism 3.0: A guide to reclaiming the commons*. San Francisco. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
[11] Polanyi, K. (1944). *The great transformation.* Boston: Beacon Press.

> of production nor that of distribution is linked to specific economic interests attached to the possession of goods….[12]

The Gift Economy: Value Created Through Relationship

In contrast to market economies, traditional gift economies offer a good illustration of an operating system that reflects the understanding of ourselves as inherently interdependent. Author and cultural critic Lewis Hyde, [13] reminds us of our roots in relational economics. In a poetic manner, he offers a glimpse of the elaborate customs and rules that reflected the interdependence of nature and humans, and bound individuals and society in a gift economy. He draws examples from historic cultures of the Kula of New Guinea, the Haida of the Pacific Coast, the Kalahari Bushmen, as well as more modern examples of artists sharing their gifts of creativity, western scientists sharing knowledge and computer programmers providing open-source software. In a gift economy the transfer of an object from person to person or from group to group, increased its value since the actions and negotiations surrounding the exchange enhanced the social cohesion of the collective and the good will, appreciation, inspiration, knowledge or skills associated with the gift and its giving. The object did not stand on its own, or derive value from its separate existence but sat always in a context of the actions and perceptions which gave it meaning. In historical gift economies, items were also circulated back into nature as all life, human and non-human, was understood to be, as physicist Henri Bortoft[14] would say, held in a "holistic relationship of intrinsic necessity" in which the parts do not exist separate from the whole.

Gift economies do not differentiate between things and people in the same way that the market economy does. They do not require the mathematical exactness to record transactions as these are recorded in relational memories, stories and experiences. This differs from the market economy in which specific prices are required, and the engagement between a buyer and seller, or a producer and a consumer, ends once the precisely quantified transaction has been completed. This transaction is assumed to require no quality of connection between the actors, thereby losing the relational value to the market system. Just like blood circulating through the body, a gift carries the basic ingredients that support life.[15] In fact in the gift economy, if the circulation of an item was stopped for the purpose of increasing the profit for an individual, it was considered as having less life giving essence, much like the circulation of blood would be less vital and actually life threatening if taken outside of the circulation of the body.

In gift economies, it is more obvious that the value or wealth of things exchanged among people lay in the shared meaning they have created about those things, not in the thing itself as separate from this exchange. The relationship between the resource and those

[12] Polyanyi K. (1944) p 48
[13] Hyde L. (2006). *The gift: How the creative spirit transforms the world*. Edinburgh: Canongate.
[14] Bortoft, H. (1999) In conversation with Otto Scharmer. Imagination becomes an organ of perception. Retrieved from:.http://www.dialogonleadership.org/interviews/Bortoft-1999.shtml.
[15] Hyde L. (2006). *The gift: How the creative spirit transforms the world*. Edinburgh: Canongate.

working with it were inseparable, an important premise that we will return to later in Chapter 3 in our discussion of commons concepts surrounding resource uses and exchanges. In contrast to a gift economy through which abundance was created through giving, a market economy creates situations of scarcity whereby the production and circulation of items are controlled. In this situation, items can be "enclosed," hoarded or "owned," whether by individuals, businesses or the state, in order to increase their price, and the "owner's" wealth. This market system of enclosures relies more on assumptions of wealth increasing due to individual independence rather than increasing due to collective interdependence.

At this point, so as not to fall into what is often a romanticized view of this early period, it is important to also note the gift economy came with limitations. A society in which well-being is derived from the group can be suffocating and intolerant of differences. The tribal traditions, secured by restricting diversity, exploration, and individual creativity were challenged when more complex interactions amongst more diverse cultures bearing new trading goods brought new options and conflicts into view. Although the gift economy was based on supportive beliefs of abundance and trust within small groups, it was also based on many concrete assumptions of the workings of natural world that led to fear- inducing inaccuracies and hierarchies. Power, accompanied by brutal punishment, was held by hierarchical rulers who also claimed power due to cosmic hierarchical rights. According to Pinker in his book, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence has Declined During these Times*, there was much violence in pre-modern times, [16] due to less sophisticated capacity for reflection, communication and reasoning, offering fewer options for responding to conflict. Jared Diamond[17] writes that tribal societies had ten times the number of war-related death rates than modern societies, even when taking into account the scourges of modern world wars. In addition, historian Ronald Wright[18] has shown that, time after time, ancient civilizations that flourished due to the creative use of a seemingly abundant resource, became so attached to prosperity that they were blind to the depletion of the resource that eventually led to their collapse.

Another limitation of the gift economies is their apparent inability to scale up to broader interactions. During earlier times, tribes formed close bonds and rituals amongst "us," and had few interactions with "them". Increased trade interactions and mobility presented a dilemma. How did one distinguish between who was Brother, trusted at the hearth, and who was Other, stranger at the gate? Moving from local subsistence to broader ranging trade created more complex systems. These in turn required more discrimination of rules and roles to attempt to duplicate the trust that had been previously based on small group interactions where familiarity and interdependence were more concretely observable.

Increasing Scale and Complexity of Trade Relationships

[16] Pinker, S. (2011). *Better angels of our nature.* New York: Penguin
[17] Diamond, J. (2012) *The World until yesterday: What can we learn from traditional societies?* New York: Viking Press.
[18] Wright, R. (2004). *Short history of progress*. Toronto, Ont.: Anansi

Many of these more organized social systems supported by trade arose when primitive tribes grouped together for survival and, at the same time, developed agricultural practises. These changes necessitated more complex, coordinated governance systems for storage, surplus and distribution. Early records of such coordinated systems have been found in ancient cultures of Africa, China, and India[19]. In 1200 B.C., Babylon trade relied on the creation of legally defined metrics. Ancient India in 300 BC developed an economic bureaucracy that included ethics regarding distribution.

Initially, these more elaborately designed contractual arrangements still reflected the assumptions of reciprocity practised in the gift economy. However, over time, they began to lose the nature of intrinsic relationship and became based more on an assumption of external "objects" exchanged by free choice between autonomous individuals. This trajectory was furthered in ancient Greece by Plato's use of Pythagorean measurements to make administration more efficient and consistent and, therefore, support greater liberty of exchange of objects. Quantitative measurement of objects in exchanges began to replace the value associated with relationship in exchanges.

Aristotle added to the evolving understanding of economy by clearly differentiating between public (the body politic) and private (household), a dichotomy that has formed Western thought for a thousand years.[20] He assumed that which was public should not be allowed to cross the boundary into that which was private.[21] He also identified a difference in economics with the "value in use" *oekonomia* corresponding to the household or private, and "value in exchange" "*chrematistike.*'" corresponding to those things done outside of the home for economic gain. In neither of these definitions does the significance of the natural world get mentioned.

Aristotle raised a significant question: what motivates people to work or earn income? He indicated that the "natural" motivation to work was to produce goods for consumption (i.e., providing only that which met personal or future family needs or "value in use"). Producing goods for sale in order to accumulate wealth was defined as "value in exchange' and considered by Aristotle as "unnatural", especially if the wealth was then loaned to others for a usury fee. To live for subsistence he felt, was the moral choice. How have we moved from this conception, to one of reliance on a debt based market system? How has "private" moved from meaning an individual household to meaning corporate? Where is nature in all of these arrangements? How did our social meaning change so drastically? The next sections attempt to address some of these questions.

The Concept of Individuality

[19] Lowry, S. T. (2003). Ancient and medieval economics. In Biddle, Jeff E.; Davis, Jon B.; Samuels, Warren J.. *A Companion to the History of Economic Thought*. Malden, MA: Blackwell. pp. 11–27

[20] Weintraub, J., & Kumar, K.eds. (1997). *Public and private in thought and practice: Perspectives on a grand dichotomy.* Chicago: University of Chicago

[21] Gobetti, D. (1992). *Private and public: Individuals, households and body politic in Locke and Hutcheson*. London: Routledge.

By the 15th century, the church, especially the Catholic Church, had become a dominant force in coordinating human activity in Britain and many countries of the European world. The attempts to rule over all interactions by demanding adherence to a single moralist creed became fraught with corruption and dissent. In 1528, Martin Luther, anticipating the limitations of this regime, promoted the separation of church and state, articulating in his Doctrine of Two Kingdoms that

> The civil sphere deals with man's physical life in society as he interacts with other human beings; in this, man is subject to human governments. The spiritual sphere deals with man's soul, which is eternal, and which is subject only to God.[22]

For 15th century Luther, the soul existed in an internal subjective world, (although he did not use that specific language) and law and property existed in an external objective world.[23]. This proposition that there was an inner experience implied that people were individuals and had private thoughts and experiences that could not be seen, let alone judged or controlled by a representative of God whether that be church or monarch. Coming from our current deeply entrenched cultural assumption of individual thinking, it may be hard to fully comprehend why this possibility of having private thoughts, separate from others, and especially from a supervising deity, was so revolutionary. However, this recognition of individuality triggered a transformation that reconfigured personal, religious, legal, and economic, arrangements of relationships.

This sense of separation and the freedom that came with the belief in autonomy was further identified and elaborated through the work of scientists and philosophers such as Copernicus, Bacon, Descartes, Newton, Hobbes, and Locke. Their work ushered in what has become known as the Age of Reason, the Enlightenment, or Modernity. This belief in scientific rationality justified the individuation of people from the absolutist control the church. It offered a new, seemingly trustable, knowledge, verified by measurable realties and exacted through the rigor of the individual mind that replaced the former belief in a universal power.

The belief in a rational, "clockwork" universe meant that phenomena could be studied and conclusions could be drawn based on evidence. The vague mythical world of nature and the body, associated with medieval spirits, was denounced as inferior to the rational mind. This elevation of the individual inner experience and capacity for logical reasoning paved the way for sweeping assumptions regarding human capacity to take charge of the "inferior" natural world. These assumptions led to changes in how people related to each other and to the land and resources. If people and objects were seen as separate they could be moved around at will. The desire to control nature to meet human needs especially needs beyond subsistence needs eventually resulted in a very competitive growth-based, market-based economy so influential and entrenched today. Compared to the medieval times modernity seemed very expansive, offering a world of endless

[22] See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doctrine_of_the_two_kingdoms accessed January 24, 2013.
[23] It is interesting to note that the actual language of an inner world did not exist according to philosopher Owen Barfield until the 17th century. See Barfield. 0. (1962). *History in English words*. London: Faber and Faber

possibilities. However, in hindsight, the linear logic of this worldview was not broad enough to notice and include systemic implications and contextual relationships that came with an increasingly complex world. The next section will explore these limitations and implications in more depth especially in relationship to the concepts of commons.

The Enclosure of the Commons

A significant practice of modernity and a precursor to the creation of a market-based economy was the "enclosure" of the resources and traditional practises people relied on for subsistence.[24] Prior to the Age of Reason, activities associated with land, including the gathering of wood, hunting, creation of crafts and home building plus the rituals and cultures arising from that place, were considered to be shared or common. "Commons" referred not just to the shared land but to all of the interconnected activities of relationships amongst people, land and cultural agreements built over time, which supported sustainability, safety and creativity. However, in the 16th century, this set of relationships was impacted by changing views regarding individual rights to the control of land, with some people being granted rights of access that others were not. In England, these rights were defined and conferred by King Henry V111 as part of his desire to separate from the Catholic Church and buy loyalty from supporters by gifting them land. Land which had offered "value in use" for subsistence, took on "value in exchange" for buying loyalty power and wealth. That which had been considered common became "enclosed" separating people, cultures, and nature, and separating production from consumption. What people produced was not in the scale of what was used by them, but was transported, traded, bought, and sold often several times before being consumed by others far from the origin and conditions of the production.

Later, the Enclosure Movement was connected to the rise of a new form of economics in which land was understood as a source of multiple means of production, not for subsistence but to supply raw materials for factories to produce goods for distant markets.[25] "Value in exchange" then advanced in importance to "value in use". However, some people benefited from the "value in exchange" more than others. People, who for generations, had lived in close relation to the gifts of nature and those resources generated by their culture, began to work in factories earning wages to exchange for food they had previously grown or foraged themselves or to buy health services they had traditionally relied on from understanding local food and herbs. With the Industrial Revolution arising primarily in northern Europe and Britain, costly factories were built. Cheap labour was deemed necessary to offset these investments and keep production cost down and trade profitable. More products were being developed, more trade was occurring, more markets were being found, and more raw materials were needed and thus more colonies were taken over in resource rich countries of the south. A significant by-product of this trade-induced colonization was the spread of the market economy ethic around the world, replacing traditional more relational methods of trade. Privatization of

[24] Linebaugh, P. (2008). The Magna Carta manifesto: liberties and commons for all. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
[25] Polanyi. (1994)

land, and the rise of a class system unsympathetic to labourers, meant many were separated from the traditional support of cultures and subsistence life styles. A new vulnerability crept in that was beyond individuals or small groups but was pervasive in the systemic structures of the culture in which these individuals and groups lived.

How the Changing Views of Money Impacted What We Value and How We Relate

Changing views regarding the meaning of money in relation to the resources and labour mentioned above are also a major thread in the story of the epistemology of separation and the changing relations between people and nature. [26]Originally, the concept of money was developed to represent the value of the actual items exchanged and to make exchanges more efficient over distances. Money was the carrier of the shared perception of value that people could express regarding the goods exchanged in their trading relationships. As agricultural products such as cows were difficult to walk to more distant trading centers where more people who wanted them existed, let alone board on boats, representations of these goods were substituted for the product. Later, coins were used to represent the value of the grain or cows, and then paper money replaced the coins. Eventually the abstractions became more complex and harder to track by the local producer or consumer. With more distant trading increasing in the 18th -19th centuries, some form of fixed exchange rate was needed so that the currency of one country could be translated into the currency of another country. Eventually, in the 20th century, credit replaced paper money and interest and debt became the engine of the economy. This allowed instantaneous digital exchanges to happen around the world. These increasingly abstract exchanges greatly eroded the reciprocal relational nature of the exchange, allowing for increased commodification and objectification of resources and labour.

To smooth global trade transactions, many national currencies were based on a gold standard but in 1971 this shifted to being calibrated against the US dollar. According to James Rickards[27] in his book *Currency Wars,* a very unstable, artificially contrived, international situation now exists. For instance, in attempts to boost national GDP, countries around the world are tempted to devalue their currencies in order to increase exports (i.e., making domestically produced goods and services cheaper for foreigners). However, such actions will frequently result in other countries retaliating by devaluing their currencies or imposing protectionist tariffs. Countries are in a short-term winning position in this war only until another country retaliates. A culture of competition and short term crisis management is operating globally, making it difficult to seed more systemic collaborative relational models. This inability to work collaboratively, especially as we face global issues, is putting the world at peril.

In January 2012, even the conservative World Economic Forum recognized the need for a systemic model, although doubted there was one: "transformational changes in social values, resource needs and technological advances [will occur] as never before. …[However] the necessary conceptual models do not exist from which to develop a

[26] Greco, T. (2009). *The end of money and the future of civilization.* White River Junction: Chelsa Green.
[27] Rickards, J. (2011). *Currency wars: The making of the next global crisis.* New York: Penguin Group.

systemic understanding of the great transformations taking place now and in the future."[28] This indication that a different model is needed seems important. Possibly, even traditional economists are noticing the limitations of the modernist era. But we are getting ahead of ourselves and need to go back to understanding more detail of the transition from pre-modern relationships of intrinsic necessity on a small scale to modernist perceptions of objective efficiency. Understanding this transition may provide insight into how it has impacted our relationships with each other and with nature and help identify the aspects needed in a new conceptual model

We cannot leave this story of our historical journey of the changing ways of relating without a reminder that we did, at one time, collectively agree to certain customary rights or "common laws" to uphold fundamental interdependent relationships with each other, the land and our cultural resources[29]. In aboriginal cultures, for instance, these agreements were typically passed on through oral traditions, rather than written agreements. In England, agreements on rights were sanctioned in the Magna Carta in 1215 and the subsequent Charter of the Forest in 1217. The Charter ensured that free men could access the royal forests to enjoy such rights as *pannage* (pasture for their pigs), *estover* (collecting firewood), *agistment* (grazing), or *turbary* (cutting of turf for fuel). Since the royal forests were, at the time, the most important sources of fuel for cooking and heating, the Charter of the Forest provided economic protection for the commoners over their means of sustenance and well-being. In 1297, Edward 1 made these two combined charters the common law of the land.

Many of the rights in these charters such as habeas corpus, trial by jury, a ban on torture, and law before a jury of peers, have formed the basis of the constitutional agreements of many countries.[30] In reclaiming the public trust doctrine environmental lawyer Mary Wood is attempting to bring governments back to their essential and constitutional mandate of acting as trustees of natural resources for the current and future welfare of their citizens[31]. However, as Peter Linebaugh's[32] research states, these agreements have been deeply eroded over time. The ancient rights stating that gains from land and labour should not be privatized for the benefit of the few but should be available for the benefit of all, have been all but lost. As a ironic anecdote to add to this story, a version of the Magna Carta itself was put up for auction by the Ross Perot Foundation at the Sotheby auction in New York in 2007, and sold for 21.3 million dollars.[33]

Can Humans be Trusted to Take Care of Each Other and Their Resources?

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[28] World Economic Forum (2012). World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2012 Executive Summary www3.weforum.org/docs/AM12/WEF_AM12_ExecutiveSummary.pdf

[29] Linebaugh. (2008)

[30] Drew, K. (2004). *Magna Carta*. Westport,Conn.:Greenwood Publishing Group. Note that Australia, Canada, South Africa, New Zealand, and USA all have based their constitutions on the Magna Carta.

[31] Wood, M. (2014). *Nature's trust: Environmental law for a new ecological age.* New York, New York. Cambridge University Press

[32] Linebaugh. (2008).

[33] Reynolds, N. (2007). Ross Perot sells 13th century Magna Carta. *The Telegraph* Sept. 2012. Retrieved from http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1564126/Ross-Perot-sells-13th-century-Magna-Carta.html

Fear of competition and corruption, or as Lewis Hyde, said "bad faith" differed from the trust in abundance, inherent in the life-giving properties of the ever-circulating gift:

> Out of bad faith comes a longing for control, for the law and the police. Bad faith suspects that the gift will not come back, that things won't work out, that there is a scarcity so great in the world that it will devour whatever gifts appear. In bad faith the circle is broken. [34]

Bad faith was actually a benign term compared to the assumptions of political philosopher Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes felt that goodwill did not underlie the nature of man, but man's primitive animal temperament would lead to a life that was "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short" unless controlled by government.[35] The question of whether people are seen as capable of building trusting relationships amongst each other, or are instead seen as needing their selfishness to be controlled by external forces, is a thread we will return to several times. These assumptions have influenced how our governance and market practises have developed.

In rationalizing the need for control of that which was "natural", a very significant, but according to many historians[36], an unseen transition, occurred in our thinking. This was regarding usury or interest. From initially being labeled as harmful to human activity and nature by Aristotle, it eventually came to be viewed as necessary for keeping the economy growing and countries strong. More regarding this transition in thinking and the implications of usury and a debt-based economy will be discussed in Chapter 3.

With the rise of the nation state in the 16th and 17th century, people began to orient their identity around their separate individualistic nations, depending on their governments to provide safety and well-being. Although on a larger scale than the tribe, nations still operated from a similar sense of "us" and "them." They attempted to meet the needs of those within the country through competition with other nation states who were seen as a threat.

Beginning in the 20th Century, economic growth became a primary concern of national governments, even to the point that attempts to remedy social injustice, such as unfair labour conditions including abolishing slavery, or reversing environmental damage due to pollution, were considered a threat to national prosperity. The monetary costs of these interventions could not be justified as they were seen to impair prosperity and weaken a country's capacity to compete on a global scale.

This continued assumption of separation, scarcity, and need for competition, makes global agreements concerning global commons such as the atmosphere, oceans and internet difficult to coordinate. In this time of climate change, when we share an atmosphere filling rapidly with deadly amounts of human created greenhouse gases

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[34] Hyde. (2006). p.130
[35] Polanyi, K. (1944).
[36] Hardt, M., & Negri, A. (2009). Commonwealth, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press., Polanyi (1944), Hyde (2006),

(GHG), we need the capacity to form immediate and collective responses. However, nations still sit around the tables of the UN using precious time haggling over the best deal for their own separated countries.[37]

Commodification of Human Activity and Nature

Another significant step in separating human relationships and nature was the commodification of labour and land. A contradiction arose when the *a priori* conception of land as common to all, a gift from God, met with the new motivations of industrial growth and desire to secure resources to increase individual wealth. Nature became useful for what it could produce. There was an increasing desire on the part of some to privatize land in order to motivate people to give up their subsistence folklorish ways, work as labourers, and increase national wealth through industry and trade. English philosopher, John Locke, attempted to reconcile this contradiction. He proposed that land on its own had little value for society or for God and was only enhanced by labour through which land was converted into "property" to be owned. He argued that property and the associated rights of ownership needed to be protected. A centralized government was, therefore, also needed, with one of its primary functions being the protection of private property to maximize individual gains.

> The *Supream Power cannot take* from any Man any part of his *Property* without his own consent. For the preservation of Property being the end of Government, and that for which Men enter into Society, it necessarily supposes and requires, that the People should *have Property*, without which they must be suppos'd to lose that by entering into Society, which was the end for which they entered into it, too gross an absurdity for any Man to own. *Men* therefore *in Society having Property,* they have such a right to the goods, which by the Law of the Community are theirs, that no Body hath a right to take their substance, or any part of it from them, without their own consent…[38]

What resulted was the institutionalization of an ontological premise of ourselves as separately operating beings: separate from each other, separate from nature with the world revolving around private property much like we assumed the sun and planets revolved around the earth. Locke also added that using money for trade would be more efficient than directly relying on goods themselves, as goods could spoil and be wasted. This placed more value on exchanging an item to maximize gain than in using the item to support subsistence of those closest to production and consumption of that item. This resulted in items becoming commodities. Locke set up principles for increasing gain by managing the balance between supply and demand "The price of any commodity rises or falls by the proportion of the number of buyers and sellers." and "that which regulates the

[37] Vogler, J. (2000). *The Global commons: Environmental and technological governance.* 2nd ed. New York: Wiley.

[38] Locke, J. (1690). An Essay concerning the True Original Extent and End of Civil Government (1689). *John Locke. Two Treatises of Government, Cambridge*. Line 138

price... [of goods] is nothing else but their quantity in proportion to their rent."[39] He believed value was produced through scarcity, and developed exchange rates based on the movement of capital.

Locke argued that individuals had the right to life, liberty and property. This concept eventually found its way into the American Declaration of Independence, with Jefferson adding the "rights to the pursuit of happiness." In describing this trend to institutionalize the assumptions of individual freedoms, Hardt and Negri state:

> In the dominant line of European political thought from Locke to Hegel, the absolute rights of people to appropriate things becomes the basis and substantive end of the legally defined free individual. [40]

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Locke set the context for 18th century moral philosopher Adam Smith[41] to articulate what is now considered the framework for classical economics and capitalism, promoting a reliance on a market based economic system. Smith thoroughly believed that markets, if left to operate freely by people motivated to enhance their own needs, were guaranteed to grow and flourish. He believed that when people work to benefit themselves they also will indirectly benefit society as in a competitive market they have to produce something of value to others in order to earn income. The creation of wealth from these self-motivated exchanges would naturally trickle down to, and take care of, all of society. Disregarded in this rationale were the multiple reasons for why people might not flourish. Viewed through the simple cause and effect logic that indicated success was guaranteed if you worked, it seemed reasonable to assume that if others were poor, it must be their fault for not being motivated to work. Another disregarded factor was regarding the limits of nature. Nature's raw materials were assumed to be bottomless and, based on our 19th century experiences, our capacity to bend nature to our needs was considered even more limitless. In the early time of industrialization, it was assumed that the input of free resources from the earth, such as minerals or forests, could never end, and that the output of pollution into air and water could always be absorbed. These false assumptions were calculated into the equations of classical economics and became rigidly embedded into the ongoing principles upon which economics operates today.[42] As Polanyi stated the market is no longer embedded in society, but that society is embedded in the market system. Nature has become property, and human activity has become labour, both commodities tradable on a market for the highest price, operating with few restrictions that might protect the commons. If something is not considered property and thus enclosed, based on this logic it has no economic value.

According to many, the whole economic formula we use to coordinate our personal or community relationships, as well as global relationships, is inherently artificial and

[39] Locke, J. (1691). Some Considerations of the Consequences of the Lowering of Interest and the Raising of the Value of Money. London: Awnsham and John Churchill.
[40] Hardt & Negri .(2009). p.11
[41] Shapiro, I. (2012) The moral foundations of politics. Yale Open Course. Yale University
[42] Leitaer, B. (2001). *The future of money.* Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers

unsustainable and requires a complete overhaul. But we are now so reliant on this structure for weekly wages or pension payments that there is little motivation, capacity, or even safety to step outside of it long enough to critique its soundness and to design a new system. Any threat to the current financial system, such as happened in the stock market crashes of the 1930s and again in 2008 sends people scurrying back to shore up the mythical giant. A sense of well-being is no longer derived from the group's well being but in our individual capacity to earn and spend.

In a world that has focused on parts and not seen the interconnections of wholes, it is hard to see the impacts of our behaviours. If many people do not know where their daily food comes from[43], it is understandable why more complex connections such as the cumulative impacts of pollution in the oceans or atmosphere on their grandchildren would be harder to comprehend. It is difficult to track the connections between seemingly disconnected conditions such as: poverty in Africa and a consumer-motivated market in North America; the use of cell phones and destructive mining practices; or flying in planes and hurricanes. As decreasing voter turnout in developed countries would suggest[44], people may not feel a connection with, or believe they can impact, the prevailing economic or political system. Cocooning into daily life can easily happen if the world feels too complex and we do not trust our collective capacities to work together.

Ecologist Garrett Hardin[45] in an article entitled "Tragedy of the Commons" seemed to echo some of Hobbes' earlier assumptions regarding the trustworthiness of ordinary people to take care of their shared resources. He indicated that with this assumed inherent propensity to compete, based on rational self-interest, people will predictably damage their shared resources through overuse. This damage he felt could only be prevented if people are controlled through increased government regulation or motivated through privatization and market incentives. This assumption justified many government intervention policies. However, Nobel Laureate author Elinor Ostrom, after over 30 years of cross-cultural work, arrived at a much different perspective of people's capacities.[46] The result of her research indicated that when able to relate to each other, and to the resource they want to protect, people will find ways to work collaboratively to preserve and sustain their commons.

HOW COULD WE BUILD A NEW COLLABORATIVE OPERATING SYSTEM?

Like a camera zooming out for a long shot, we have continually expanded our range of view to take in a larger and larger context. The view has moved from the small concrete world of tribal groups living on an earth that was considered to be flat, to a complex

[43] *Public 'unaware' of food origins.* http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/6731659.stm
[44] Niemi, R. G. &. Weisberg.H.S eds. (2001). *Controversies in voting behavior*. Washington, D.C: CQ Press.
[45] Hardin, G. (1968). The Tragedy of the Commons. *Science*, 162 (1243-1248).
[46] Ostrom, E. (1990a). *Governing the commons: The evolution of institutions for collective action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

interconnected global society engaged in international travel and trade. The combinations of information made available through new technological measurements, along with the more obvious signs of planetary stress, have stimulated an expansion of this view. As more information, connections and relationships are made, our view can encompass the dynamic balance of interactive relationships in the material world between sunshine, carbon, oxygen, methane, clouds, water, rocks, algae, plants, and the activities of living species that developed and maintain the precise conditions necessary to support every aspect of life on the planet. This balance has been all around us for thousands of years but we are only seeing it and our impact on it now. The growing knowledge that we live within a delicately balanced planetary system that we must maintain for our future survival, requires us to develop another broader iteration of social arrangements that reflect this planetary consciousness and responsibility.

A new operating system, the Commons Paradigm, includes a multi system approach to relationships of intrinsic necessity amongst resources, planetary cycles, each other, and other species. In this last section, I will briefly outline the framework of this approach and will offer more detailed descriptions of concepts and practice in Chapter 3 when I describe the work being done in this field by various researchers and practitioners.

The most accepted definition of "Commons" that is emerging contains three interconnected elements: the pool of resources shared in common, the community of people who relate to those resources, and the processes they use to make decisions about the protection, management, and development of those commons. Some of the resources are depletable such as material, natural, and genetic resources. Some are replenishable such as the ones in the cultural, intellectual, and social realm. Some are local like community gardens, blood banks and lakes, and some are global such as atmosphere, oceans and the World Wide Web. Historically, our original concept of "commons" was very concrete and land based as our circles of activities were very land based. As we broadened our capacities, this set of relationships became the generative source for developing new common resources such as customs, language, medical knowledge, technological inventions, and the internet. I will elaborate further on the associated concepts, language and theories in Chapter 3

These commons are all around us all the time but we have so taken them for granted that their vital importance is almost undetectable. One of the largest unseen and unused resources is our own collective capacity to comprehend and coordinate our actions in alignment with our planetary commons. This is a vital and essential commons resource we need to protect, manage and develop if we are to create the transformation that the world needs. However, let us now move into considering the body of literature that has been developed within social construction, systems theory, and public discourse, and examine some specific examples of how these theories are coalescing into potentially building a new global paradigm.

CHAPTER 2

2. HOW DOES SOCIAL CHANGE HAPPEN?

The previous chapter laid out a narrative about past directions we have taken, challenges we now face due to the limitations of operating beliefs that lay underneath those directions, and a proposed new option: the co-construction of a commons paradigm for how we might respond to these challenges. Before delving further into what a commons paradigm means, and how its new narrative is being conceived, co-constructed, and operationalized, there are several foundational theories about how social change comes about that are useful to consider. These are presented to provide resources for commons theorists and practitioners, as well as contexts for the description of emerging commons concepts I present in Chapter 3, and for the case study analysis and recommendations that I will present in Chapters 4 and 5.

There are many different theories of change that underlie the directions we choose to pursue to make the world a better place. My entry into discussing this field of social change is through the philosophy of social construction and how it provides insights into the relational nature of transformative change. In that context, I also highlight the significant perspective that systems theory brings to our perception of complex interactions and how language is involved in creating meaning together. I address how transformations in large-scale social constructs can be defined as paradigm change. Understanding how we construct meaning, not as happenstance, but in a developmental and processual manner is highlighted, especially in regards to the concept of providing "scaffolding" for public discourse and decision-making processes. Advocating a commons paradigm to replace our current individualist paradigm entails citizens being collectively involved in public processes that are adequately designed to address the enormity of this shared endeavour. I, therefore, introduce the Scale of Public Interaction (the SPI) as a useful typology to identify the types and scopes of public discourse often used and to illustrate what aspects are most beneficial to supporting a commons approach.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

> My attempt is to generate an account of human action that can replace the presumption of bounded selves with a vision of relationship: I do not mean relationships between other separate selves, but rather, a process of coordination that precedes the very concept of the self. My hope is to demonstrate that virtually all intelligible action is born, sustained, and/or extinguished within the ongoing process of relationship. From this standpoint there is no isolated self or fully private experience. Rather, we exist in a world of co-constitution. We are always already emerging from relationship; we cannot step out of relationship; even in our most private moments we are never alone. … the future well-being of the planet depends significantly on the extent to which we can nourish and protect not individuals, or even groups, but the generative processes of relating.[47]

[47] Gergen, K. (2009). *Relational being, Beyond self and community*. New York: Oxford University Press. p. xv.

Above, social constructionist Ken Gergen presents this passionate and encompassing motivation for re-thinking how we construct meaning. He goes on to say that to continue this presumption of separately bounded beings creates a threat to the world and leads, much like Karl Polanyi[48] cautioned 60 years earlier, to a reduction of all human beings and our activities to commodities, and all values to market value. To respond to the current issues, it is necessary to move from thinking of separate concrete objects in the environment manipulated by separate individuals, to understanding the implications of a relational universe engaging in ongoing co-creative processes. This movement of perspectives has been articulated in the philosophical stance of social construction. This stance differs from the dominant discourse of modernism. There are several interrelated assumptions that, in the following section, I will weave together in a discussion regarding the social construction of identity, knowledge, and meaning. These provide orienting assumptions for analyzing the construction of a relational universe in the form of a commons paradigm that I will discuss in the next chapters.

Social construction challenges the modernist view of the self-contained individual occupying a fixed, isolated, and consistent identity. Instead, it offers a premise of identity as being co-created and open to the possibility of transformation in every moment through interactions. Far from our identity being something we build and, therefore, privately own, Sheila McNamee says we are actually beholden to each other for the creation of identity.[49] We can reflect multiple selves in response to various contexts. Conceiving of a contextualized identity morphing in response to relationship, may offer more creative options than attempting to defend the rigidity of a bounded self. This typically results in efforts to establish safety through stability and consistency. Our socialized assumptions of success often stem from this demand for clarity, control and consistency. Being interdependent with others can be experienced as a source of vulnerability if viewed through the lens that assumes success can be reliably controlled. On the other hand, interdependence can be the source of great richness and insights if approached with curiosity and inquiry as is proposed by the stance of social construction.

Social construction also offers a critique of the concept of the interior self, when expressed as separate from an exterior social context. Increasing the well-being of this isolated individual identity can become a standard by which to determine short term priorities, i.e." if it feels good it must be right." This stance provides fertile breeding grounds for marketing "feel good" products and services, leading to consumerism as well as, according to social theorist Michel Foucault[50], forming social habits that lead to institutionalized power inequities. Happiness can becomes not a shared co-creative experience but a right to be delivered consistently, or else something is assumed to be "wrong".

Inquiring into one's happiness or well-being requires self-reflection. Today, many of us take the significance of self-refection as a normal barometer for giving us a picture of what is happening within and around us. However when philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) proposed that the internal world of people's ideas informed their external material reality, this was considered a radical proposition for his times. His position differed from the predominant view offered by

[48] Polanyi. (1994)
[49] McNamee, S. (2010) Presentation at workshop. Calgary, Alberta June 2010
[50] Foucault, M. (1980). Truth and Power. in C. Gordon (ed) *Power*/*Knowledge*: Selected Interview and Other Writings 1972-1977, pp. 109-133

"objectivists" who maintained that reality existed only in the external world and was separate from the mind. Almost three hundred years later, Thomas Kuhn[51] argued that traditional scientific knowledge is socially constructed, not a discovery of "what is really there." Social construction adds more dimensions to this questioning of objectivity by inquiring into two interconnected premises: our assumptions regarding knowledge as "truth", and assumptions about the false duality of an internal world as separate from the external world. Self-reflection is not the result of an isolated internal act but the self is a confluence of many voices. [52]

Many limited conceptions resulting from the objectivist science and reductionism in the modernist era have been laid at the feet of Newton, Descartes, Locke, and Smith as described in Chapter 1. In some instances they have been personally blamed by purported post-modernist, holistic thinkers as actually the singular cause of our current problems. However, as Vygotsky[53] stated, there is nothing in the mind that is not first of all in society. This suggests that these famous minds were expressing what was already in the cultural contexts around them as well as, through giving it language, creating a cultural context. This individualistic view is itself a constructed reality! In other words, as mentioned in Chapter 1, "we dun it"!

The philosophical stance of social construction suggests that no pre-existing, singular absolute truths exist for individuals to unearth. Julie Tilsen, when quoting McNamee, stated: "When moving from an individual discourse to a relational discourse of knowledge production, we shift from the notion that knowledge is discoverable ("the truth is out there") to the idea that knowledge is created. As such, knowledge is made, not found."[54] Interaction amongst different actors in different contexts allows for the creation of different meaning and different forms of "joint action" that McNamee defines as what we do together and what the doing makes. These interactions are enhanced by discourse, language, and the diverse meanings with which language is imbued. Therefore, language is very significant to how understanding is reached and joint action is taken and I will discuss this further in a later section.

Social construction considers knowledge to be situational knowledge and learning to be a social phenomenon. This processual framing expands a tendency to try to capture knowledge into definitive truths. As Hosking and McNamee say "A central premise of social construction is that social realities are social achievements produced by people coordinating their activities. This premise is thus very different from the more common narrative (often only implicit) that 'reality' is singular, 'out there' and knowable by the individual mind through a combination of sense data and individual mind operations."[55] This statement offers a window into why so many of our attempts at social change flounder, given our customary ways of holding public discourse. These are often characterized by blaming "them" (other citizens or public officials) for wrong doings, and promoting "our" solutions as an external fix-it "thing." These proposed solutions tend to

[51] Kuhn, T. (1962). *The structure of scientific revolutions.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
[52] Gergen,K. (2009).
[53] Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society*. (M. Cole, Trans.) Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
[54] Tilsen, J. (n.d.). Resisting homonormativity: Therapeutic conversations with queer youth. Retrieved from : http://www.taosinstitute.net/julie-tilsen. P.21

[55] Hosking, D. & McNamee, S. (Eds.) (2006). *The social construction of organization.* Malmo, Sweden: Liber and Copenhagen Business School Press.

float abstractly, as if separate from the complex web of interpersonal interactions, beliefs and behaviours of all of those most involved, who have actively engaged in ways that contributed to the creation and maintenance of the problematic situation and who therefore need to be on board for co-creating a new, more satisfactory response. Clearly, different processes are required that can support citizens, public officials and other stakeholders to consider the implications of multiple views, create meaning together and coordinate their actions.

Over time this sense of truth and reality can coalesce into societal "realties" according to Berger and Luckmann, so that we come to believe "'this is how these things are done.' A world so regarded takes on a firmness of consciousness."[56] A reconsideration of how things are habitually done can become apparent when different cultures meet, as will be referenced later regarding First Nations protocols. Eventually beliefs may become unavailable to inquiry, and therefore to change. Social theorist Foucault[57] refers to this firmness as "regimes of truths" amongst professional disciplines that circulate knowledge from shared practises. However as Gergen states, "Everything we consider real is socially constructed. Or more dramatically, nothing is real unless people agree that it is."[58] This sense of reality, as based on social agreements, is so very different from the world in which people often view themselves as passive victims of outside powers i.e. government or corporate "regimes of truth." If we live with unquestioned assumptions of how the world works, often referred to as "business as usual," we easily begin to lose sight of the many daily ways we participate in relationships with each other, government, markets and nature.

We Constructed This Problematic Situation, How Do We Construct a "Better" One?

"Better" is used here to describe situations, not according to some abstract, universal and absolute value judgment or endless pursuit of progress usually associated with modernist views, but is specifically context dependent regarding experiences of usefulness and preferences.[59] For example, in mathematics, multiplication is not inherently better than addition, except if my purpose is dealing with a more complex task of repetitive sets of numbers. In that context, it would be "better" if I used a more complex tool (thanks to socially accepted Pythagorean rules) to shorten that task. In social situations "better" can be defined only according to the utility in the specific context of people in their specific domains of life conditions. To be "better" would mean that the new co-created situation would satisfy needs that the previous situation had not. We will discuss this later in terms of paradigm change. With these ever broadening horizons, there eventually comes into focus an awareness that a diverse range of others also have multiple and

[56] Berger, P. & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. New York: Doubleday. p.59

[57] Foucault. (1980)

[58] Gergen, K. (2008) An invitation to social construction, London: Sage London. p.10

[59] It seems worthwhile to include a discussion of 'better" and "progression" here due a tendency of post modernists, being highly sensitive to the damage done by the narrow static modernist judgments, to being very alert to reinforcing such language and assumption. However the fear of privileging can also lead to floundering in relativism and an inability to engage in the more detailed work of discerning the specific, context-dependant language and variables that make up a social situation. "Better for what and for whom?" are helpful questions to ask to assist in this dilemma.

legitimate perspectives that form our situation. It is, therefore, "better" to include this diversity if those involved wish to create long term comprehensive and publicly supported solutions. This widening circle also requires more complex interaction and language to navigate these interactions and to co-create some synthesis of what is accepted as better. The term "progression" refers to a sequenced, processual movement through which this context dependant experience of "better" is co-developed and differs from the word "progress" that is associated with a value judgment, or a non-contextually defined truth regarding an end state.

This progressive widening of the range of view may appear to be linear in its trajectory (e.g., the movement from modern to postmodern frames of reference). However, once we are aware of postmodern systemic frames of reference, we will likely find the more simple mechanistic frames of modernity, described in Chapter 1, has limits. However, the dynamics through which the collective progression happens from one frame of reference to another is non-linear and involves messy, organic attempts at seeking, dissolving, testing, building upon and coordinating beliefs and patterns. Furthermore, once our view has expanded and become integrated as our new frame of reference, it can feel so natural that we may forget we have progressed through a series of stages and may even be unaware that our old understanding is, in fact, nested in the current one. It is this forgetting of our own progressions that may cause lack of judgment concerning the diversity of our own or others' experiences. We have used terms such as modern and post modern as useful ways to articulate and make sense of wide-ranging patterns of progression that have been culturally experienced over a period of time.

In Chapter 1, I outlined a scenario in which we, as societies, moved from life supporting situations that seem "better" in a given context, to what is now being recognized as life threatening situations. From the tribal mythical times, through modernity, post modernism and post postmodernism there is an ever widening circle of what is noticed, and actively engaged with in making meaning of our world. This circle of interactions with others and with our environment widens due to the influence of diverse life conditions: as life conditions change, new responses and understandings are required. At the individual level, as new meaning is developed this, in turn, creates new interactions and life conditions. Inquiry and reflexivity support this widening range. This process involves a decentering from the individual focus on self, to expand and include a larger systemically connected context of what was previously viewed as external extraneous influences. Some have referred to this broadly as moving from the egocentric awareness to sociocentric to world centric.[60]

The capacity to make coordinated social and political decisions cannot easily occur when people have not broadened their horizons and are operating primarily from an individualist monological stance. Responding to the multiple challenges of our current times requires an interest in and ability to perceive and engage with the multiple causes, perspectives and implications that make up the whole systems with which we are interacting. We must also overcome tendencies to reduce systems to simple parts. However, it is estimated that only 20% of the population of the Western world have moved from the modernist framework to this systemic participatory frame of thinking, reflective of postmodern sense making.[61] Although I have not seen this difference

[60] Wilber, K. (2007). *A brief history of everything*. Boston: Shambhala Publications.
[61] Researchers including Michael Commons, Carol Gilligan, Susanne Cook Greuter, Jane Loevinger, Robert Kegan, and Bill Torbert have arrived at this conclusion through diverse means of research.

referenced in much of the work in social construction, systems thinking, or public discourse, it would indicate that different processes are required that can support citizens, public officials and other stakeholders to bridge this gap between their capacities and the demands of the situations in which they find themselves. Fortunately, it has been shown that well designed supports or "scaffolding" can greatly increase the capacities of people to expand beyond their habitual frameworks and participate more effectively and generatively in discussing and analysing the complexities of their social situations.[62],[63],[64] I will speak more to the importance of scaffolding and the construction of knowledge through public decision-making processes later in this chapter.

Below I have created several Figures 1a -1e that might be helpful to illustrate this widening view. In looking back, we may see that, as a society, we have always been socially constructing our realities, priorities, policies, and institutions. However, that awareness is not initially in our range of view until we have the ability to observe and reflect upon the interconnected system of experiences and beliefs that influence our view of the world.[65]

[62] Commons, M.& Goodheart, E., (2008). Cultural progress is the result of developmental level of support. *Journal of World Futures*, 64: 406 -415.

[63] Ross, S.N. (2007). Effects of a structured public issues discourse method on the complexity of citizens reasoning and local political development. Dissertation abstracts International B, 68 (02). (UMI No.3251492).

[64] Inglis, J. (2011). "Holistic democracy" and citizen motivation to use a more holistic approach to public decision making. *Integral Review*, *7*(2).

65 Diagram adapted from Model of Hierarchical Complexity. See Commons, M.L. (2008). Introduction to the model of hierarchical complexity and its relationship to post-formal thought. World Futures, The Journal of General Evolution. 64, 5-7, p. 305–320.

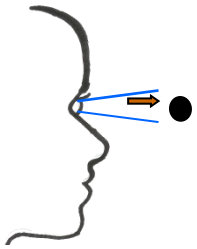

Figure 1a.
A concrete view of the world as existing statically out there

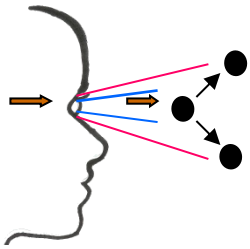

Figure 1b.
Expanding view includes connections of simple linear causality: some things impact other things.

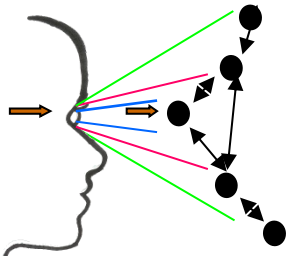

Figure 1c.
Further expanded view: connections of non linear causality, things both impact and are impacted having unpredictable results.

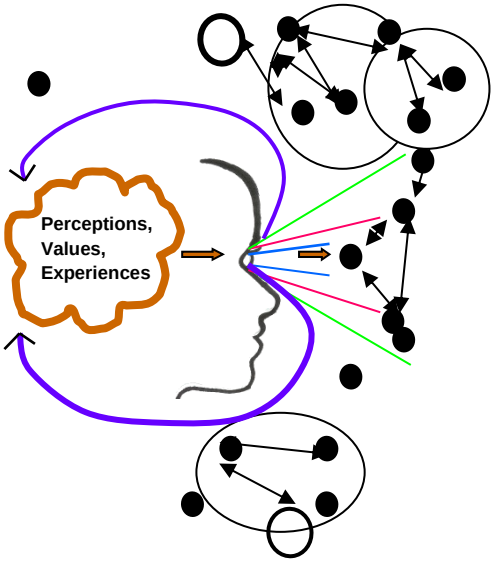

Figure 1d.
Complex view that now can include an awareness of multiple interconnected systems that impact and are impacting each other, including ones own perceptions. The situation is dynamic. There are always many interactions lying outside the range of view yet to be discovered, perceived and/or created. An understanding emerges regarding not just *what* is being seen but also *how* it is being understood impacts the *what* that is being seen.

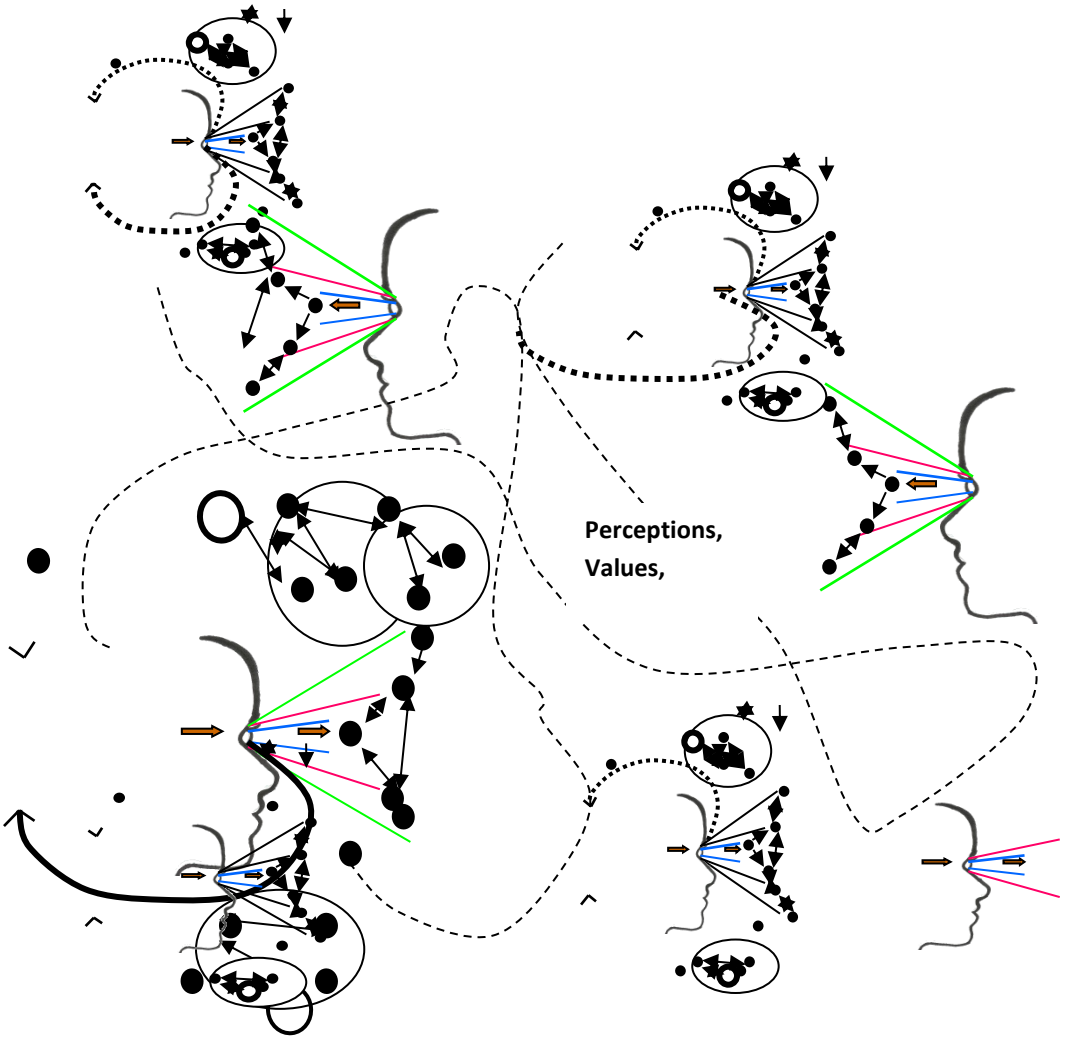

Figure 1e.
Meta-systems view: interconnected systems and multiple ranges of view need to be perceived, and their meanings coordinated. Perceptions are understood to arise from interactions in the space between and amongst others. More comprehensive understanding and actions may emerge. This level of complexity of relationships is happening around us all of the time even in Figure 1a-d whether being observed or not.

Inquiry and reflection can expand the range of view. If we are only focused on partial meaning (just seeing one aspect and not the context surrounding it or hearing only one viewpoint) then our construction will be less sturdy than if we had fuller information. So when looking at the frog in the beaker situation regarding the impacts of CO2 we may be generating conclusions based either on little contextual feedback (e.g. our day to day activities seem just fine other than an occasional storm or dry spell) or partial information (as can happen due to reporting from biased media or vested interest groups). Without inquiry, critical reflection and feedback how do we know if our assumptions are useful in

understanding our current and future situations? The next section explores these questions and the contribution made by Systems Theory which describes how everything is connected to everything, in all directions, at all times and the important role feedback loops play in maintaining equilibrium.

Social Construction Reflected in Systems Theory

In general, a system is defined as a group of interacting, interconnected, or interdependent elements relating to form a complex whole whose properties cannot be found in the components observed in isolation.[66] Complex systems are made up of simpler components that interact in ways to produce a coherence not found in the parts alone. The interactions are not simple predictable linear cause and effect relationships moving from one central point outward, but are nonlinear and with no centralized organization. They can be organized in hierarchies of systems and subsystems like organs in a body each having an identifiable whole function but also being part of another whole function. The coherence itself is a transitory state. The systems are information processing units, gathering information and making decisions based on information that supports the well-being of the whole.

In the field of cybernetics, this information flow is referred to as feedback loops. Feedback loops assist the system to self-regulate. In natural systems, "information" is defined as representations, symbols and communication signals. For human systems (i.e., systems of people), "information" relates to language and meaning. As Harlene Anderson states, "Human systems are language generating and simultaneously meaning generating systems… a sociocultural system is the product of social communication rather than communication being a product of organization. Hence any human system is a linguistic or communicative system." [67] Second order cybernetics, as promoted by anthropologist Gregory Bateson[68] and biologist Humberto Maturana[69] states that there is no such thing as an objective outside observer. The observer is always included and is impacting and being impacted by the experience. Thus, second order cybernetics connects feedback loops with social meaning making. Systems do not operate as if objectively separate from the meaning that is made by an observer, facilitator, or therapist, for example, but they are dynamically reorganizing all the time.

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[66] Laszlo, A., & Krippner, S. (1998). Systems theories: Their origins, foundations, and development. Published in:J.S. Jordan (Ed.), *Systems Theories and A Priori Aspects of Perception*. Amsterdam: Elsevier Science, Ch. 3, pp. 47-74

[67] Anderson, H., & Goolishian , H. (1988). Human systems as linguistic systems: Preliminary and evolving ideas about the implications of clinical theory. *Family Process.* Volume 27, no 4. p.372

[68] Bateson, G. (1991). *Sacred unity: Further steps to an ecology of mind* (1st ed.). New York: Harper One.

[69] Maturana, H.R. & Varela, F.J. (1980): *Autopoiesis and cognition: The Realization of the living*. Boston: Reidel.

Miller's[70] work on living systems indicates all life is about process He traces a continuum from simple life forms such as amoeba that process information and make choices, to the complexity of supranational organizations such as the UN. He indicates that they all use the same twenty subsystems for processing matter and energy, or "information."[71] This nested progression is echoed in Ervin Laszlo's General Evolutionary Systems Theory[72]that states that in open dynamic systems where information and energy flows freely, convergences are created in higher degrees of organization whether from atoms to stars, or villages to states.

How we understand the relationship between social systems and natural systems is also being constructed. In pre-industrial societies, for instance, it was assumed that social systems merely adapted to natural systems. With the Industrial Revolution and advances in technology, it became commonly believed that humans could control natural systems. Later, the belief was framed that natural systems are victims to human systems, and now a more recent iteration recognizes an inclusive reciprocal relationship. The latter implies that we can come into what Gergen calls a relational consciousness. This can result in taking responsibility for the creation of our relationships between our social and planetary systems in a manner that is co-evolutionary and interdependent. Lazlos states, "Having become conscious of evolution, we must now make evolution itself conscious. If we so willed it, the next leap in the development of human society can be intentionally guided" [by creating a] "holarchic path where individuals and communities collaborate of their own accord in flexible social systems."[73] The commons paradigm is attempting to articulate such a conscious path and in so doing may be coordinating a previous gap between social systems and biological systems.

Language, and Patterns of Coordinated Actions

Language, as mentioned previously, is particularly significant to social construction. Becoming more conscious of language - not just as words or phrases but also as coordinated action - can support how we become aware of our communally created choices. We take actions with words. We have reactions to words and we invite or block actions through words. Language represents realities in the form of worldviews that are socially constructed and deconstructed within an interactive space. Language is not like preformed billiard balls moving between statically placed individual minds. We are always in a context of meaning, actions and language and sitting in the possibility of creating other meaning, actions and language. Instead of being constrained by the skin-defined individual self, we are formed and thus bounded by, and through, communication. It is through language that we form context and communities, and through language that we derive a sense of belonging.

[70] Miller, J. G. (1995). *Living systems*.Newot, CO: University Press of Colorado. [Originally published 1978].
[71] Parent, E. (2010). *The Living Systems Theory of James Grier Miller.* International Society for the Systems Sciences.
[72] Laszlo, A., & Krippner, S. (1998).
[73] Laszlo, E. (1991). *The age of bifurcation: Understanding the changing world*. Philadelphia: Gordon & Breach. p.104.

According to Anderson, "We do not arrive at or have meaning and understanding until we take communicative action, that is engage in some meaning-generating discourse or dialogue within a system for which the communication has relevance."[74] Reality, whether it be about what constitutes a "problem" or what might dissolve the "problem" is not predetermined, but is constantly negotiated through language.

In Figure 2 below, Sheila McNamee [75] illustrates how language and meaning arise as people coordinate their activities together and how that may result in patterns or rituals. These become associated with standards and expectations that gain value, and eventually may become entrenched patterns that define what is considered to be normal. We register responses and focus reactions through what we value. Values can lead to repetitions of sequences of behaviors, the formation of stereotypes, and practise of rituals. When many values and worldviews are involved, as is normal in most public interactions, this loop or loops becomes much more complex (as illustrated in Figure 1e on page 30).

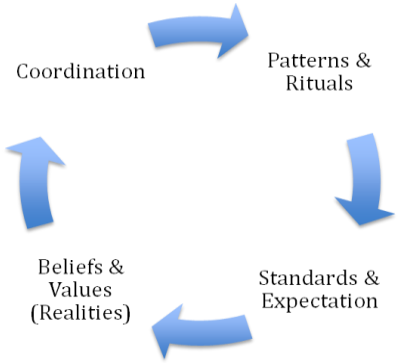

Figure 2 The Relational Construction of multiple moral orders (realities) by Sheila McNamee

Policies and institutions provide social constraints by encouraging certain behaviours and discouraging others. These are socially created and communicated realities. Moving into more stable patterns would suggest, as Wittgenstein described, that we have learned to "play the language game."[76] Using the term "game" is not meant to trivialize the significance of language, but to place it in context of specific patterns or habits of meaning built amongst us over time. The process is similar to how players abide by rules when they make moves and counter moves in a game. The patterns may be so entrenched, and we have learned the language game so well, that we are no longer aware of our part in the dynamic co-creating and co-dissolving process. Social constructionism seeks to accentuate the importance of our choice of language in the creation, dissolution, or maintenance of this cycle.

[74] Anderson,H. & Goolishian, H. (1988)
[75] McNamee, S. (in press). "Constructing values and beliefs: A relational approach to sustainable development." In J. Appleton (Ed.), *Including Attitudes and Values in Sustainability Development Research.* Cheltenham, England: Edward Elgar Publishing
[76] Wittgenstein, L. (1953). *Philosophical investigations.* Trans. G. Anscombe. New York: Macmillan.

Creating meaning together takes attention, focus, and commitment and so is not a passive but an active process requiring joint action. We are often unaware of the intricate web of active agreements that end up as policies, regulations or legislation that govern our every move and keep what seemingly feels like our individual lives always tied into a mesh with others. While sitting on a plane one day I tried to discern the confluence of interconnected agreements that had been made to allow me to participate in an ordinary event such as moving forward through space while sitting comfortably 30,000 feet above the ground. This involves how schools are accredited to train mechanics and pilots, how on-flight meals are kept hygienic (although not always tasty), how land use policies allow for massive spaces to be annexed so that airports and runways can be built, how international agreements define air traffic patterns and security, to how the extraction of minerals creates the overhead lights etc. etc. This awareness of the web we sit in could be applied to simple activities like crossing a street, or buying a can of pasta sauce, or more complex activities as challenging a bylaw, or stopping tar sands development.

Language arises communally not privately. As actions unfold, they form, as indicated by McNamee, patterns or conventions in our culture that are often tacit, lying below the surface of our daily awareness. The patterns become normalized and institutionalized over time creating necessary constraints through which we coordinate our public communications and actions. These constraints are not by nature permanent or linearly deterministic but dynamically responsive to the dialectical tension that arises when new contexts, actors and options come into play. For a paradigm change to occur we must take many of these constraints from their place in the background of our attention and re-examine them to ascertain whether they are still useful, whether they still fit the context and are considered socially desirable for our, as Wittgenstein said, "going on together". He wrote, "The meaning of a word is its use in the language."[77] This concept of "use" suggests tools that we actively set in motion to perform tasks. The phrase suggests that seemingly independent words exist in a relational context. Therefore, to understand others' meaning requires inquiry into their desired outcomes and context. This inquiry may reveal a reality (out there), and an experience of that reality (what meaning it has) and the expression we chose to convey that experience (how it is framed, represented, articulated).[78]

When paradigms are being contested (as is true in proposing a commons paradigm), expressions have heightened activity, presuppositions of a society become more exposed, and core values are expressed in which the culture is poised to discover itself and find a new coherence. The raising of suppositions and the expression of values suggests the significance of public discourse in the formation of new paradigms. This will be the subject of the next section.

Polyphonic Discourse and Deliberative Democracy

[77] Wittgenstein, L. p 43

[78] Turner, V.W., & Bruner, E.M. (Eds.), (1986). *The Anthropology of Experience*. Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press.

Social construction relies on polyphonic discourse signifying that the interaction requires co-ordination of numerous and diverse voices and viewpoints. These diverse and often conflicting voices arise between and amongst us, as well as within our bounded selves. Often in public engagement, we are blind to each other's views, with each of us staying in the isolation of our own truth. It is a pragmatic necessity, not only a moral issue, to include a broad range of actors and perspectives when making public decisions in order to reveal and understand the whole picture.

This discussion begs another clichéd story: the blind men and the elephant. When each blind man independently reported his version of an elephant based on the limited experience of feeling just one part of the torso (the long round trunk, the thin flat ears, the smooth hard tusk), each man had accurate information about that part, but, collectively, they had no capacity it seems, or process, for sharing their different experiences and constructing their shared and more complex reality. With inquiry or an adequately facilitated process to keep participants from making narrow disconnected assertions of truth, they could have voiced their differences, been heard (they were blind not deaf or mute) and created a sense of the whole.

National delegates sitting around the UN table seem like the blind men with the elephant. Similarly, they defend their individual truths and their individual nations' economic needs while not seeing the collective wealth of the whole, or the implications for the collective well-being.

> "As constructionist ideas suggest, rather than asking about ultimate truth, the important questions concern the implications for our lives together. How does a given set of ideas contribute to human well-being; who do they advantage and disadvantage; do they lead to more freedom or domination; do they sustain the planet or destroy it; and so on."[79]

These questions, posed by Gergen, open up an inquiry into what might be collectively preferred ways to proceed together. They indicate the need for a weighing out or deliberation of pros and cons of various set of ideas. Although this kind of shared deliberation is making some inroads into personal therapy or organizational discourse, it is not scaling up, and is noticeably absent from, our political discourse in which we are socially constructing public decisions and policies regarding how to move forward together whether locally, nationally or globally. These areas are too often settings for absolutist claims of truth fanned by media, political debate or partisan agendas. This field of public discourse, and specifically public deliberation and decision-making, is significant and I will commit a separate section to it after first discussing the construction of new paradigms in general and especially at a global level. There are many who have studied how this change in paradigmatic worldviews can be enhanced and I will share some gleanings from that field in this next section.

[79] Gergen, K. (2011). What counts as social construction. *Taos newsletter*.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW PARADIGM

> You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.
> Buckminster Fuller

The term paradigm refers to a philosophical or theoretical framework that includes theories, laws, generalizations, and experiments. [80] Physicist, historian, and philosopher Thomas Kuhn [81] used the concepts of scientific revolution or paradigm shifts to refer to changing frameworks in the natural sciences, although it is now being applied to the social sciences. Paradigms are incommensurable with each other as they are based on completely different standards and worldviews.

Kuhn describes a developmental sequence of phases by which paradigms change. In the pre-paradigm phase there is no consensus and widely incompatible and incomplete theories are being espoused. Eventually, consensus is reached based on experimentation, negotiation, and agreements on methods and terminology. A stable period of "normal science", or a new dominant paradigm, is reached. Small anomalies can be accommodated in this phase but, over time, if many discrepancies and questions arise that cannot be explained through the existing paradigm, it is considered inadequate and a new revolutionary period is entered. Kuhn felt this period was characterized by crises that catapult the move into deconstructing the old paradigm and seeking a new, more functional one. The popular term of "thinking outside the box" has been coined to describe how the scope of the current worldview or box is inadequate and needs to go beyond previous limits. However, the process of thinking not just outside the box, but *about* the box itself, i.e. "thinking about how we are thinking" may be a better term. This represents reflective thinking, inquiry and analysis that can respond to an expanded scope of life conditions not previously understood. This quality of thinking more dynamically reflects what is needed to change a paradigm in which we have become boxed.

Despite the popularity of the term paradigm change, the appearance of a new paradigm is not an "anything goes" phenomenon. According to Kuhn, "The proliferation of competing articulations, the willingness to try anything, the expression of explicit discontent, the recourse to philosophy and to debate over fundamentals, all these are symptoms of a transition from normal to extraordinary research."[82] This is not just a mere change in perception but ripples out to reorganize and construct multiple new sets of relationships between and amongst components resulting in a new framework to be socially constructed, incompatible with the previous. Kuhn was indicating that the data did not change but the perception of that data changed due observing new and potentially transformative relationships and meaning <u>amongst</u> the data that were not experienced

[80] Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/paradigm
[81] Kuhn, T. (1970). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
[82] Kuhn, T. (1970). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. p. 91

before. For example, Copernicus presented a radically new way of understanding the arrangements of the sun, earth, planets, and orbits.[83] These elements did not themselves change but their relationships were seen as being arranged differently than assumed and, therefore, of holding different meaning. Instead of the earth being fixed with the heavenly bodies moving around it, as described for hundreds of years by the church, Copernicus noted that the earth revolved around the sun. This shift of perceptions of the earth's centrality and stability precipitated a rearrangement of how the socially defined components of the previous paradigm (i.e., heavenly bodies, god and humans) were assumed to have meaning and be in relationship and raised questions about the Catholic Church, and how truth was defined and verified.

This developmental cycle of paradigms forming, contradicting and transforming, repeats throughout history usually occurring over many decades or even centuries, as new information or contexts arise that elicit new constructions. It took 200 years before a majority of people accepted Copernicus' observations. In the early phase, discourse is difficult across paradigms since that language has arisen within the dominant paradigm and therefore is not adequate to express the emerging paradigms. As mentioned earlier, philosopher Wittgenstein had referred to comfort with known discourse as establishing a groove that has its own subset of language. It is like learning to play the game together, each participant knowing where they stand with each other.[84] With the new paradigm, there is yet no agreed terminology to span the conceptual differences, no groove has been established.

Kuhn shocked scientists who believed their 'objectivity' put them beyond the habits of language or the influence of personal beliefs, or communities of beliefs. He maintained that even supposedly objective scientists could look at the same phenomena but see two different things since they have fundamental beliefs about the world that differ. This could not be "fixed" by just changing the superficial data. Without the awareness that our worlds are socially constructed, people end up talking past each other, often speaking out of their own worldview and not hearing, let alone inquiring, into these fundamental differences. Those promoting the old paradigm may be slow to hear or acknowledge the problems and limitations that frustrate the proponents of the new paradigm. Finding language between paradigms is difficult, making the new emerging paradigm and its proponents invisible or illogical for a period of time.

When comparing paradigm change within the social sciences versus within the "hard" sciences, Olsen, Lodwick and Dunlap[85] argue that the former are rarely as deliberately approached as the latter. This is partly because paradigm change in the public realm is not publicly discussed or debated in the same dedicated manner as are new theories in the more focused (and I would add funded) venues of traditional science. Change instead can emerge unintentionally, often incompletely or even vaguely. It's spread is dependent on

[83] Koestler, A. (1959). *The sleepwalkers: A history of man's changing vision of the universe.* London,U.K: . Hutchinson.
[84] Whitehead, A, N, (1927). *Science and the modern world.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[85] Olsen, M. E., Lodwick, D.G., & Dunlap, R.E. (1992). *Viewing the World Ecologically*. (Chapter 2, "Theoretical Framework," pp. 13-32.) Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

people increasingly becoming aware of, and sharing experiences about, anomalies within the old social paradigm.

Public education about pressing issues such as climate change often fails to take the importance of this communally and developmentally constructed knowledge into account. Often presentations are made to individuals sitting separately in darkened theatres or at home without any process for them to share what meaning they are making about this information. Although public discourse is not likely to become a linear and rational science, nor should these discussions by which the public creates shared meaning about anomalies be left to happenstance either. This points to an enormous gap between the discourse of the science community and the public. For example, the impact of CO2 emissions or issues surrounding the impacts of industrialization on the Great Lakes has been known by the scientific community for decades, and has been vetted by peer reviewed journals. However, it is not being vetted by people living in the general communities that bear those impacts. Although this gap in communication is being somewhat recognized in the science community lately, there is still little funding put towards supporting large scale public deliberations on the approaches we might take to address pressing public issues such as climate change.

Revolution, Evolution and Transitional Change

Whereas Kuhn has been associated with revolutionary jumps between incommensurable paradigms, that some magically refer to as "quantum leaps," Einstein referred to a more evolutionary process in which the earlier stages inform the next:

> Creating a new theory is not like destroying an old barn and erecting a skyscraper in its place. It is rather like climbing a mountain, gaining new and wider views, discovering unexpected connections between our starting point and its rich environment. But the point from which we started out still exists and can be seen, although it appears smaller and forms a tiny part of our broad view gained by the mastery of the obstacles on our adventurous way up.[86]

Bateson, like Einstein, focused on the transitional stages of change that resulted from learning and also saw the progression as an evolutionary rather than revolutionary process.[87] Each level is built upon and subsumes the previous one. First order learning involves working with facts, the "what" that is learned or memorized and does not need to involve our beliefs (e.g., there are many different trees). Second order learning considers the context and process, or the "how" of learning and from this reflection adjustments may be made in the components of the previous order of learning. It may be referred to as situated learning (e.g., our learning about how different trees grow in relationship helps us understand forest ecosystems and that informs a broader spectrum of meaning and action than can be gained from just understanding the individual trees).

[86] Einstein, A., & Infeld, L. (republished in 1966) *The evolution of physics: From early concepts to relativity and quanta.* New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., p. 152

[87] Bateson, G. (1972). *Steps to an ecology of mind*. San Francisco: Chandler.

Third order learning involves a transformative change as it includes a reflection on perspectives regarding both the "how" of learning and "what" is being learned (e.g., our assumptions of forests as timber supplies that support short term markets will create different actions and policies that will sit in tension with assumptions of forests as long term ecosystems that impact habitat, water tables and climate patterns. Therefore, new approaches to supporting economics and employment need to be designed based on sustainable practices.). The third order learning would be the prerequisite for paradigm change, making interaction of multiple systems visible to our inquiry and thus available for creating new relational meaning so that a new whole emerges.

A more microscopic look at transitions can be seen through three processual phases attributed to Hegel: (1) thesis; (2) antithesis (reaction to the thesis); and (3) synthesis (resolution of the tension between thesis and antithesis. The synthesis offers a new, fuller, more coherent framework that successfully overcomes the limits in the thesis and antithesis. Although Hegel considered the synthesis the end point, it of course, can become the next thesis to be tested against experience and the cycle repeats itself recursively in a dynamic manner. From this processual view, there is no final perfect singular paradigm.

A still further zoom in reveals another layer of significant sub phases within Hegel's three-part process.[88] This layer includes initial attempts of living with the tensions between thesis and antithesis, that eventually lead to acknowledging the discontent, and entering a chaotic phase as new options are tried out to see if they can be successfully coordinated to provide more satisfaction. This latter phase may require some time and effort before eventually the more fulfilling (although transient) synthesis phase evolves. I will refer more to these phases later in my discussion regarding public discourse as they are very significant to understanding how people arrive at decisions to move forward together and, therefore, are germane to public engagement in commons governance.

Social Construction at a Global Level

With roots in the disciplines of psychology and communication, it is not surprising that social construction theory is applied in the setting of personal therapy, organizational development or academic learning. However, social construction theory also offers insight into the connection between actions, actors and structures at global political and economic scales. Alexander Wendt,[89] in discussing international relations through a social constructionist lens, described social structures as having three aspects: shared knowledge, material resources and practises. They may be conceived and arranged differently based on whether they are viewed through the reductionism of a neo liberal regime, or the interconnectedness of the proposed commons regime. Wendt[90] also points

[88] Sonnert, G., & Commons, M. L. (1994). Society and the highest stages of moral development. *Politics and the Individual*, *4*(1), 31-55.
[89] Wendt, A. (1999). *Social Theory of International Politics.* Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.
[90] Wendt, A. (1992). Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics. *International Organization*, vol. 46, no. 2.

out that institutions are socially constructed. Although they may be perceived by some as external coercive forces, they only exist due to people's socially formed conceptions of how the world works, and can only gain legitimacy from active participation and endorsements. In other words, "we" created our institutions - "we dun it."

It is surprising that many people think of politics, especially global politics, as unsavoury and in a realm beyond, and sometimes even beneath, their daily concerns and disconnected from the relationships they construct locally. In contrast, Hal Saunders, former US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs argues that politics is completely about relationships and is the result of continuous coordinated interactions across the semi-permeable boundaries of groups and individuals.[91] We are involved politically at many levels and in many configurations of relationships all the time whether we know it, or like it, or not.

In discussing social construction in terms of international relations, Tannenwald[92] suggests there are four categories of shared beliefs: a) normative beliefs or principles that guide criteria of justice, right and wrong, (e.g., incest): b) causal beliefs that offer guidelines of how means result in desired ends, (e.g., use of foreign aid to reduce poverty); c) policy prescriptions that involve shared notions of procedures (e.g., voting regulations); and d) shared belief systems that hold wide and deep systematic sets of aspirations and social needs of a group, class, state or culture (e.g., freedom to pursue happiness). These categories of shared beliefs are similar to the diversity discussed by adult developmentalists who name a similar range from specific to broad in relationship to increases in complexity of worldviews.[93] These various ranges and transitions offer meaningful tools for analysis of the development of a commons paradigm and will be referred to again in Chapter 5 to summarize observations made in the four areas of inquiry regarding how the commons paradigm was being constructed.

Scaffolding the Development of New Paradigm

Gergen suggests that the fields of cognitive development and social construction are slowly merging[94]. This has implications for how we might further understand the process of our construction of meaning and choice of actions. Vygotsky, like Gergen, placed culture and social interaction as central in the development of complex thinking. Vygotsky advocated that knowledge construction is both social and cognitive. He challenged Piaget, referred to as the "structuralist of the interior,"[95] whose primary premise was that individual children developed new constructs inside themselves.

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[91] Saunders, H. (2005). *Politics is about relationships: a blueprint for the citizen's century*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

[92] Tannenwald, N. (2005). Stigmatizing the bomb: Origins of the nuclear taboo. *International Security*, Vol.30, No. 1, pp. 5-49.

[93] Michael Commons ,Carol Gilligan, Susanne Cook Greuter, Jane Loevinger, Robert Kegan, and Bill Torbert

[94] Gergen, K. (2011). What counts as social construction. *Taos newsletter.*

[95] Edwards, M. (2004). Concerning the absence of Vygostky and social construction from Wilber's integral theory. Accessed September 20, 2012 at http://www.integralworld.net/edwards17.html

Vygotsky argued, "All the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals."[96] More sophisticated and effective mental processes would be developed through exposure to various social/cultural environments leading to higher mental functions. Through a process called *scaffolding* the social/cultural environments such as in a classroom could be deliberately structured to support children to reach their potential. This setting of encouragement, and exposure to those with more skill, could support participants to move at a comfortable pace, from knowing less to knowing more. He referred to this as the Zone of Proximal Development.

Michael White[97] claims that thoughtfully designed scaffolding questions can provide stepping stones to assist people to move from the known and familiar into the unknown but possible, or even preferred. Such an expansion of view can open up the capacity to see an expanded range of options for actions allowing participants to be agentic and to create new conditions in which to approach problematic situations. By encouraging people to reflect on who they are and what they are doing, scaffolding can support people to align their actions with what most matters to them. They can develop new proposals for action, anticipate conditions favourable to these actions being taken and consider outcomes based on acting on these proposals.[98]

It is clear from the research that the social construction of meaning and consequent decision-making and joint action depend on highly reflective competences, and, in many situations requires processes that can scaffold the emergence of this competence. However, just because we say we *should* be more reflective, and move out of our narrow individualist frameworks, does not mean we then just jump to doing so. A deeper look at the processual nature of social learning and transformation can give us a sense of the importance of scaffolding and how it can promote change at a cultural level.

Fostering Reflective Capacity, Social Learning and Transformational Learning[99]

How can this reflective capacity and the social learning it promotes be fostered? The field of social and transformational learning offers insight in terms of how reflection occurs, how meaning is constructed and how actions are chosen. Acknowledging some of the key contributors to this field is important, both to recognize their contribution specifically and also, to model the layers required in constructing meaning - a necessary component in collectively developing a new paradigm.

German philosopher and sociologist Jurgen Habermas introduced "critical social theory" as a method for analyzing contemporary society, a method that he hoped would meet the

[96] Vygotsky, (1978). p 57
[97] White, M. (2001). Folk psychology and narrative practice. *Dulwich Centre Journal* 2001, 2, 1–34.
[98] White, M.,& Epton, D.(1990). *Narrative means to therapeutic ends.* New York: Norton.
[99] Parts of the section appeared in Inglis, J. (2011). "Holistic Democracy" and Citizen Motivation To Use a More Holistic Approach to Public Decision Making. *Integral Review, 7*(2).

demands of both philosophy and science. Through this method, he framed social action as inherently connected to social meaning, values, worldviews, roles, and social norms situated within social, economic, and political life conditions.[100] He married communication and action, as he saw the dynamic movement towards reaching shared understanding as a fundamental aspect to a functioning society. He believed that perspectives could grow beyond their possible narrowness and naïveté when tested through social discourse. Competence in this communicative action could be developed, providing the basis for a theory of social evolution through public deliberation. In an "ideal speech situation," Habermas thought that people could reason together, transform their individual preferences and seek a common good.[101]

Donald Schon [102]contributed the concept of "learning society" to the understanding of the theory and practice of learning including concepts of "double-loop learning" and "reflection-in-action." [103] He used these concepts to describe social movements as "learning systems." Schon, along with Chris Argyris, Bill Torbert and Peter Reason, promoted forms of focused inquiry, often known as collaborative inquiry or action inquiry, through which the assumptions and models one operates from could become less concealed and available and responsive to learning.[104]

Paulo Friere,[105] a Brazilian popular educator, focused on a way of learning that was enhanced by people talking, analyzing, and working with each other, in ways that made positive differences in their worlds. He referred to this as the "problem posing" method of learning versus "banking education" whereby teachers deposited information into what was assumed to be empty minds. The former, he said, promoted "conscientization", meaning that these exchanges regarding people's lived experiences held the potential of awakening and transforming consciousness and, thus, building hope amongst the oppressed. Friere also indicated that information and life conditions were mutable if people were able to shift their perceptions, especially their perceptions about power and their ability to influence change. He supported the use of learning circles in which each person's voice had equal weight and believed this could be the basis for true democracy. Friere believed that shared critical reflection and learning, through a process he called "praxis", could lead to political change.

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[100] Habermas, J. (1984). *The theory of communicative action*: Vol. 1. Reason and the rationalization of society (T. McCarthy, Trans.). Boston: Beacon.

[101] Young, I. M. (1995). Communication and the other: beyond deliberative democracy. In M. Wilson & A.Yeatman, (Eds.), *Justice and Identity, Antipodean Practices.* Chapter Nine. Wellington: Bridget William Books

[102] Schön, D. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. London: Temple Smith.

[103] Smith, M. K. (2001). Donald Schön: learning, reflection and change. *The Encyclopedia of Informal Education*. Accessed online July 17,2010 at: www.infed.org/thinkers/et-schon.htm accesses

[104] Reason, P.& Bradbury**,** H. **(**2008). *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research Participative Inquiry and Practice* Second Edition London: Sage Publications Ltd

[105] Freire, P. (1993). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* New York: Continuum Books.

Jack Mezirow is recognized for his work in transformational learning in adults. His research showed that most adult learning is communicative learning as it involves understanding the meaning of what others are communicating regarding values and ideals. He explored how underlying psychocultural assumptions influenced meaning making of present situations and how that shaped expectations of future situations. Communicative learning seeks coherence: "We continually move back and forth between the parts and the whole of that which we seek to understand and between the event and our habits of expectation."[106] Mezirow indicated that perspectives, often taken on unconsciously and held habitually, could actually be understood and transformed through critical reflection. He concluded that action resulting from an analysis of assumptions, a process that he called reflective action, was a necessary aspect of decision making.

This research on reflective capacity and social learning is significant regarding how public engagement processes could be designed to support collective decision-making as are needed for commons approaches to governance and economics. I will explore these processes further in the following section.

THE ROLE OF PUBLIC DISCOURSE IN SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

> L. S. Vygotsky confirmed … that reflective thought is social conversation internalized. We first experience and learn what Oakeshott calls "the skill and partnership of conversation"--what I call here the craft of interdependence--in the arena of direct social exchange. Only then, Vygotsky demonstrates, do we learn to displace that skill and partnership by dramatizing and playing out silently within ourselves the role of every participant in the conversation……knowing is not an unmediated, direct relationship between subject and object. It is a disjunctive, mediated process involving the agency of other people. [107]

Above, Bruffee indicates the importance of conversation. A common phrase used in social construction is that the world is changed one conversation at a time. This expression highlights the potential of every in-the-moment interaction, but, more importantly, it stimulates an inquiry into how one conversation could actually lead to such a complex collective process as "changing the world." The expression can blur the fact that there are many different kinds of conversation and not all of them will lead to such a collective result. The quality and impact of public discourse depends upon many variables including the context, the participants and the processes involved. In this section, I will present a typology of the different kinds of interactions commonly used in civic or public settings and how may they result in different kinds of interactions. I will also highlight the difference between general conversation and decision-making and raise the question of how legitimacy is granted to public decisions.

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[106] Mezirow, J. (1990). *Fostering critical reflection in adults*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.p. 205
[107] Bruffee, K. A. (1993). *Collaborative Learning.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University. p.114 & 117

The field of public discourse is prolific. There are a few organizations with which I am associated, that act as umbrellas groups for housing information of public engagement initiatives in North America: the National Coalition of Dialogue and Deliberation, The Kettering Institute and the Canadian Community of Dialogue and Deliberation. There are also several researchers and practitioners proficient in this field including Atlee, Bohman, Delli Carpini et al, Fishkin, ,Foucault, Gastil, Rosenberg, Ross, and Yankelovich. They point out the difficulty of current public decision making whilst describing the need for, as well as challenges of, public discourse. Much of democratic decision making uses reductionist either/or adversarial approaches that are not adequate for more complex issues that require multiple publicly generated and supported responses.

In response to a growing disillusionment with such democratic practices, Bohman argues that deliberation can support democracy by improving responses to the complexity, pluralism, and inequalities of society.[108] Deliberation offers a specific form of discourse in that it involves stages that support deep consideration of many perspectives and the weighing out of implications prior to arriving at decisions.[109] Much like Elinor Ostrom, mentioned in Chapter 1, Bohman challenges assumptions that the public is "unreasonable," by saying that the difficulty actually arises from people not having support in discursive situations where they can use their reason, or, as Kant would say their "enlarged capacity for thought." Both Fishkin[110] and Yankelovich [111] have demonstrated the potential of the public to successfully deliberate issues before arriving at a decision, when they are supported in doing so. Yankelovich has shown that when people are presented with complex issues to consider, and when given appropriate forms of support, they will engage in reflection and evolve their views over time. From his research, he concluded that peoples' views regarding an issue will, through focused engagement and inquiry on an issue, progress through predictable steps from spontaneous, re-active individual opinions to more considered, deeper, co-created judgments.

Foucault[112] described how knowledge is constructed through discourse, highlighting the influence of some types of discourse to result in "truth" claims and others to be marginalized. He emphasizes the power inherent in framing topics when some are presented as "worthy" for consideration. These shape and create meaning systems, and dominate how we organize our social worlds while others topics may be resisted and lose status. This is relevant to how, or if, anomalies regarding the current paradigm are publicly discussed such as climate change or Great Lakes pollution, and how some articulations of a new paradigm may take precedence and others fall to the side. If short

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[108] Bohman, J. (2000). *Public deliberation: Pluralism, complexity, and democracy.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

[109] NCDD Resource Centre. *What Are dialogue & deliberation?* Accessed June 2013 at http://ncdd.org/rc/what-are-dd

[110] Fishkin, J. S. (1991). *Democracy and deliberation.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

[111] Yankelovich, D. (1991). *Coming to public judgment: making democracy work in a complex world*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

[112] Hall, S. (1997). *The work of representation.* Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices. London: Sage.

term success and freedom are the normative goal in the Western culture, considered most worthy of dominating public discourse especially media, then other views such as those related to long term sustainability can be subject to marginalization.

Developmental psychologist Shawn Rosenberg[113] has applied an adult developmental lens to this process of evolving views and co-creating decisions. He suggests that the reason we have challenges in our democratic practises is that the requirements of public discourse leading to collective action are beyond the developmental capacities of many citizens. He indicates that taking a one size fits all approach to public engagement (e.g. referendums), blinds us to the need for more supported forums. The ability to analyze a complex public issue, reflect on and communicate one's ideas, understand and be concerned about the perspective of others, are all necessary skills in order to engage effectively in a democracy. However, he argues that we should not assume that these requirements are automatically practised by individuals and social groups when it comes to participating in public decision-making. At the same time, he suggests that well facilitated public deliberations can potentially support the development and engagement of these capacities and thus deliberative processes might offer citizens a better chance at responding to the complexities facing them in the 21st century.

The Scale of Public Interactions

Based on prior research and education regarding engaging the public in complex public issues, my colleague Sara Ross and I developed the Scale of Public Interaction (SPI). The SPI graphically represents the different types of discourse and their usefulness in co-constructing different outcomes (see Figure 4 below). I am presenting it here, along with examples, as it demonstrates how scaffolding can be useful for engaging in commons practices.[114]

The focus of the SPI is to match the "what" (i.e., the desired outcome of a given form of public interaction) and the "how" (i.e., the skills, and application of those skills, required to co-create the intended outcome). We used the term "interaction" to direct attention to the skills required to perform the mutual and relational nature of public processes. "Interaction" differs from the commonly used terms public "involvement", "engagement" and "participation", that indirectly infer being engaged by an outside agent, whereas the former term speaks more to the active, agentic, and multi-directional co-construction that is occurring amongst citizens, government officials, and facilitators. It is important for both participants and facilitators of public processes to consider whether the processes they are using will support the outcomes that they want.

For thousands of years, human beings have been gathering in formal and informal groups to talk about their needs and concerns, and to voice their views about what should be

[113] Rosenberg, S. W. (2002). *The not so common sense.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
[114] The following section is adapted from the article: Inglis, J. (2007). Matching public interaction skills with desired outcomes. *International Journal of Public Participation* 1(2):2–17.

done to meet challenges and improve quality of life. In contemporary societies, there are many varieties of interaction between members of the public, and they are known by many different names. There are public meetings, conversation cafés, citizen juries, town hall meetings, study circles, deliberative forums, generative dialogues, collaborative inquiry, mediated conflict negotiations, and consensus-building, to name just a few. For each of these approaches for working with challenges that inevitably arise when human beings interact, there are proponents and advocates who believe passionately that the particular methods they use are essential for building social capital and fostering the development of participatory democracy. Some practitioners feel that just getting people out and talking to each other will make a difference. Others, like those drawn to the commons paradigm, are inspired to create a level of discourse that has the potential for transforming current global issues and contributing to a global movement that offers hope for a more-just and sustainable world.

Sustainability and social justice are worthy ideals many of us share. They also are very large and general ideals that need certain public interaction skills and processes to accomplish. These skill sets can be cultivated through well-considered progressive stages. What assumptions do we make about the efficacy of our usual forms of public interaction for developing these processes, and for moving us toward these ideals? To answer this question, participants and practitioners need a way to ascertain whether the public interaction process being proposed is appropriate for achieving the desired outcome; i.e., whether there is a good match between the process and the skills needed for achieving that outcome. If this assessment is inadequate or faulty, much time, resources, and goodwill may be wasted.

In many cases, the initiators of public processes gather people to talk with only a vague explanation, or even understanding, of how the process will address a public problem thoroughly and productively. Although inclusion and diversity are important principles, more needs to happen than just filling a room, recording on flip charts, and categorising comments on sticky notes. Participants and practitioners need to be explicit about the outcomes they wish to achieve and how the form of public interaction they plan to use may support those outcomes. Just as we would not expect beginning students of arithmetic to perform advanced calculus armed with only addition and multiplication skills, we should not expect the public to tackle the complex systemic issues of homelessness, water quality, in-migration or the development of a social charter for the care of a large scale commons using the simple communication skills of casual and opinionated talk or strategic planning by experts.

We can easily recognize that calculus is a more complex, higher form of mathematics requiring a progressive development of skills and is not a subject that can be taught when readiness is not established. How can we begin to recognize that public interaction aiming at comprehensive social change is a more-complex form of interaction that also requires a progressive development of skills and is not just a technique to be facilitated without understanding the preconditions for readiness? Without a method by which to recognize the different levels of complexity in the tasks of public interaction, many facilitators may attempt to work with simple forms of public interaction to accomplish

complex tasks. For example, casual talk and reactive opinionated talk, or even inclusive dialogue processes are not adequate to achieve the quality of commitment, structure, time, and focus needed to support multi-stakeholder, multi-perspective decision-making about complex public issues. Lack of discernment with regard to the skills required to hold such a discussion can result in wasted hours, frustration with public meetings, apathy, and even cynicism about public processes in general.

Considering social implications of a complex issue is very different from just campaigning for a yes /no vote. The public interaction skill set for responding to a complex issue calls for a different quality and amount of time and commitment than working with a simple issue. Co-constructing meaning requires a different way of talking, thinking, deciding, and acting together. Complex issues have many facets, layers, and perspectives regarding their causes, impacts, and solutions. All of these variables need to be identified and worked through systematically before such issues can be addressed productively. Most social interactions do not support this kind of thoughtful engagement.

Moreover, a different type of structure and focus for gathering people is required to ensure adequate attention is given to a complex issue. Enacting comprehensive social change demands more than working with key individuals through leadership training or personal communication programs. It requires us to develop structures to support our collective skills and create a new civic culture, i.e., new norms of relating to each other when addressing public issues. Social change, although often expressed as if it results from individual choices of words and actions, is actually a reflection of the cultures those individuals share and co-create. The norms that affect the ways we relate to one another publicly both influence and are influenced by changes in our institutions and in the policies we make through those institutions.

The SPI was developed to graphically draw attention to the gaps that exist between the interactive processes prevalent in society and those that will be needed to truly engage in participatory democracy and comprehensive social change. Highlighting the existence of a gap draws attention to the need to learn and scaffold the development of new skills .Figure 4 below depicts a continuum of public interaction ranging from casual talk to the kind of structured interactions needed to support comprehensive social change. The different sizes of the blocks represent the relative degree of complexity involved with each task along the continuum, reflecting the idea that public interaction constitutes a progression of increasingly complex tasks.

Scale of Public Interactions (SPI)

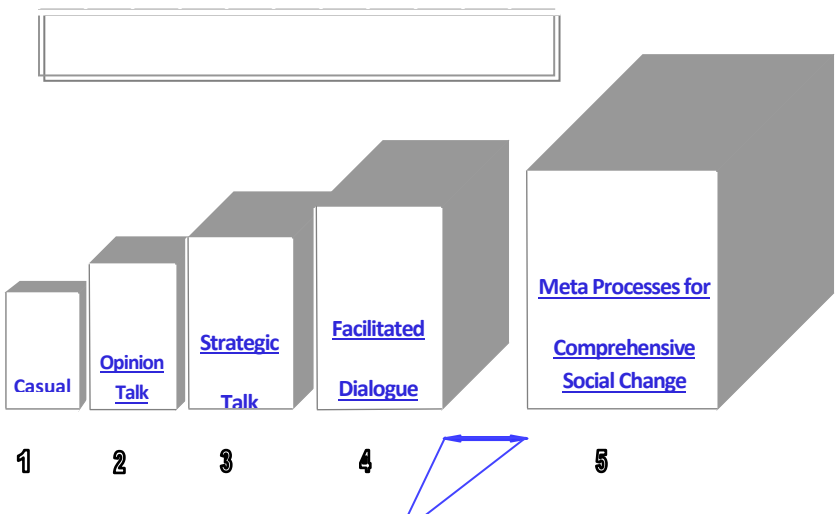

Figure 4: Scale of Public Interactions SPI

The numbered scale (1 through 5) applies to two different dimensions. First, increasing the space between a number and the number following it indicates that the demands made by the tasks required for successful interaction in the succeeding block go beyond simply adding another task or another piece to the same task. As we move along the scale from 1 to 5, the tasks become both qualitatively and quantitatively more intricate. Second, as the following discussion explains, the scale also reflects demands in focus, time, commitment, structure, and inclusiveness that rise non-linearly as complexity increases. The SPI thus ranges from a requirement of little or no structure (in the case of casual conversations) to the need for intricate structures and processes capable of supporting comprehensive social change over time. These scales of interaction reflect the expanding range of views found in Figure 1a –1e.

In the following sections, I take up the question of what can and cannot be accomplished through interactions at different points on the SPI. To illustrate how the scale works, I use hypothetical examples, drawn from my own experience with the issue of affordable housing with the assumption that the examples could be recognizable as similar to interactions regarding many commons topics whether responding to water quality issues, enclosure of forest ecosystems for timber supplies, or open software.

SPI 1: Casual Talk

'Casual talk' runs the gamut from 'how the meeting went this morning', to the weather forecast for the weekend, to our reactions upon hearing the news of an apartment fire. Casual talk consists of mostly fragments of concrete details that reveal the 'tip of the iceberg', leaving the rest of the iceberg below the surface, unnamed and unaddressed. Beneficial outcomes of this form of interaction include the exchange of some information and the maintenance of friendly relationships with others. These interactions are personal in the sense that they occur at the level of exchanges between individuals and are typically spontaneous, requiring little structure or preparation. For example:

> You observe and participate in a number of brief exchanges during lunch and between presentations at a regional conference on affordable housing. Someone mentions how much house prices in her community have gone up. Someone else says in passing that he knows the speaker's daughter, while another complains

about the lack of parking space. Others use the break to schedule a meeting on a different topic for later in the week.

This "small talk" is individual, random and "light". It requires little in the way of time, effort, focus, commitment, or skill to organize beyond what people need to function in their day-to-day lives. When people want to be pleasant, avoid disagreement, and stay relaxed they may also avoid controversial topics that elicit divergent perspectives and strong opinions. Although we may spend much time in this means of communicating it is quite individual and there is not a feeling of joint action.

SPI 2: Opinion Talk

"Opinion talk" includes the interactions of casual talk and the skills such talk requires, but adds the activity of, and the skills needed for, stating individual views and opinions about what is, what ought to be, who should do what, and who shouldn't do what. Opinion talk consists largely of general statements, observations, and assertions. People might say things like, 'There's only one way…', 'Everybody knows…', 'It happens all the time…', and so forth. Opinion talk is declarative and seems to demand 'yes' / 'no' responses that themselves are "categorical"—they are offered without qualification or without options other than agreement and disagreement. Nevertheless, opinion talk can be beneficial if it creates opportunities for people to make themselves heard or to take a stand. Although assertions can divide people, they can also draw people together, thereby generating the "social capital" for those who have found like-minded others. Interaction of the opinion type requires little structure and little investment of time, energy, or commitment (unless it is part of an organized activity such as a formal public debate). For example:

> You take part in a small-group discussion at the regional conference on affordable housing. The facilitator asks participants to go around the table, each taking three minutes to address the question, 'What is the best way to control soaring house prices in your community?' One person says the only solution is zoning controls. Another scolds that considering zoning controls would mean developers would not be attracted to the area. A third participant contends the whole problem is the influx of newcomers. A fourth admonishes that no one should talk about profits from development when some people can't afford a place to live. Another argues that money budgeted for recreation centres should be spent on low-income housing.

The roundtable discussion in this example had the benefit of allowing participants to voice their opinions. However, by itself it did not lead, and would not have led, to the deeper exploration required for coordinated action and to make progress toward resolving the issue of affordable housing. By inviting each individual to offer his or her idea of the "best" solution, it encouraged participants to argue in favour of a particular position. This sort of '"dueling solutions" talk narrows the scope of consideration and hence excludes information and analysis germane to a complex issue like affordable housing. People are not able to find a shared meaning. Because it permits unqualified assertions, SP2 talk can—and frequently does—easily push people into reactive stances that polarize

discussion and induce participants to filter out evidence, experience, judgments, and arguments that support alternative views. SPI 2 talk is typical of many of our public communicative interactions, such as town hall meetings—even those that invoke the virtues of engaging the public.

SPI 3: Strategic Talk

'Strategic talk' includes the preceding skill of 'opinion talk' (stating personal opinions and voicing responses) and adds linear cause-and-effect logic that supports those responses—e.g., if we do activity 'x' then the outcome 'y' will happen. Strategic talk commonly takes place in small-group meetings intended to achieve a pre-determined end. Such meetings follow agendas composed of 'action-items' (such as influencing, negotiating, visioning, deciding, assigning, and so on) that collectively serve as the strategic 'means' by which the end will be accomplished. The desired outcome of strategic talk is an action or set of actions that constitute a plan for solving a problem, responding to a challenge or opportunity, or meeting a need. Often, strategic talk involves advice from experts. From experience, we know that strategic talk requires more time, commitment, and structure than casual conversation or opinion-based debate. Strategic interactions may build social capital through the creation or maintenance of networks, visibility, and influence. For example:

> The non-profit housing society holds a four-hour meeting to create its strategic plan for the next year. Its purpose is to continue the effort to reduce homelessness in the city. Participants set as their chief objective reducing homelessness by five percent in the coming year. Their strategy is to achieve the five percent reduction by obtaining funding to erect one new building; by renting and refurbishing two others; and by finding space for three new temporary shelters. They also reach agreement on who will take responsibility for which tasks, and they establish a timeline for completing those tasks.

At some point, strategic talk proves helpful, even indispensable. Its down side, however, is that it can abet a "rush to action" when a problem, need, or opportunity has not been studied adequately and a widely shared understanding of it remains to be achieved. Homelessness is a good example of the sort of problem or need people (often with the best intentions) rush to address before it has been grasped fully by everyone whose contribution is essential to solving it (or even substantially mitigating it). It's not so much that a given diagnosis (e.g., people are homeless because there are not enough affordable homes) or a particular response (e.g., build more affordable homes) is necessarily mistaken as it is that each is apt to be a *partial* diagnosis or response. Strategic talk about a complex issue like homelessness will prove ineffective if it tries to oversimplify a systemic issue, such as failing to take sufficient notice of its multiple, interconnected root causes, that in turn require multiple, complementary, sustained responses by a large number and wide range of responders. It will be ineffective if it keeps the issue "out there", as if it is a thing separate from our cultural values and priorities. Strategic talk about a complex problem may forestall or alleviate a crisis, but it can also lead to short-term, 'band-aid' efforts that do little to accomplish long-term change of socially created systems.

SPI 4: Facilitated Dialogue

'Facilitated dialogue' includes the skills of strategic thinking and talk about the external situation and adds the skill of recognizing and grasping more complexity by noting the impact of peoples' various perspectives, reasons, situations, and relationships. It provides structured processes that afford people opportunities to learn together by inquiring about each other's views and concerns, explaining their own, and endeavouring to identify points on which they can agree (or perhaps at least "live with"). Facilitated dialogue pays special heed to the importance of good relationships among individuals and groups, and hence shows a special regard for including the "voices" of all who are affected by a problem, issue, or need and would be affected by a proposed response. There is a sense of issues as being socially created.

Dialogical talk is a form of communicative interaction that enables and encourages participants to reach deeper and to grasp the complex roots of people's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour (not least of all their own), and hence into the ultimate sources of persistent, seemingly intractable problems, issues, and needs. To see and understand a matter from all perspectives clearly demands from participants a considerable investment of time, commitment, and conscientious communication. For example:

> After sustained, vocal pressure from citizens, the provincial government sets up a series of facilitated dialogues in several communities to raise public awareness of and concern about the lack of affordable housing. Local councils take responsibility for recruiting people from as many economic sectors and demographic categories as possible, including individuals and families who know homelessness from first-hand experience. Unfortunately, even though they are urged to participate, many people close to the issue do not attend. Those who do attend, however, agree on ground rules that include listening without interrupting and trying their best to understand without judging. Some participants voice their reaction to learning of the paradoxical high incidence, yet near-invisibility, of homelessness in an affluent society like theirs. Some suggest collaborations and partnerships between various community organisations and institutions, such as churches, food banks, charitable foundations, and police. All comments, questions, and ideas are recorded on flip charts that become the basis for a report written for the Ministry and made available to the public through the news media, agencies, and local councils.

In contrast to the instance of 'strategic talk' described earlier, participants in this example of 'facilitated dialogue' achieved degrees of understanding and connection with the issue, and with each other that were much more "up-close and personal". For those who participated, the effects of rising housing costs came to be seen more clearly—and felt more sharply—through the shared meaning that dialogue helped them develop. On the other hand, the skills required for productive dialogue might eventually bog people down when the task before them is to actually make decision together to address the issue. This would require responding to the tensions of weighing competing solutions, balancing divergent perspectives, setting priorities, and considering cost and consequences. The

gratification some people experience when they can engage in the "big talk" of exploring and making meaning together may unintentionally exclude others who are not comfortable with the requirements for such discourse. For some, it may produce an experience of "feel good" bonding and gratitude for having surfaced more understanding. Having finally arrived at this shared experience, people may not want to disturb it to face the tensions and tradeoffs inherent in making decisions amidst diverse options. Often consensus is attempted via dialogue but in the attempt to reach a comfortable consensus some points of difference can be glossed over. Agreements on coordinated actions may not be reached

SPI 5: Developmental Processes for Comprehensive Social Change

"Processes for comprehensive social change" build on and extend the inclusiveness and connective discourse of 'facilitated dialogue' by adding in broader layers of complexity with the outcome being pragmatic coordinated action on the issue not just the actors relationships with each other. Such processes attempt to be as comprehensive as possible so that pragmatic, systemic action can be taken to address the many aspects of complex problems or issues.

Comprehensive interactive discourse differs in important ways from ordinary forms of public interaction. It goes beyond meetings, beyond even well attended conferences with jam-packed agendas. It requires a progression of structured public sessions, each building on the one before it, that increasingly enhance the ability and inclination of all stakeholders to invest sustained energy in building the foundation for comprehensive social change. (Stakeholders include those who feel the impact of a problem or issue; those who will be affected by a change in its shape, nature, or status; those who contribute to solving or resolving it; and those who bear responsibility or possess resources for mounting an effective response.)

Public interaction of the SPI 5 type is characteristic of what we might call skillfully scaffolded or developmentally designed public interaction processes. SPI 5 processes both draw upon the variety of skills required for SPI 1 through 4 and support progress beyond the limitations of these forms of interaction.

SPI 5 processes can offer a number of benefits if they are used repeatedly over time. They foster the acquisition by citizens of new abilities, dispositions, and skills, such as those required for setting collective priorities and integrating or balancing multiple perspectives. They cultivate good intentions and public-spirited motivation to effect social change.[115]

Although SPI 5 processes may seem time-consuming, in the long-run they may prove to be more efficient and effective than alternatives, because they anticipate and circumvent common pitfalls that lead to polarization and sabotaging of cooperative efforts.

[115] Ross, S. N. (2006). More perspectives, new politics, new life: How a small group used The Integral Process for Working on Complex Issues. *Integral Review*, *2*, 90-112.

The unique value of SPI 5 lies in five features:
▪ Its capacity to help people identify and analyze the root causes of complex problems;
▪ Its capacity to help people develop multi-stakeholder actions to address those root causes;
▪ Its capacity to elicit from people responses that range from voluntary actions to transpartisan, institutional policymaking;
▪ Its capacity to promote the institutionalization of methods for deliberative democratic decision-making; and
▪ Its capacity to help people sustain coordinated efforts, to evaluate those efforts, and to adjust their actions accordingly.

Consider this example:

> A small group of citizens are greatly concerned about the shortage of affordable housing in their city. They represent a wide range of perspectives and experiences in the community. They know affordable housing is a complex matter.
>
> Members of the group commit themselves to a seven-week series of meetings: structured, facilitated sessions, each three hours long. Although the problem is complex, and the process is a long one, participants understand that each step is necessary. The exercises they engage in for mapping the problem allow them to see the systemic connections between affordable housing and other concerns in their community, such as transportation, zoning bylaws, opportunities for entry-level employment, and safety. They learn why there is no "quick fix" solution—the problem is socially constructed and embedded deeply in their community's attitudes, behaviours, organizational structures and bylaws. Their grasp of the root causes of the problem leads them to take 'ownership' of it and to accept responsibility for addressing it.
>
> The group's members do not rush to a solution, but rather spend time carefully selecting a critical question to begin working on in depth. They realize that no single action by one group will budge the problem, so they develop several options for answering that question, each of which they build by viewing it through a particular perspective. The options also reflect the fact that individuals and organisations in the community might spontaneously initiate action, while other actions would require public support for policies to be implemented and monitored by government agencies.
>
> Because the options for responding to the problem would in one way or another affect the entire community, broad community consideration is needed to create shared meaning and joint action. So these initial concerned citizens invite the whole community to spend a Saturday afternoon to build on the analysis they have developed for the last few weeks. They organize the material so it can be used to deliberate the options, weigh the trade-offs and work toward a response everyone can get behind.

> As a result, for several weeks after the public deliberative decision-making event small committees meet to plan and implement the actions chosen by community participants. Six months later, the community must make a decision regarding its community centre. It is able to use the same sequence of steps to address that issue.

Public interaction in the form of deliberation, at the level of SPI 5 is clearly necessary for genuine, effective democratic decision-making on complex questions. But deliberation does not happen automatically in the public realm and people are seldom aware of what it takes to co-construct a complex understanding of issues and reach decisions about joint actions. Therefore it is difficult for them ahead of time to know why they should commit to such a seemingly long process. Well-designed structures are needed to help people with different interests, motivations, and capacities inquire and reflect together.[116] In order to respond effectively to a problem, need, or issue, citizens must have access to a public deliberative process that leads to actions that will begin to transform its root causes. They can do so only when the process in which they participate reveals fully and clearly the many layers and facets that give the problem, need, or issue its complexity.

Next I will focus on the interior workings of public decision making and offer more detail regarding the process of public deliberation and how it can be scaffolded.

Co-constructing Decisions to take Joint Actions

Continued economic dependence upon fracking, use of pesticides, expansion of airports or construction of large homes all represent situations in which meaning and priorities have been constructed and decisions made at various scales that impact our shared commons now and in the future. We often miss the significance of the underlying defining moments when decisions are socially arrived at, and especially miss our involvement in them. To conceive of ourselves as impacting decisions, either through explicit or implicit co-construction, can help move us from viewing ourselves as victims of outside forces to active participants in co-creating our life situations. This shift of perception is especially important when taking up the role of being trustees of our common resources that involves multiple complex decisions.

However, people are seldom aware of how complex the process of decision making is personally, let alone collectively. If we are to respond adequately to the complexity of resource management, we must make *collective* decisions, some of which will be quite difficult, about priorities, policies, and actions. It, therefore, is important to amplify the significance of this often-overlooked process of making public decisions, the very essence of co-governance of commons, and offer ways to observe, understand, and thus support comprehensive decision making.

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[116] Ross, S. N.(2006). Perspectives on troubled Interactions: What happened when a small group began to address its community's adversarial political culture. *Integral Review,* 2: 139-209

Considering the severity of many of our local and global issues, it is no wonder that people often want to take immediate concrete action. There is often impatience with sitting in meetings and "just talking". If people do not comprehend the sequential steps needed to co-develop sound public solutions, there can often be a sense that simple solutions should just appear, as if dropped into the room from some external source. However, before taking action, there has to be decisions by several people (unless we are in a dictatorship) to take the action. Before these decisions can be made, there needs to be relevant options available to decide upon. Before these options for solutions are identified or created, there needs to be shared understanding amongst those most involved regarding the diverse causes of the problem.

Problems are often labeled under big sweeping categories, so before their causes can be understood there needs to be agreements on which aspect of which "problem" we assume we are discussing. Our language and meanings need to be unpacked. In addition, everyone understandably sees things through their own lens of experiences and values. These diverse and legitimate perspectives need to be included. Taking actions will likely have different implications for different people that also need to be considered. If we attempt to short cut any of these sequential steps, our actions may not get at the systemic roots of the issues and merely offer bandage treatments. To undertake these steps well requires patience, time and structured processes to support our best selves coming forward. Decision making, if we want satisfactory results, will require more from us than many are used to giving and there seems to be no way to short cut this investment if we do not want to incur undesirable consequences or sabotage by those who feel their voices were left out. There is a tension between taking adequate time to deliberate on such issues, in our "business as usual lives", and the realization that we are running out of planetary time, especially when facing pressing, rapidly increasing and catastrophic issues.

How Legitimacy is Constructed

It is also important to note that actions will not be supported if the decisions to take them are not considered as legitimate i.e., socially constructed and accepted. Suchman states that legitimacy is "a generalised perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" [117] Legitimacy itself is a changing construct and subject to the expanding views as indicated in Figure 1a-e. For instance, in the early 19th century, Bentham advocated that a decision was right if it maximizes the greatest happiness for the greatest number of citizens. This raises questions about what happens if many are happy but at the expense of others. Locke relied on science and rationality as a legitimate means to produce the highest good. Marx framed legitimacy as the absence of exploitation. Rousseau presented the need for legitimacy through creating a social contract. Democracy indicates that legitimacy is based on majority votes but does not discuss how the minority is to be legitimately engaged by the majority. Nor does it deal

[117] Suchman, M. (1995). Managing legitimacy: Strategies and institutional approaches., *Academy of Management Review*. Volume 20. No 3. 571-610. p573

with inequities of influencing votes due to access to lobby groups and media or as named earlier, difficulties of reducing complex public issues to a simple yes/ no votes. Berger and Luckmann[118] describe the social construction of legitimacy as being the ongoing and dynamic process of how people actively make sense of, reproduce and justify their historic societal practices and institutional order. David Beetham[119] indicates how citizens actions, like voting or sitting quietly at public hearings on a controversial development instead of voicing outrage, can socially construct legitimacy by indicating evidence and symbolic declarations of acceptance. This would also indicate that not accepting certain social practices and making declarations, such as co-creating a Commons Social Charter, could denote illegitimacy of the current institutional order and legitimacy of a new order.

Developmentally Designed Deliberation[120]

Ross offers a methodology (characterized as SPI 5) for scaffolding public deliberation that specifically addresses the need for complex thinking in public engagement, and the realities of the developmental differences that such deliberation must support if a wide enough diversity of the population is to be engaged. Her method addresses both the need for progressive steps as well as the structure and facilitation that supports these steps. Based on the work of Commons et al[121] and drawing on research in adult development, behavioural sciences and complexity theory, Ross identified the progression of steps involved in supporting citizen deliberation. Her research indicates a recurring pattern in the steps people go through in making decisions that is fractal in nature and occurs across different scales of decision making from personal to organizational to cultural.[122]This recurring pattern builds on the Hegelian dialectic with the addition of an important transition step called "smash" as articulated by Commons and Richards.[123]

To illustrate these steps, consider the following simple example regarding buying a car. A would-be purchaser moves from *thesis* (e.g., "I will buy a car"), to *antithesis* ("I can't afford a car") to *oscillating* ("I have to chose between being carless or buying a car and being poor"), to a *chaotic* or "smash" state where new options are tested and adjusted to see if they can possibly fit to satisfy the initial need (buy a used car / high maintenance fees, borrow friends car / feel beholden). When carried out fully, such a sequential process can lead eventually to a more coherent state of synthesis expressed by an often unexpected solution that satisfies all of the presenting conditions (joining a car co-op! ta

[118] Berger, P. L. & Luckmann, T. (1966).*The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, New York: Anchor
[119] Beetham, D. (1991). *The Legitimation of Power.*, Houndmills: Palgrave.
[120] Following is adapted from article: Inglis, J. (2011)
[121] Commons, M. L., Trudeau, E. J., Stein, S. A., Richards, F. A., & Krause, S. R. (1998). Hierarchical complexity of tasks shows the existence of developmental stages. *Developmental Review, 18*, 238-278.
[122] Ross, S. (2008)
[123] Commons, M., & Richards, F.A., (2002). Organizing components into combinations: How stage transition works. *Journal of Adult Development,* Vol. 9, No. 3,

da).This new whole solution was not among the options initially considered but emerged due to the focused consideration of the parts, i.e., the diverse views of options.

Such a process may repeat cyclically and with more complexity. With each repetition, as new information is encountered, the synthesis becomes the new thesis and the cycle repeats, but now at a higher level of complexity. This progressive repetitive pattern of decision-making operates over various scales, topics and situations. Ross argues strongly for the benefits and challenges of these decision steps, and their essential role in well-designed public discourse. As she has shown in her own empirical work, such a design provides the structure that can hold the tensions that arise between competing views, and supports the process to move through a complete cycle, towards resolution or synthesis. It supports the movement through the flatness of relativism and motivates the often frustrating climb up through the zig zaggy path of new options in order to seek synthesis. Synthesis is possible only when the new option or approach successfully addresses the inadequacies of the other options. This theoretical model, that Ross calls The Integral Process for Working on Complex Issues (TIP), presents a detailed and developmental understanding of what occurs in the phenomenon of emergence, resulting in new solutions to old issues.

There are several examples of how TIP has been used with community groups to discuss issues such as water conservation, responses to climate change, and dysfunctional community interactions.[124] However, this process is so different from the usual methods of public discourse and the ways public decisions are made that there are many difficulties in introducing and sustaining such a method so that it eventually could become part of how we socially construct meaning in our culture. Without the reflective capacity to engage in "thinking about our thinking" or "deciding about our deciding" we can continue to seek simple quick fix solutions to complex issues and return to simple methods of public discourse. In this way we stay like the frog in the beaker adjusting to stressful conditions as the "new normal" without reflecting on impacts and implications that might otherwise motivate us to develop new, more appropriate behaviours. It is assumed that implementing a commons paradigm will require processes that support the level of public deliberation and decision making described above and that part of introducing this paradigm will require directly addressing these challenges of adequately scaffolding social construction, and public discourse.

I had spent ten years researching and developing methods of developmentally designed processes which I called 3D Democracy for dealing with multi dimensions of complex social issues such as climate change before finally coming to a conclusion similar to one that commons paradigm proponents, Hardt and Negri, have raised. [125] They suggest that public processes and social democratic projects, such as those espoused by Jurgen Habermas and John Rawls, may indeed transform the interactions of the public amongst themselves and offer more capacities to deal with issues comprehensively. However, if

[124] Several resources can be found at http://integrativelearninginstitute.com/Climate%20Change%20Issue%20Framings%20State%20of%20World%20Forum.pdf

[125] Hardt, M., & Negri, A. (2009)

they are not bringing into the discussion the larger construction of social meaning at the paradigmatic level they may inadvertently only serve to give legitimacy to the existing limited paradigm. A very effective civic discourse, even one that has been developmentally designed to engage multiple voices and reach comprehensive decisions, could still sit naively within the old paradigm unless deeper constructs regarding our relational constructs amongst ourselves, nature, property and law are surfaced.

Where are the facilitators and funded forums that offer such a deep collective questioning of the very frameworks of institutions that we usually rely on for funding? The Canadian Community for Dialogue and Deliberation is raising this question regarding facilitated public process and critical reflection regarding the status quo. For instance, without critical reflection and methods of evaluation, are professional facilitators of public forums on development permits being co-opted to deliver the outcome that government or corporate clients want, and as a result, stifling citizens questions or outrage?[126] Columnist Chris Hedges[127] railed that we have the capacity to socially construct illusions, especially if we silence critical thinking in fear that it will be considered "negative' by a culture that has become enamoured by "feel good" positive thinking experiences, resulting in demands for staying happy as their right.

SUMMARY

This chapter has described the philosophical stance of social construction as well as some particulars of how that stance offers a basis for a transition from a modernist to a post modernist means of engaging each other regarding local and global issues. Do we have the motivation and time required for this kind of broad ranging collective engagement and discernment necessary for addressing the many levels of detailed decisions we need to face in order to turn our ship around in a turbulent sea? By "time", I am referring to time both personally in regards to our already busy lives, as well as in regards to the window of time before our global temperature is in runaway mode. Although I have not found anyone who has directly addressed the tension between time and complexity, Pia Anderson[128] in her research has addressed the issue of hope and complexity so I will end this chapter with her findings. Her research indicated that when people are facing a complex issue, hope can be shaken when they begin to really see the layers of difficulty that are involved. This, however, may reflect a period of losing hope that actually is a false hope, and that a more realistic hope may emerge through a scaffolded process for issue analysis. More realistic motivations can result through the co-construction of pathways of action on sub issues. Trust in other group participants' engagement, more so than their own resources, offered a strong source of hope and motivation. This seems to indicate that people may eventually seek and rely on the power of socially constructed

[126] See C2D2 Big Question series. May and June webinar discussions. Accessed on February 2013 at http://www.c2d2.ca/big-questions.
[127] Hedges, C., (2009). *Empire of illusion: The end of literacy and the triumph of spectacle*. Toronto, On:Knopf Canada.
[128] Anderson, P., (in press). The dynamics of hope and motivation in groups working on complex societal issues.

responses if there are adequate processes available. This kind of committed working together results in a different sort of hope than the "feel good" version of hope that is often being presented as a quick antidote to the gloom that we fear might overtake us if we fully look at the escalating climate change statistics compared to the lack of mainstream response. In referring to a kind of engaged hope, professor of environmental studies David Orr stated in an address at Oberlin College "Hope is a verb with its shirtsleeves rolled up."[129] With that call to action in mind, we can now look at what activity is happening in regards to co-constructing a commons paradigm.

[129] Orr, D., accessed Feb 28,2912 at http://lars.toomre.com/quotes/author/David%20W.%20Orr

CHAPTER 3

3. COMMONS CONCEPTS: A PARADIGM UNDER CONSTRUCTION

> …commons is not a mere resource (water, culture, the internet, land, education), but rather a shared conception of reality that radically, challenges the seemingly unstoppable trend of enclosure and corporatization.
> Ugo Mattei[130]

In this chapter, I will identify and examine the concepts regarding "commons" that are being constructed and coordinated to create this larger "shared conception of reality" referred to by Mattei above. It is important to name what some of the concepts are at this point in the dissertation, as in later chapters I will reflect on the areas of inquiry to understand in what way, and to what extent, the commons conception of reality is actually being shared and applied. It gives the reader an inner look at the complex activities involved in dissolving previous concepts associated with a neoliberalist paradigm, and in forming new concepts associated with a commons paradigm. I will also reflect on how well this paradigm seems to be providing a viable alternative to our existing conception of our relationships with each other and between us and the natural world.

I will begin this chapter by discussing the importance of language in creating and articulating a new commons paradigm. Then I will discuss some of the concepts that are coalescing that define the field of commons, including some essential principles relating to the activities of governance, resource use and economics. I will also offer an overview of what commons is not. At the end of the chapter, under a discussion of social movement and epistemic communities, I will discuss the push and pull that can occur within any group attempting to find shared language and create change, including those in the field of commons. This is reflected in the struggle to keep the door open to broad and new participation while also recognizing the need to deepen and refine concepts and actions.

Although I do not attempt to provide an exhaustive coverage of the diverse authors and organizations engaged in articulating a commons paradigm, I have drawn on several hubs of activity in order to present the emerging concepts. Vincent and Elinor Ostrom's in-depth research through Indiana University (and their resulting Institutional Analysis and Development [IAD] Framework) has provided resource material through the digital library of the commons.[131] David Bollier is a prolific author and speaker, especially bringing in the significance of digital commons, and has recently teamed up with Silke Helfrich to publish an anthology of commons writing including 90 contributors. James

[130]Mattei, U. (2012). First thoughts of the phenomenology of the commons. In D. Bollier & S. Helfrich (Eds.), The **w**ealth of the **c**ommons; A **w**orld **b**eyond market & **s**tate**.** *Amherst, MA***: L**evellers Press. p.43
[131] Information available at http://dlc.dlib.indiana.edu/dlc/

Quilligan has written regularly for *Kosmos Journal*, occasionally for the *Integral Review*, and has been on major speaking tours in the US, Britain and Europe. Leo Burke, who includes commons in his MBA course at Notre Dame University in Indiana, co-created a four-week online course on commons that has been delivered to United Nations delegates and government officials in collaboration with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR).[132] As well, several blogs and list serves have been developed including the School of Commoning [133] and the P2P Foundation.[134] *On the Commons* is a commons based strategy centre doing both online and in person organizing to increase the visibility and capacities in the commons movement.[135] Much of this work is coming from the US and from Europe although most organizations have active links with the global south where many commons practices have occurred for generations although not under that term. Vandana Shiva has notably been a voice for grassroots commons related activity in India for many years, specifically related to farmers' rights and the privatization of seeds.

Most of my sources are North American and particularly US centric, largely due to my geographic location and network. I see this as a limitation but since the American hegemony is driving much of the world's actions at present, the US seems to be a relevant focus from which to inquire and make reflections while keeping in mind that there are other points of reference.

I have observed that neither social construction, nor an analysis of how paradigm change occurs, is mentioned in commons literature. However, I assume that the philosophy would feel very relevant to theorists and practitioners in the field as the meaning associated with commons results from the practices of social construction that are widespread in the commons.

IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF A COMMONS PARADIGM

As discussed in Chapter 2, it is through language that we co-construct and convey context and meaning. Meaning is generated not in isolation, but through communicative action that evolves into patterns, values, and worldviews. Many of those involved in the field of commons focus on analyzing old meanings, patterns, values and worldviews and the process involved in co-creating new meanings, patterns, values and worldviews.

In the last decade, there has been a flurry of activity around the concept of "commons" itself. The term is gathering both scholars and activists, some focusing mainly on a historical understanding of commons as concrete natural resources and some on "new" understandings of commons as also including inventions and digital space. Some are oriented around a local focus, some around global, some just on resource protection,

[132] Information available at http://www.unitar.org/event/introductory-e-course-global-commons-0
[133] Information available at www.schoolofcommoning.com/
[134] Information available at http://p2pfoundation.net/
[135] Information available at www.onthecommons.org/

some on consciousness, and others on law. Everyone seems eager for the barn raising to get going but some are tussling over the orientation of the building and which tools to use and where to build what, when. A coordinated plan is foreseen by some but has not gained broad agreement so it is doubtful we will complete the building or move into and inhabit this new paradigm in the near future. It is work in process.

Even at the first International Commons Conference held in Berlin in November 2010, people arrived carrying different meanings and experiences of commons. For example, some participants assumed commons only meant the digital commons such as the Internet and open software and wondered why others were talking about oceans and forests. Those having only studied commons in terms of natural resources were equally perplexed. However, as outlined in Chapter 2, this discovery and exploration of different views is a necessary phase of co-construction of a new paradigm and requires much dialogue and attention to language.

One observation I have had in the last four years is that there is a movement towards using commons as a noun complete in itself, as opposed to using commons as an adjective such as commons field, commons movement, commons approach or commons paradigm. In my writing, I use both parts of speech. In addition, it is interesting to note that many First Nations languages are primarily verb-based compared to the noun-based English language.[136] Noun-based languages can easily lead to the sense of a separate self, being fixed at the center of life. Verb-based languages carry a sense of relational dynamism with transformational implications that were studied by theoretical physicist David Peat.[137] Verb-based languages can convey a process approach in which meaning evolves and dissolves not separate from, but dependent on, interactions. Relying just on noun-based language of categories and definitions may frustrate attempts to describe the commons paradigm that is based on relational systemic processes.

Commons has provided both a critique of the current market-based paradigm as well as a proposition for a new alternative paradigm. Many commons discussions present a new conception of and engagement with experience that moves us beyond the individualistic, reductionist subject/object duality, which, as described in Chapter 1, has framed our beliefs, actions and institutions for the past several hundred years. Some discussions are related to ontological considerations regarding value and relational construction. Some are circling around methodology, presenting pragmatic questions such as who controls or shares what, what practices for sharing and managing are being used, and how do we protect specific commons now and into the future? There is also a vague use, and at times a misuse, of the term commons as well as terms associated with commons, making a coherent commons-literacy difficult.

[136] For further exploration of the topic see http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/languages-of-native-people#SUBReadings

[137] Peats, D. (1995). *Blackfoot Physics.* London: Fourth Estate

The commons paradigm, much like Gergen says about the field of social construction, has yet "no unified or canonical position,"[138] but covers a range of varied and overlapping practices and conversations drawing from various sources and subject to different emphasis and amalgamations. In fact he would say that the term "dialogues" is preferred to "paradigm" as the former keeps the process of ongoing interaction and meaning formation in the foreground and avoids the attempt to define paradigm formation as something that exists as if independent of that interaction. This nature of being "in process" is understandable and has merit as a creative open system as described in Chapter 2. However, it also presents a challenge in that open approach may try to be everything for everybody and, therefore, be full of unexplored assumptions, and expectations. A lack of agreement on what is being discussed may make articulation of commons difficult and impede the field's capacity to function as an attractor for those who are seeking a new credible option. One notable motivation that does seem to underlie a commons approach, although not precisely named as such, is to address Bateson's epistemological error referred to in Chapter 1, i.e., the error of believing human beings are individual, bounded agents, separate from each other and from the systemic workings of the natural environment and planetary systems

The language surrounding commons has arisen from many disciplines including diverse fields such as law, economics, ecology, civil society, political science, international development, and cultural anthropology. There is a recognition forming among governments and institutions, as well as an awakening public, that complex issues such as homelessness in city streets, food distribution in Africa, or pollution of the Great Lakes reflect systemic issues that have similar patterns and root causes. There is a sense that working across multiple disciplines may be necessary to create systemic change to respond to these issues. For efforts to be relevant to this level of change, discussions across many areas of human activity are needed. The commons approach may offer a broad enough context to elevate conversations from their customary silos so that new meaning and action can be coordinated

In the next section, in order to familiarize the reader with how the commons paradigm is being articulated to date, I describe some of the more significant meanings that are being constructed or deconstructed in the process of developing a commons language. This includes some essential elements or principles, as well as concepts related to governance, resource use and economics, all arenas where the meaning of human activity in relation to nature is played out. It may feel like plodding irrelevant work to take this time on terminology but how do we co-create understanding unless we consider the diverse assumptions underlying the terms used?

Wendell Berry, in justifying the importance of detailed language to define new values and relationship stated, "We know enough of our own history by now to be aware that people exploit what they have merely concluded to be of value, but they defend what they love. To defend what we love, we need a particularizing language, for we love what we

[138] Gergen, K. (1998). Constructionist dialogues and the vicissitudes of the politics. Velody, I. and Williams, R. (Eds.) *The politics of constructionism*. London: Sage. p.34

particularly know."[139] Love and analysis are two words not often put together but I would advocate that they are necessary partners when creating a new paradigm. David Bollier indicated that" The Commons is one way to assert a 'particularizing language' declaring that natural resources are 'not for sale.'"[140]

ARTICULATION OF CORE CONCEPTS OF THE EMERGING COMMONS PARADIGM

The core concepts of the commons offer alternative beliefs, practises and structures to those associated with the current paradigm that is based on the separation of human activity and nature through enclosures, commodification, and corporatization. This section includes an overview of the essential elements and principles and also a discussion of the concepts related to governance, resource use and economics
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Essential Elements and Organizing Principles

Charlotte Hess,[141] who has been developing a commons library at the International Association for the Study of Commons since the early 1990s, observed that people gravitate to the commons concepts based on six entry points: (1) desire for protection of a shared resource from enclosure, privatization, or commodification; (2) peer production and mass collaboration as shown in electronic media; (3) awareness of new types of tragedies of the commons; (4) motivation to build civic education and commons thinking; (5) recognition of new or evolving types of commons within traditional commons; and (6) rediscovery of the concepts of commons that had existed in 15 -16th century England. These different entry points suggest there is a wide diversity of assumptions circulating regarding commons. In her research in 2008, Hess found nine widely differing definitions of commons used by commons scholars. However, she did note some coalescence around four themes: shared heritage of all, birthright, concern for the future, and fear of enclosure. Now, in 2013, I am noticing that three additional themes have entered the conceptualizations: issues of damage to global commons and thus planetary survival, the differentiation of types of resources, and the analysis of nation state governance and monetary systems.

Hess also indicated that concepts of collective action and collaboration were increasingly appearing in the language of commons. These were associated with the need for, and the

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[139] Berry, W. (2000). *Life is a miracle: An essay against modern superstition.* New York: Perseus Books. p.40.

[140] Bollier, D. (2007). The growth of the commons paradigm. *Understanding knowledge as a commons: From theory to practice*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, p34

[141] Hess, C. (2008). *Mapping the new commons.* Presented at "Governing Shared Resources: Connecting Local Experience to Global Challenges;" the 12th Biennial Conference of the International Association for the Study of the Commons, University of Gloucestershire, Cheltenham, England, July 14-18, 2008.

existence and validity of, a realm of shared activity outside the realms of government and market. Articulation of this new realm included concepts relating to the importance of relationships capable of supporting equity, responsibility, and sustainability.

Ostrom's extensive fieldwork in the co-management of common resources yielded insights into the organizing principles necessary for successfully managing resources outside the realm of government and market. Her research is widely respected for demonstrating that people are capable of cooperation and taking collective actions to protect, preserve, and replenish their local commons. Her research identified eight design principles used by these groups to support their success.[142]

1. They clearly defined the boundaries of the resource and the resource users: e.g., designating the residents who could draw water from a geographically defined water basin.
2. They developed rules regarding the use and distribution of common resources that reflected the local conditions; e.g., for different times of year, and for different water and growing conditions different rules would be adopted.
3. Most users participated in decision-making. There was a collective choice process: e.g., those who know the resource and the conditions needed to successfully manage it make the decisions
4. They set up an effective monitoring process accountable to the users: e.g., if you use too much water, you are accountable to your fellow water users not an external legal jurisdiction.
5. Degrees of sanctions were set up for resource users who violated community rules: e.g., different sanctions would be set based on the implications of the over use, and on the reputation of the violator.
6. There were accessible conflict resolution processes: e.g., prior agreements are made that are low cost and accessible for responding to contentions issues.
7. Other governance bodies (regional or national) respected the group's ability to determine their resource use and management: e.g., state governments recognize the right of the user group to create its own rules regarding water use.
8. Smaller resource management systems are nested inside larger ones: e.g., water users of an irrigation canal create rules that exist within the rules that govern the larger water basin from which the canal drains.

These principles would have arisen from much discursive interaction and negotiated agreements. In a more recent writing, Ostrom provides a valuable insight into these relational factors that support the above principles and result in the co-creation of practises deemed legitimate and sustainable.[143]

[142]Ostrom, E. (1990). *Governing the commons: The evolution of institutions for collective action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[143] Poteete, A.R., Janssen, M., & Ostrom, E. (2010). *Working Together: Collective Action, the Commons, and Multiple Methods in Practice*. Princeton University Press. p 502

> A large number of variables increase the likelihood that self-organization could be effective in solving collective action problems. Among the most important are the following: (1) reliable information is available about the immediate and long-term costs and benefits of actions; (2) the individuals involved see the resources as important for their own achievements and have a long-term time horizon; (3) gaining a reputation for being a trustworthy reciprocator is important to those involved; (4) individuals can communicate with at least some of the others involved; (5) informal monitoring and sanctioning is feasible and considered appropriate; and (6) social capital and leadership exist, related to previous successes in solving joint problems. The exact structure that will enhance cooperation cannot be specified at a general level, as many specific features of a particular dilemma affect what has a chance of working. The crucial factor is that a combination of structural features leads many of those affected to trust one another and to be willing to do an agreed-upon action that adds to their own short-term costs because they do see a long-term benefit for themselves and others and they believe that most others are complying.

This factor seems to echo the research findings of Anderson mentioned in Chapter 2 regarding hope. When dealing with complex issues, such as management of shared resources, the structure of the process and how others are engaging, impacts people's motivation to keep engaged. It is out of this relational being that commons may arise.

However, in the service of sharing the challenging dynamic facing the commons community regarding negotiating agreements on terms, concepts and scale, it is worth mentioning here that Ostrom's work receives both praise and criticism. Mattei and others have suggested Ostrom's work has limited application in that it does not step back far enough and critique the current structure and operating beliefs of a neoliberalist regime. Instead, they suggest her work provided a microscopic look at small groups co-creating ways to thrive within the dysfunctional context of this regime.[144] Also, Ostrom has been criticized for focusing her research only on local commons, although to be fair, her later writing did begin to address the realm of climate change[145].

Paul Stern [146] has attempted to scale up Ostrom's design principles to provide a framework for analyzing the global commons. His adapted framework takes into account the implications of global diversity and complexity, including the scale of resources, numbers of people and institutions involved, vested interests, as well as the saliency of the resource damage. However, to date no one else (that I am aware of)

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[144] Mattei, U., (2012).

[145] McGinnis, M., & Ostrom, E. (1996). Design Principles for Local and Global Commons. In *The International Political Economy and International Institutions*, Vol. 2, eds. O. R. Young, 465–493. Brookfield, VT: Edward Elgar

[146] Stern, P. (2011). Design principles for global commons: Natural resources and emerging technologies. *International Journal of the Commons*, North America, 5, Available at: <http://www.thecommonsjournal.org/index.php/ijc/article/view/305/235>. Date accessed: 05, June, 2011

has been able take up the mind-boggling challenge of scaling up their research to the level of global commons (i.e., atmosphere, oceans). Therefore, we are left with this question: if collective action works locally when trust is built amongst involved individuals who have reliable information and are able to communicate over long periods of time, how then does it work at a global level? Taking climate change as an example, the reliability of information is still being contested, and communication is occurring mainly through competing states and corporations. Trust through shared involvement with the whole issue is not being developed leaving us unable to take collective effective action.

Many commons practitioners, grappling with the challenge of discussing the whole, have attempted to break down their communication to its related parts (i.e., *commons* to refer to the resource, *commoners* the people, and *commoning* as the activity). Unfortunately, this simplification has the potential of occluding the dynamic, ever-present relationship among the parts. Commons advocate, James Quilligan[147] reinforces the systemic nature of commons by referring to a *set of relationships*[148] - a phrase that represents commons as a dynamic intrinsically related system. According to general systems theory, as described earlier, a change in any one element would change all the other elements and therefore the operation of the whole commons. Quilligan's set of relationships includes:

1. the resources (replenishable or depletable)
2. the people who share the resources (users, managers, producers, consumers)
3. the boundaries that specify the community and the extent of resources involved
4. the formal or informal rules/norms that govern access and benefit
5. the value defined and created through the preservation or production of shared resources.

REFRAMING CONCEPTIONS OF GOVERNANCE, RESOURCES, AND ECONOMICS

After advocating the previous holistic set of relationships I am now about to tease their elements apart so as to allow more analysis of some of the language, definitions and motivations significant to the concept formation. I will group this analysis under the familiar headings of governance, resources, and economics. These are all areas where meaning in our culture has firmed into patterns and rituals, standards and practices and could benefit from some inquiry and consideration of different approaches based on different beliefs.

Reframing Governance

[147] Quilligan, J. (2012a) Why distinguish commons good from public goods. In D. Bollier & S. Helfrich (Eds.), *The Wealth of the Commons; A World Beyond Market & State.* Amherst, MA: Levellers Press.
[148] Quilligan, J. (2012b) From power point presentation presented in London.

Governance is the process of how people make meaning, set priorities and organize themselves. Political philosophers[149] throughout history have offered disparate definitions of governance. These reflect different assumptions of the preeminent regime ranging from the Philosopher King (Plato), the ideal functioning of the polis or body of citizens (Aristotle), to the sovereign state that must use legal and moral forces to compel people to act in the common good. (Hobbes), to constitutional government necessary to protect individual rights to property (Locke), to direct democracy executed by all people regardless of their riches (Rousseau) to government whose mandate is to support the publics values of equality and justice.(Rawls).

Much of the motivation for seeking a new paradigm of governance is due to the increasing awareness of the limitations of our current structures to meet basic societal needs while also maintaining a healthy environment for the future. Key questions focus on concerns about whether benefits from resources are distributed fairly and whose voices and values are being engaged in the predominant political discourse regarding management of these resources. People are seeking ways to increase and legitimize their ability and responsibility to take care of the resources upon which their lives depend, whether at a global or local level, for now and for generations to come.

If the people are assumed to be generally unruly (i.e., not to be trusted to take on the challenges of collective actions, as was assumed by both Hobbes in earlier years or Hardin in recent years), then it could make sense to hand over their sovereignty and vest it in the state that would then act in the best interest of all citizens. On the other hand, Adam Smith[150], and later Milton Friedman[151], would advocate that those best interests could be met through free markets. The role of state was to support the free and efficient working of the market as the vehicle to meet people's needs. It could do this by providing infrastructure (e.g., building roads and bridges), defending nations or private property, regulating coercion, or creating incentives for innovation. This conception of and reliance on the centrality of state-supported markets formed a paternalistic relationship between authorized leadership and the citizenry, breeding a culture of passivity amongst citizens. It also placed society within the market, versus the market within society, as discussed in Chapter 1, allowing markets to operate separately from direct public sanction.

No discussion of governance can be complete without raising questions about cultural assumptions of power. I see in some commons literature an underlying framework of victimization, evident when promoting a justification for citizens to rise up and be engaged. There can be an assumption that the "good" people are being dominated in some way, usually associated with corporations and government, and merely have to overthrow the" bad" people. This assumption could benefit from being surfaced and the implications considered. I will discuss this process further in the next chapter.

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[149] Smith, S.,(n.d). Yale Introduction to Political Philosophy. http://oyc.yale.edu/political-science/plsc-114

[150] Smith, A. (1863). *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations*. Edinburgh: A. & C. Black.

[151] Friedman, M. (1996). i. 2 The Role of Government in a Free Society. *The politics of American economic policy making*, 22.

The perceived fixed roles of "we the victims" and "they the persecutors" can frame thinking and actions. However, Foucault[152] believed that our sense of power is not fixed but is dynamically negotiated and constructed in every exchange. Power, he states, is not what some people have and others lack, but rather it is co-constructed at many non-centralized nodes of interaction. Power relations are established through our participation in daily activities that contribute to, or reinforce, patterns of dominance or oppression. Foucault's point is that our notion of dominant centralized authority is created as we negotiate and interact together. Yet, once constructed, we treat authority as if it is "there," statically fixed beyond our own processes of interacting. Through generations we have become so accustomed to these practices of centralized authority, we continue to perpetuate them. In times of aristocracies, sovereignty was vested in an individual ruler. According to Foucault, this form of authority was then merely expanded through the liberal democratic tradition into an institutionalized grid of power that still regulates our interactions. Our language of rights and construction of laws can unknowingly enable those practices of authority and give them legitimacy. I have sat at countless presentations by passionate advocates for social change and ecological protections, who go to great lengths to name the challenges we face, offering a critical analysis of our government structures that condone such exploitations. However, in the Q & A that follows, when people ask what they can do, the only solution they are given is to write to their elected official! This seems to further entrench a belief that the only way to enact change is through using the same structure that was previously critiqued, deepening the well-rutted path of looking to the centralized authority for answers. Other possibilities need to be stimulated regarding how citizens can interact and actively co-construct means of co-governance.

Commons theorists and practitioners are attempting to awaken us to consider a different configuration of relationships and set of practices for co-governance. Yet the notion of commons also faces a conundrum. How do we actually create governance that is so inclusive that it coordinates across local, regional, bioregional, national, and continental regions, and cultures but does not do so in a way that repeats the limitations of centralization. In pondering this, I often look to our physical body as a good working metaphor that can provide some new perspectives that are tangibly and immediately within our shared experience. Our liver, heart, and skin are operating in a very effective and coordinated fashion every moment without any centralized command and control function. Much of this coordination occurs due to information regarding the status of health of the systems being passed and processed generously and regularly throughout the body, allowing for adjustments to be made. Therefore, the importance of information flows and active in-the-moment meaning making capacities to coordinate that information into useful knowledge, seems significant to consider, when looking to how effective coordination can happen amongst global systems. The internet is another example of a non-centralized system and, as many have said, it may be operating like a global nervous system enabling information to be passed abundantly, providing

[152] Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings (1972-77)*. Ed. C. Gordon. New York: Pantheon Press.

immediate feedback and potentially allowing for adjustments to be made if the information is recognized as important. I will discuss more about responses to this conundrum of broad yet effective coordination in discussing the think tank case study in the next chapters.

Social Charters: Laying Frameworks for Co-governance of Resources.

Private corporations and public government interests are both organized into collective voices. Common interests are not. Corporations and governments have clearly defined roles, mandates, and places where people with those roles and mandates interact. Citizens tend to come and go as if separate beings not working collectively to co-manage their commons. They relate to their forests, mineral or hospitals through governments or corporations instead of directly with each other and that resource as direct producers and consumers with rights and responsibilities. A means of engaging each other to negotiate principles, priorities, and agreements regarding long term use and maintenance of shared resources they directly depend on is needed. A preliminary structure for this engagement has been referred to as a social charter.

Many commons advocates have promoted a new form of governance that would step outside the cultural assumption of centralized public or private organizations and vest direct sovereignty in the people. The term "sovereign" can be associated with a highly individualistic concept of supreme ruler, or a state of complete self-sufficiency. However, in commons language, it refers to people having direct relationship with their resources.

> Commons organizations maintain that the global commons is entrusted to humanity for the benefit of all beings, which means that commons rights are sovereign to all people and do not need to be granted or legitimized by a state … Commons rights affirm the sovereignty of human beings over their means of sustenance and well-being.[153]

James Quilligan,[154] is promoting that collective agreements, developed through social charters and trusts, could be a method for exercising that sovereignty. These charters could be co-created documents for describing the rights and responsibilities of this innate relationship between people and nature. A charter could articulate a declaration of intent and vision of how to protect, maintain, and enhance a specific common resource for beneficiaries. A trust would provide the legal organization through which the charter would be operationalized, including details of fair access, and production and distribution of assets.

There are several examples of geographic areas where trusts have been formed to manage resources and circulate assets back into the community. These include the Alaskan Permanent Fund and the Columbia Basin Trust in North America. Although mandated to

[153]Global Commons Trust website http://globalcommonstrust.org/?page_id=22.
[154] Quilligan, J. (2012c) *Social charters: Praxis of the commons.* Future of Occupy http://thefutureofoccupy.org/2012/04/social-charters-a-comprehensive-program-for-reclaiming-sovereignty-over-our-natural-and-social-commons-resources/

have regular citizen input, these organizations are dependent on State sanction for their initiation, ongoing legitimacy and funding and, therefore, are different in scope and structure than a self-organized commons trust based on a citizen initiated and written social charter. Although not called commons charters, there are other examples of situations where people are gathering outside the usual sovereign government mandate and across political boundaries, to manage shared resources. One example is the West Asia and North Africa (WANA) Forum. Under the initiative of Prince Hassan of Jordan, WANA is creating a multilateral dialogue on regional approaches to shared challenges such as water, migration of refugees, and economic development that reach beyond any single nation's capacity to address. [155] In the next chapter, under the Great Lakes case study, I will discuss another group's attempt to take on the heroic task of co-creating a social charter to co-govern their common water resource now and for the future.

Quilligan emphasizes the importance of the relationship between users and producers:

> The key is involving *resource users* in the process of production. This should be self-evident, since users are often the first to recognize problems and identify solutions in the allocation and provision of common goods. *Praxis* is the process by which a theory or skill is enacted or realized. In contrast to the Market State's model of the 'delivery' of goods and services to a passive public, when consumers are co-producers of the goods and services they receive and organize, their practical and applied knowledge is embodied directly in their *commoning*. As co-producers, the motivations, knowledge and skills of resource users become part of the production praxis, leading to new ways of interacting and coordinating social and economic life. By enhancing the effectiveness of resource provision and allocation and the creation of value, these new forms of co-production have the potential of transforming much of the present system of economic, political and social decision-making.[156]

Governance is associated with rights and the means by which those rights are given legitimacy. Due to the prevailing neoliberalist worldview, state sanctions have given almost unrestricted freedom to markets. The resulting market and state duopoly has become the prevalent legitimized force of governance. As this regime has failed to take care of the environment, or support intergenerational fairness and accountability in the use and access of planetary resources, author David Bollier and lawyer Burns Weston initiated The Commons Law Project.[157] The mission is to elevate commons as a form of credible legitimate government, and to form a *triarchy* with state, market and commons each supporting each other with specific roles and functions. However, other commons practitioners, such as Mattei,[158] feel that this positioning of commons into a third sector, frames it in our minds as being an arbitrator of two poorly structured ideologies. If the purpose is to unite humans with nature, I believe it might take us further to see these state

[155] For information on the WANA forum see http://www.wanaforum.org/#/TextPage&F=0&Index=0&Link=page_1.xml
[156] Quilligan, J. (2012c) n.p.
[157] More information can be found at http://www.commonslawproject.org/
[158] Mattei, U. (2012)

and market functions nested into, and accountable to, the commons. This re-structuring would highlight the distinctions between functions but still maintain the intrinsic wholeness of the relationship between humans and nature, a mandate that is not part of the current market state structure that maintains the modernist assumption of separate parts. The diagram below captures these different conceptualizations

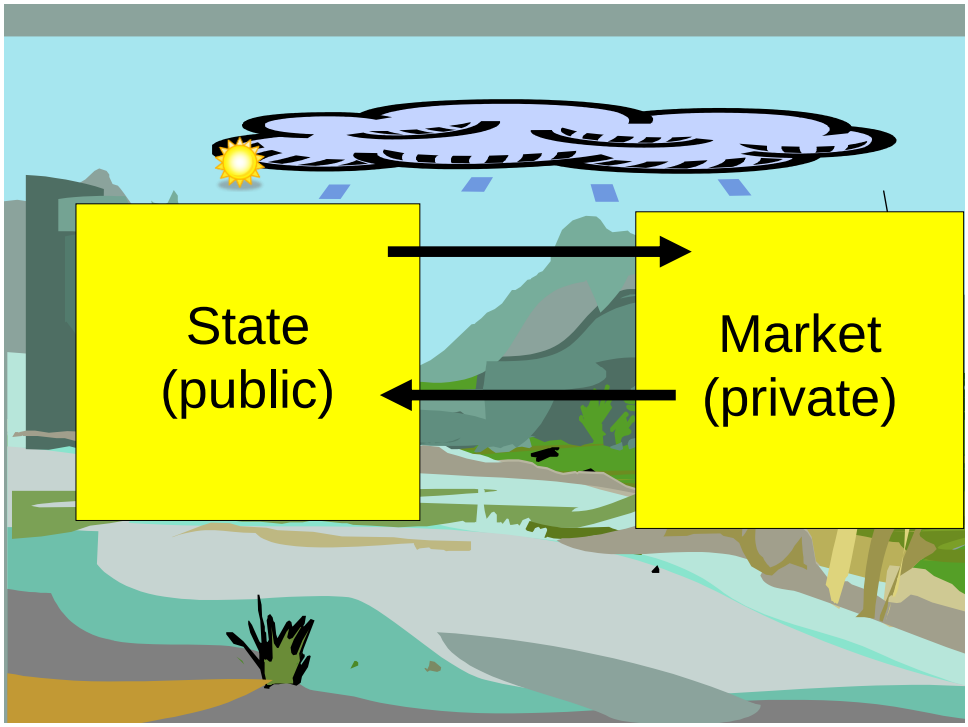

Figure 6 a. Moving from State and Market systems dominating the focus of our relationships

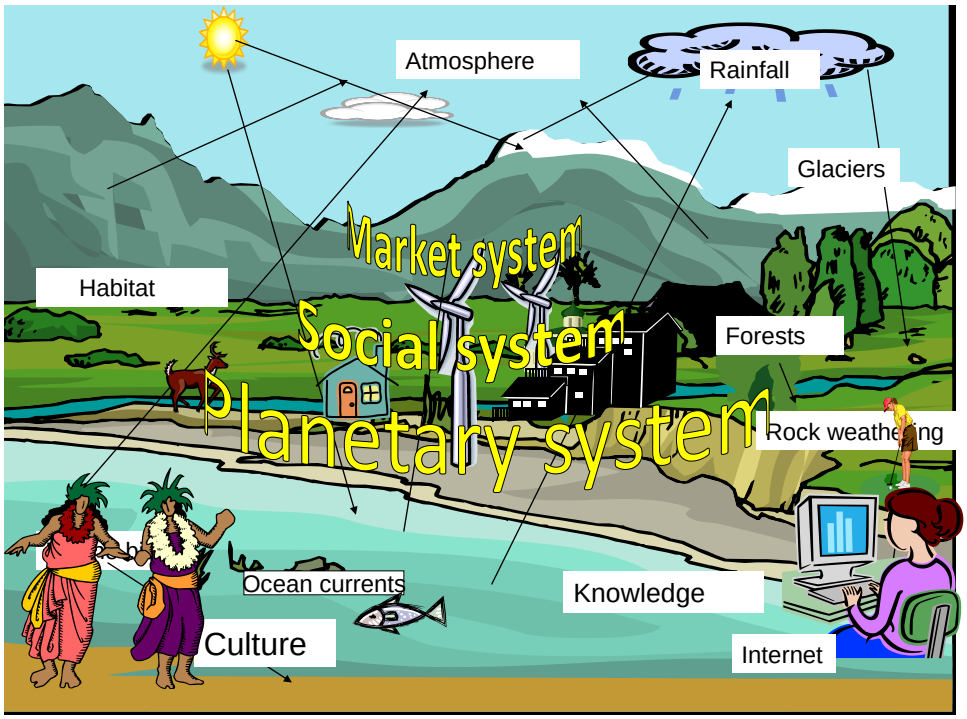

Figure 6 b. Towards nested systems embedded in multiple organic relationships

Bollier and Weston indicate that building on legal traditions and using widespread discourse and participatory processes, could result in "the establishment of a new procedural environmental right, the human right to commons- and rights-based ecological governance."[159] They recognize the challenges of offering something new into, as Foucault described, a population habituated to only think in terms of their relationship with the centralized status quo power system. However, presenting this new understanding of rights could also offer a means to shake up this limited perception of options and attract a new discourse. It is challenging to also think about how to engage this discourse across such diverse local and global commons that have diverse cultural practices. How to acknowledge such very real challenges without framing them in the language of insurmountable problems is an inquiry in which commons scholars and practitioners could actively engage. Appreciative Inquiry[160], developed in the 1990s, is an organizational development method that increases capacities to engage discourse by focusing on what an organization or participants do well. It is especially helpful for organizations facing rapid change. It raises the awareness of potential impacts that may result from habitually framing situations as "problems" or "challenges" which can often foster deficit thinking. Instead, invitations can be made for people to express positive aspects of their culture. In the case of the commons, this might involve a focus on

[159]Bollier, D., & Weston, B. Green governance: Law of the ecological commons. (2012). In D. Bollier & S. Helfrich (Eds.), *The Wealth of the Commons; A World Beyond Market & State.* Amherst, MA: Levellers Press.p.146.

[160] For more information on AI see Cooperrider, D. L., Whitney, D., & Stavros, J. M. (2003). Appreciative inquiry handbook. Bedford Heights, OH: Lakeshore Publishers

"values." For example, a question such as, "what do you value that you feel is being threatened" might stimulate a conversation about what is collectively valued that could be motivating, compared to just focusing on what is wrong, which can be frustrating.

Although there is an ideological commitment to public participation promoted in commons, I observe little reported acknowledgement of what it involves for the public to rise to the challenge of engaging in the complex task of constructing new meaning and actions together, such as would be required to create new forms of "commons-based economics and governance" (such as social charters and trusts). Therefore, for me, as a developmentally oriented public engagement practitioner, this call for participatory practices without recognizing the necessary developmental stages involved can have sort of a magic, wishful thinking, or naïve quality to it. The processes for comprehensive social change (Scale of Public Interaction 5) described in Chapter 2 would be useful for public education and engagement of diverse voices to support governance of commons. These include steps to analyze issues, sustain polyphonic discourse, inquire into assumptions, anticipate and address the complexities of diverse stakeholder perspectives, deliberate costs and consequences, and reach decisions on priority actions. All of this is necessary for long-term collective management of commons resources, especially at global scales. Many commons scholars and practitioners have not yet bridged into the rich field of social construction, public dialogue, deliberation, collaborative action inquiry, and deliberative decision-making or are not cognizant of the progressive steps needed to support the desired transition. Of course, even if people know that processes are needed, the issue of time, funding of trained facilitators, and the challenges of working on a global scale contribute to making the transition to a new participatory paradigm difficult. More observations will be made about this challenge in the next chapter.

Reframing Resources

Having discussed governance of commons resources, we will now turn to discuss the term "resources," itself, as it requires some unpacking. The word is often connected with separation, objectification, commodification, and abuse especially to do with extraction and development for commercial purposes. In this writing, I take the view promoted by commons literature, that resources are the many elements and relationships that support or promote sustainability and wellbeing. In some circumstances, it might be necessary to differentiate between the resources (e.g., the fish) and the resource domain they are in (e.g., Great Lakes). However, the domain, in another context, might be a resource (e.g., the water in the Great Lakes providing transportation for boats). Although this attention to terms expands our terminology, it is important to realize that meaning and contexts render the terms, themselves, mutable. It requires time and discourse to sort out the possible tangle of assumptions they represent. This kind of specification and attention to the details of terms and definitions is familiar amongst policy makers and "experts," but may initially be new and uncomfortable to those engaging at the grassroots. Below I will offer some of the delineations and definitions regarding resources associated with

commons meaning-making that help explain the importance of history, scale, limits, and negotiations of boundaries.

Roman law provided four language categories for resources that still impact our social meaning and legal frameworks today: *res publica*, *res communes*, *res nullius*, and *res privatae*. Those resources held by the government for the public's benefit such as roads and lakeshore access are *res publica*. Those accessible to all that cannot be exclusively controlled by any individual or group, such as air and sunshine, are *res communes*. Those to which no rights have been defined for their use or accessibility or which have been abandoned are *res nullius*. But if these are taken over for exclusive use, they become *res privatae*. Although it is significant to understand that we have a history of how we have arrived at such meanings, the terms alone do not address the further complexities of the who, what, and how that have developed in 21st century resource use and management. I will discuss the confused meaning and implications amongst the areas of *publica*, *privatae* and *communes* in a later section and why this indicates a need for constructing new meaning as commons.

Global and Local Scale of Resources.

Traditional understandings of commons were local place-based situations and this concrete association is where our minds often turn when first considering commons. There are many examples, taken from many parts of the world, over many generations, of local common practises that include community gardens, forest boards, land trusts, money lending, or childcare collectives. As already indicated, Ostrom's earlier research and, thus much initial attention of commons theorists and practitioners, was focused on local physical resource management such as forests, meadows, water sources or fisheries. What is lacking is an understanding of how management of global commons resources (such as oceans, air, the electromagnetic spectrum, etc.) has happened to date or could be coordinated. Due to our systemic interdependence, if our global commons are not healthy, we will eventually lose the health of our local commons.

John Vogler[161] offered insights into governing the global commons by outlining how international agreements have become increasingly necessary as our global reach has extended beyond that of our boundaried national jurisdictions, into the oceans, deep seabed, Antarctica, outer space and the atmosphere. The boundary of a seaside nation used to be determined by the distance that a cannon ball could fly. Now technology has extended our reach into the range of unforeseen possibilities and complexities involving overlapping relationships amongst local and global commons including circulatory impacts between ice covered poles, forests, oceans, and atmosphere. Technology also has caused us to adjust our understanding of outer space, once considered vast, uninhabitable and thus *res nullius*, now recognized as a resource for our communication systems. Thus, outer space now holds a potential for our interconnected global mind, i.e., *res communes* in contrast with, from another perspective, a space for future global warfare i.e., *res privatae*.

[161] Vogler, J. (2000). *The Global Commons: Environmental and Technological Governance.* 2nd ed. New York: Wiley.

At a global level, challenges of boundary categorization exist, especially when resources are mobile across commons (e.g., fish or telecommunication satellites that travel through global commons but hold value as local goods). Privately funded companies are now gaining exclusive access to parts of space in order to mine asteroids for minerals, a concept and practice that could not have been imagined years ago.[162]

Some global areas provide common goods whereas others provide common sinks (i.e., areas where waste is disposed: e.g., the atmosphere absorbs CO2 and radioactive particles, or the ocean absorbs garbage). Often, products, such as oil from the ocean floor, are extracted from the global commons for relatively short-term profit by privately owned companies. However, the waste is dumped back into the ocean at no cost to them. The actual cost is absorbed by the commons for years to come. The problems associated with such a scenario were highlighted with the BP disaster in the Gulf of Mexico.

The over-extraction, over-consumption and dumping of pollutants has raised the question of which jurisdiction has the responsibility to take care of these global commons. Although oversight for the monitoring of international agreements rests with the UN, as previously stated in Chapter 1, the UN operates as a group of independent nation states vying for their own needs to be met. The UN has been criticized for co-constructing principles and policies for sustainable management but not being able to collectively enforce their implementation.[163] All global issues are complexly interconnected and challenging to coordinate as is demonstrated by the maze of 26 UN organizations involved in international scientific research into global environmental change.[164]

Often the 1987 Montreal Protocol, a UN agreement regarding chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), is upheld as an example where the UN was able to name an international problem, educate the public, reach agreements and implement collective global actions that worked in a short time frame to avert a catastrophic situation. With further analysis,[165] this situation was deemed to have worked, in part, because: the scientific community reached consensus, their information was clearly represented and translated into policy, which then stimulated innovations in the market place to develop a technical fix that was not costly but actually made money. Movement happened as understanding and legitimacy were created. This case differs profoundly from responses to climate change. The causes of climate change are much more complex, and solutions are not simple but instead are costly and prone to being discounted as the impacts will fall most heavily upon unseen future generations.[166] Scientists faced with the enormity of the implications of their findings have been slow to indicate their consensus, leaving many opportunities for delay tactics to be justified. The public, on a large scale, has not been

[162] For more information see http://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/story/2012/04/24/tech-asteroid-mining-space.html,
[163] Vogler, J. (2000)
[164] Initiatives, Programmes and Organisations, UK Research Councils Global Environment Research Office, Volume 3, 1994,
[165] Vogler, J. (2000)
[166] Quilligan, J. (2010a) Interest rates and climate change: Realigning our incentives through the power of the commons. *Kosmos Journal* Fall/Winter 2010

involved in weighing out the cost and consequences that would occur from taking action, or from not taking action, so has not created a shared vision to support collective action at both a local and global level.

Depletable, Renewable, and Replenishable Resources.

James Quilligan[167] argues that much of our current misunderstanding, and even illusion, derives from the tangled conflated perceptions of depletable and replenishable resources. The differences need to be understood so that they elicit different management actions.

Depletable or non-renewable resources are finite. Once used, they cannot be replaced. They span categories such as natural, material, and genetic. Examples include fossil fuels (such as coal, petroleum, and natural gas), certain minerals (such as uranium, aluminum and copper), and plant and animal species. These resources are material and, therefore, subject to scarcity.

In contrast, there are also replenishable or renewable resources. In the list of renewables are the usual ones we associate with energy use such as wind, water, geothermal or solar. In addition, forests are renewable, as is oxygen, and hydrogen. We hear less of the social, cultural, and intellectual resources we create such as knowledge, language, internet, inventions, communications etc. These are replenishable, nonmaterial resources, potentially always abundant and generative.

Due to our long history of dependency on the essential nature of physical resources such as food and water to meet our survival needs, we clearly recognize and value those material resources. However, we place less value on our nonmaterial resources that requires a higher degree of abstraction to detect and understand. Due to the lack of more subtle distinctions regarding resource differences our economic practices have overlooked these unvalued resources.

Classical economic theory assumes there are no limits to growth. It has not taken into account the depletable nature of many material resources. These theories assume the diminishment of resources can be avoided by the logic of simply raising prices. Higher prices may mean that fewer products are bought but it also creates a "scarcity value" and a scarcity mentality. As a result, we have arrived at an absurd situation in which depletion is good! We treat limited material resources as if they are limitless (e.g., fresh water or species habitat), and limitless nonmaterial resources as if they were valueless (e.g., knowledge and creativity)! This situation needs attention and critical reflection regarding the meanings and institutions we have built, and a reconstruction of priorities more in line with the systemic situation that is now in the range of view for many of us.

Our ability to construct meaning, relationships, and options for new effective actions is, itself, a renewable and abundant common resource. This is a greatly overlooked, underused and undervalued resource. We are taking the richness and potential for evolving the human capacity to survive and thrive for granted and, therefore, not

[167] Quilligan, J. (2010b) The Commons of mind, life and matter: Toward a non-polar framework for global negotiations, Kosmos Journal, Spring/Summer 2010.

developing, nurturing or protecting this resource. If we could collectively value such resources, it would very likely result in different approaches to education, health care, research, communication, innovation, conceptions of labour, use of time, reduction of GHGs etc. *Our evolving human capacity is the necessary resource for creating and implementing new sustainable means of sharing this planet.* If given the nurturing conditions that allow for interactions and creativity (the opposite of enclosures), our knowledge, inventions, and culture would have the potential to grow abundantly, offering sustainable sources of wealth for the common good. This nurturing, I advocate, does not magically arise but requires the intentional scaffolding of social learning and public discourse processes, as referenced in Chapter 2. Therefore, to the list of global commons that need coordinated attention including the oceans, air, fresh water, arable land, forests, space and internet, human co-evolution itself must be added.

Alienable or Inalienable Resources.

Inalienable rights are considered inherent to the whole and are so significant to an intrinsic essence that they cannot be separated without changing the essence of the whole. For example, an arm is inalienable to the body, a river is inalienable to the community that surrounds it, as is a public library or courthouse to a specific town. It is assumed that these cannot be sold or their contexts reassigned. Inalienable rights are assumed to be those that cannot be transferred, bought, or sold so as to separate one unit from another.[168]. However, our set of assumptions about what is inalienable is actually a collectively constructed interpretation based on different perspectives and motivations. Challenges to our assumptions occur when, for instance, ground water is bottled and sold, or fertility clinics buy and sell human eggs, or people sell their kidneys. Behaviors, shocking to some, have logical motivations to others.

The issue should not be framed for example as whether water bottlers are right or whether water conservers are right. A larger context needs to be observed, systemic connection need to be made, and a definition of what outcomes are 'better" need to be agreed to.[169] For example if the collective goal is about the long term well being of all of those sharing a water resource, the focus can shift to the implications, trade off and consequences that could result from any actions anyone takes regarding that water rather than on "who holds the truth" or "who is to blame". Those implications require further inquiry into what might happen to wellbeing, life styles, income and employment of both bottling water and conserving water.

By raising the concept of "inalienable" and "rights" can elicit a discussion can be stimulated regarding what unforeseen consequences might occur or are occurring if parts are separated from the whole. Relationships of intrinsic necessity may be left unacknowledged, unprotected and open for privatization as, for example, when large quantities of water are removed without considering the impact on the local water table. Without large public consultation or collective deliberation, resources can be moved from *res communis*, in which all benefit, to *res privatae*, in which only specific groups benefit.

[168] It is interesting to note that in the US Declaration of Independence, the inalienable rights were defined as the rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.
[169] Ross, (2006)

Excludable, Subtractable, and Rivalrous Resources.

Another way resources have been categorized in some of the commons literature is based on access and use. A resource is said to be "excludable" when it is possible to control access to it and prevent people from using it. For example, I can legitimately exclude you from using my house but not from breathing air. If one person's use of a resource diminishes its use by others, it is considered subtractable or rivalrous. For example, my eating a pizza prevents you from eating it and might even motivate me to see you as a rival and rush to eat it first. However, my use of a road or the Internet does not automatically diminish or compete with your use of it. Again, discussions regarding these categories can offer a means of exploring what assumptions we hold regarding our shared resources.

Common Pool Resources or Open Access Resources

According to Ostrom, Common Pool Resources (CPRs) are valuable natural or human-made resources that are available to more than one person and potentially vulnerable to degradation due to overuse. Unmanaged resources, such as a lake are considered to be open access resources, not to be confused with common resources, such as a local fishery. This is the significant differentiation of meaning that ecologist Hardin[170] left out of his conclusions regarding his assumptions of human incapacity to take care of resources, known as the "tragedy of the commons." In his article, published in 1968, he described a social dilemma in which independent rational self-interested individuals share a resource, such as herdsmen grazing cows in a pasture. His conclusion was that each would increase the size of his or her herd, and eventually overgraze the pasture. In his article, he referred to the pastures as commons but they actually were an open access resource where no share agreements had been made. His reflections are more about the tragedy of permanently independent individualism. His hypothetical herdsmen were operating as individuals in a manner that was rivalrous, not having yet negotiated any meaning or practices about how to sustainably co-manage their pasture. Thirty years later, he indicated his error saying he should have called his article "Tragedy of the Unregulated Commons" [171] but meanwhile his conclusions were used to justify much government and corporate interventions. Ostrom's research cited many examples of self-organized groups using the principles named earlier to anticipate such dilemmas and make agreements to manage their resources sustainably, thus disputing the basis for external controls.

[170] Hardin, (1968)

[171] This is an interesting example of views shifting in response to different conditions and other views. It is also interesting that this evolved reflection is seldom quoted. Hardin, G. (1998). Extensions of "The Tragedy of the Commons". *Science* 280 (5364): 682. doi:10.1126/science.280.5364.682

Resources Organized as Public, Private, or Common Goods.

Former U.S. Interior Secretary Walter Hickel once explained: 'If you steal $10 from a man's wallet, you're likely to get into a fight. But if you steal billions from the commons, co-owned by him and his descendants, he may not even notice.'[172]

Possibly each person going about his or her individual business, as if in a separate world, would not see the billions being stolen from the commons. However, if he or she regularly spoke to his/her fellow citizens in self-reflective forums set up to consider the sustainability of a particular commons that all were co-managing, the transgression would much more likely be observed, and result in collective action. Due to our lack of collaborative negotiation practices, we have lost sight of our rights, and more so, our shared abilities to value and protect those rights. We miss the feedback loops that let us see and adjust to our impacts on our natural resources as well as our impacts on each other.

This sad reflection on our human condition, as Henkel describes, also suggests differences in the scale and scope of what we are able to attend to when we operate as isolated individuals seeing isolated issues. As discussed in Chapter 2, simple, immediate, and concrete issues are more easily noticed and responded to, whereas those that are more systemic, complex, and distant go unheeded, especially if there is no method for dialogue available to collectively develop understanding regarding these issues. This may be why a community is enraged at the cutting down of a single tree on their main street: an issue that can become a lightning rod for citizens who are feeling disempowered. However, when the surrounding forests are removed, exposing their water supplies to evaporation and their soils to erosion, there may be little response, especially if it is connected with economic growth and jobs for community members and their neighbours. More distant and complex issues, such as rising CO2 in the global atmosphere, thus can seem completely beyond our realm of collective action.

Much of our conceptualization of how the world works separates our activities into the domains of private or public. It has been historically assumed that the differences in these domains would act as a counterweight to each other so that neither could dominate the common good. However, in our prevailing neoliberal framework, both domains operate from similar assumptions of exclusion, competition, and individuality, making the distinction between public and private less clear. As Canadian author Donald Savoie notes, in looking at how public functions have become hopelessly blurred with private, "… . . strategic plans were turned into business plans, citizens into customers and cabinet into a powerless board of directors, and attempts were made to tie pay to performance."[173]

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[172] Bollier, D. (2004). "Who Owns the Sky? Reviving the Commons." *In These Times*. Accessed Feb. 27, 2013 at http://www.inthesetimes.com/comments.php?id=631_0_1_0_C

173 Savoie, D. (2013) Running government like a business has been a dismal failure. The Globe and Mail. Published Monday, Jan. 07 2013 Accessed at http://www.theglobeandmail.com/commentary/running-government-like-a-business-has-been-a-dismal-failure/article6968196/

According to Quilligan,[174] the lack of sustainable management of our resources, whether natural or human created, stems largely from our fuzzy understandings of public, private and common goods. He defines private goods as those products or services developed by a business for commercial use. We can easily distinguish these from public goods such as transportation, education, parks etc. What is less clear is the difference between public and common goods. Quilligan says, "The simplest way of contrasting a public and common good is to ask: does this particular resource require management as a social mandate or as an expression of mutuality and collaboration? In other words, is this property best maintained by government or the public?"[175]

Traditionally, the term "public" has been assumed to mean the same as "commons", or a community's right to support itself using the resources at hand. However, more recently the meaning has changed to become synonymous with government management. The meaning of government management has shifted from protecting the common resource for current and future generations to a vaguer term of "protecting the public interest." This latter understanding can often be used to justify a central government granting exclusive access to private companies under the espoused assumption that the market is the effective vehicle to meet the "public interest." Possibly, when resources were more plentiful, the implications of this short-term view were less apparent but now, amongst many, there is a growing recognition that natural resources are limited. Governments however are using their publicly sanctioned rights to give development permits for the destructive practice even further a field such as for fracking within a university campus, logging within endangered grizzly habitat, or flooding a whole community in order to build a power dam. All of this is done with the justification that the public good is being achieved by keeping the economy running, and running ahead of the fear of dwindling resources. Meanwhile, communities have lost access to their common goods and a sense of their sovereign rights.

We have, perhaps passively, assumed democratic national governments would be a counterbalance to free markets. However, neither state nor markets with their short term have the capacity to be the stewards of the commons[176]. They are ill equipped for the meta-systemic, long-term coordination required to govern the commons. It is also becoming clear now that the public and private are increasingly melded into a single institution in what is now referred to as state capitalism or, as Phillip Bobbit termed it, the "market state."[177] This recognition that there is no counterbalance to market interests has led to a resurgence of interest in the notion of commons as a means of protecting and enhancing long term sustainability and social equity.

174 Quilligan, J. (2012). Why distinguish commons good from public goods. In D. Bollier & S. Helfrich (Eds.), The Wealth of the Commons; A World Beyond Market & State. Amherst, MA: Levellers Press.

175 Quilligan J. (2012) p.74

176 Wood. M. (2014)

177 d'Ancona ,M.(2006). Everything we think about the wars on terror is wrong Interview with Phillip Bobbitt in the *The Spectator* accesses Jan. 9, 2012 at http://www.utexas.edu/law/faculty/pbobbitt/spectator.html

Resources Organized by an Epistemology of Property Ownership.

> As regards law, the basic orientation of American [as well as most of the world's] jurisprudence is towards personal human rights and towards the natural world as existing for human possession and use. To the industrial-commercial world the natural world has no inherent rights to existence, habitat, or freedom to fulfill its role in the vast community of existence. Yet there can be no sustainable future, even for the modern industrial world, unless these inherent rights are recognised as having legal status. The entire question of possession and use of the Earth, either by individuals or establishments needs to be considered in a more profound manner than Western society has ever done previously… To achieve a viable human-Earth situation a new jurisprudence must envisage its primary task as that of articulating the conditions for the integral functioning of the Earth process…[178]

As indicated in this quote by Thomas Berry, a foundational element in how society has developed meaning and practices that separate us from commons lies in the deeply embedded and institutionalized concept of ownership of resources and property. Therefore, it seems worthwhile to take the time to identify how this conception of reality was formed and what challenges might be in store regarding co-creating a new understanding of the relationship between people and common resources.

Much of our current meanings and institutions regarding property were developed in the late 1700s from the work of John Locke. His motivation was to free people from the constraints of the church and ruling aristocracies by allowing them ownership of the fruits of their labour (i.e., he believed that making improvements to the land should entitle the labourer to own the land). However, in hindsight, this seems to have delivered property from a public resource (*res publica)* to a private resource (*res privatae)* and subsequently into the domain of the corporation.

According to Hardt and Negri, [179] society has internalized Locke's meanings of property and ownership so deeply that we, in the Western cultures, currently operate almost as if under a spell, granting individual property rights a sacred, absolutist meaning. The manner in which we have construed property has organized our relationships with each other and the environment. It reflects the individualist subject/object duality of the modernist tradition resulting in deeming humans as separate owners and manipulators of a thing outside themselves. With this view come ownership rights, including the unquestioned right to use something as one wishes, exclude others from its use, and transfer these rights to another. The institutions based on these beliefs have diminished the power of commoners to act as self-regulating organizations managing their long term needs. By offering new frameworks for organizing our relationships, rights and

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[178] Berry,T. (1999,) The Great Work. New York: Bell Tower p.60

[179] Hardt, M., & Negri, A. (2009). Commonwealth, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.,

responsibilities, the proposed commons paradigm is attempting to break out of the spell of private ownership and offer a new direction, that of shared trusteeship.

First Nations ontology can offer a basis for comparison to the Western assumption of property and may find a resonance with the commons propositions. According to Bryan [180], Western ontology of property is rationalistic, based on a technological view of nature and, in essence, results in "institutionalizing self-interest as the fulcrum for the 'good life' of anyone." The Western, narrow, linear doctrine of progress could not recognize the well adapted, complex, highly nuanced, webs of meaning and collective cultural practices of being-in-relationship with Earth observed by native cultures. It was almost impossible for First Nations people to find any language to convey their sense of intrinsic relationship to their land and cultural traditions to the colonists. Many colonists assumed their perspective of civilization to be the only truth, to the point of attempting to make individual property ownership a basis for rights of personhood under the US Constitution, relegating aboriginal people to non-personhood. In contrast, according to an interpretation of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, legally registered groups such as corporations could be treated as having the rights of personhood in certain circumstances.

In Canada, these differences of cultural meaning have been in dispute since before Confederation in 1867 and have never reached a place of synthesis and a way forward for those cohabiting this region. Since Confederation, the can has been kicked down the road with various tribes negotiating for land claims with various attempts to "fix" the problem, including pressure from the Canadian government to move to the Western way of individual property ownership. This might benefit some individual "property owners" by moving them into the market economy and reducing their financial dependence on the state for the short term, but could eventually destroy the integrity of the First Nations ecosystems as well as the fabric of their culture. How the "problem" is languaged has itself become part of the difficulty. Without recognizing and addressing the ontological basis for differences, solutions are likely to be partial and unsatisfying, erupting into creative frustration as in the 2013 Canadian-based Idle No More[181] protests and hunger strikes. Within this context of such historic experiences of marginalization, and current attempts to elevate the First Nations voice, how do we, as a broader group, develop an identity as global citizens sharing common issues? How do we work together to respond to the shared dilemma of potential mass extinction due to climate change that none of us have ever dealt with before? I will discuss this question further in Chapter 4 in my case study on the Great Lakes.

Reframing Economics

[180] Bryan, B. (2000). Property as ontology: On aboriginal and English understandings of ownership. Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence. 13, 3-31. p.5

[181] For more information see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Idle_No_More

Having discussed commons concepts pertaining to governance and resources we will now discuss those relevant to economics.

As stated in Chapter 1, enclosing resources results in nature and human activity becoming commodities, tradable in a short-term market for the highest price with little protection for working people or the commons. This reductionism results in the dismantling of abilities to perceive the systemic nature of relationships and, thus, the ability to organize to protect and enhance these relationships for current and future wellbeing. In the last five years, much has been written reflecting on how our economic, financial and monetary system do or do not work. A commons approach to economics proposes we look outside the current beliefs of this system completely and not do as Einstein warned (i.e., try to fix the problem with the same thinking that created it). The commons approach would put more emphasis on the wealth available through an abundance of replenishable nonmaterial resources to balance the limitations and vulnerabilities of our depletable material resources. It would mean moving from a debt-based economy to a wealth-based economy and it would address the split between producers and consumers.

Quilligan[182] states that a significant step in this direction is to draw a distinction between values and pricing. Commodification results in market pricing and does not take into account the future wellbeing of people and other species, the collective value of which is discounted in order to keep economies growing. Commodification increases when production and consumption are separate functions involving different participants with different context, motivations, and values. For example, the recent fire in a textile factory in Bangladesh, made many in North America make connections between the conditions for the production of a shirt, and the $8.00 purchase of that shirt in a local Walmart. A relationship to some degree was formed where none existed before. People questioned the price of that shirt in terms of their values and the values and context of those who made it. This is very different relationship than for example in Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). This arrangement involves the consumer of vegetables to pre-purchase a share from a grower in their local region so they do not have to go into debt to produce food. There is a close interdependent relationship with the values and needs of the user, and the values, needs and working conditions of the grower. How could this mutually beneficial arrangement, modeled in a CSA, operate at a global scale regarding global commons?

Both Thomas Greco[183] and Quilligan outline how we have built a cycle of debt that distances us from the commons. Money is deposited in banks and lent out at interest that the bank retains as profit. In this way, debt creates money and gives an incentive for private banks to create more debt as was evidenced in the housing bubble and market crisis of 2008. More wages are required to pay this interest and more jobs are needed to create the wages and more resources are used to create those jobs. This does not support cooperation or conservation. Competition breeds further separation, individuality, short-term self-interest, and assumptions of success with centralized control over what is valued and what is available being vested in banks.

[182] Quilligan, J. (2010)
[183] Greco, T. (2009). *The end of money and the future of civilization.* Vermont: Chelsea Green

How can people, feeling the pressures of debt and the need to keep up in competitive markets, step off this treadmill? How can they give the time and attention needed to reflect on the structure of this situation, the meaning they have given it, and see if their needs might be better met through the more direct efforts of collectively caring for their resources? How can people extract their time and creativity from the enclosure of waged labour? Being caught up in the short term severs the capacities and motivations of people, closest to their resources, to act in ways that take care of these resources for their long term. Shifting our reliance off this cycle and constructing a new approach is both necessary and daunting. My case study on the Commons Paradigm Think Tank will report on some thoughts that were generated regarding this Catch 22 dilemma.

Not only citizens, but also markets, are habituated to operate within these short-term, self-interested time frames. Long-term impacts are discounted - for instance, the price of taking action now on climate change is considered too high for the current economy to bear and, therefore, the costs are transferred to future generations. This practice, in effect, discounts the quality of life of future generations.

A monetary system that reflects values, indexed to long-term sustainability not just prices, could change this mindset and time frame and has been presented by Quilligan as a necessary lynch pin for implementing a commons approach. However, as much as setting up a new global monetary system may seem at once pragmatic and necessary, it also seems fantastical and beyond anything yet conceived of, or collectively agreed to, let alone thought through well enough to gain legitimacy and be implemented. As a place to start, it is useful to remind ourselves that currency values have been created and changed in the past in a variety of ways. Following the 1944 Bretton Woods Agreement, most national currencies were indexed to a gold standard to allow for global standards and international exchange rates to be set.[184] In 1971, the US came off the gold standard and the US dollar represented a promise from the government to redeem the dollar with another dollar.[185] In 1995, 17 European countries agreed to a shared currency called the Euro. During wartime, citizens have rapidly switched to using war bonds. Frequent flyers get points that they can cash in on various goods and services. These examples illustrate that collective decisions regarding changes in indexing are possible, suggesting a change to a monetary system based on a sustainability index is also theoretically possible.

Extensive research has already been done on developing a sustainability index. For instance, sustainability indicator projects[186] have been developed whereby residents act as citizen scientists monitoring the social, ecological, and economic well-being of their communities over time.[187] This grassroots effort engages citizens in meaning making,

[184] More accurately, every country joining the International Monetary Fund was required to set a par value for its currency in terms of gold,

[185] Leitaer, B. (2001). *The future of money.* Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers

186 Hák, T., Moldan, B., & Dahl, A. L. (Eds.). (2007). *Sustainability indicators: a scientific assessment.* Washington: Island Press.

[187] Learn more of how this role has developed at. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citizen_science.

reflective thinking, and systemic awareness regarding their commons. These initiatives have coalesced into projects such as Genuine Progress Indicators, Quality of Life Indicators and the Happiness Index. Governments and corporations have taken up monitoring, resulting in sophisticated cross-referenced data regarding, for example, the condition of riparian areas, methods of waste management, and the impact of public education. Ideally, based on agreements and standards co-developed in social charters and trusts, once the people in a given commons knew the limitations of a resource, an appropriate cap could be set on its use, or a rent could be charged on anything that was in excess. This income could be collected and reinvested to rehabilitate depletable resources, enhance replenishable resources, or be distributed to citizens. This "information" or language and meaning, as stated in Chapter 2, needs to be coordinated at a global level to create an immediate planetary feedback system much like our temperature, blood pressure, and stress, provides dynamic interconnected feedback regarding our body's state of health. Erik Rothenberg through Unified Rating System, Universal Lifecycle Assessment (URSULA)[188] has been developing such a system for gathering and coordinating planetary information regarding sustainability. Creating a global monetary system tied to values of sustainability to me seems necessary to support our comprehension of ourselves as interconnected global citizens, collectively acting in ways that maintain a vibrant global commons.

In keeping with the philosophy of social construction, many people need to be invited into the process to create a new language and means of calculating value. These new calculations, and the development of a potential currency, need to take into account differences in equity, means of implementation and incentives that are coordinated but not in a centralized hierarchy as we have currently created. Such a group conversation is being stimulated by a soon-to-be-published invitation by Integral Review of which I am guest editor, inviting discussion on key articles presented by Quilligan and Rothenberg.

DEFINING WHAT COMMONS ISN'T

While acknowledging that people will be attracted to commons due to different motivations, and that the movement may allow for a flexibility of terms, the commons community will also need to further clarify what the commons movement is not, so as to justify how and why its proposition may be offering something to the world that other social change language and efforts may not be doing.

Commons Differs from the Environmental/Sustainability Movement

An unidentified author stated on a website, "The top problem to solve is thus not the sustainability problem itself, but finding the new paradigm needed to solve it. Environmentalism and civilization may not know it but they are both in search of a

[188] For more information see http://ursulaproject.org/

paradigm that works."[189] This sense is reiterated by a participant of an online commons course, "I worked in community-based ecological education and restoration for over 20 years and realized that as hard as people worked and despite much progress, including growing knowledge and sound restoration techniques, we were not going to get over the hump to a sustainable and just future. We need to change the operating system itself. Our economic system is in direct opposition to ecological sustainability and thus to justice. I think the commons is the key to operationalize sustainability."

Author Gus Speth, former administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, in his analysis of why the environmental movement has failed to move us out of our current crisis, says that it became mired in and associated with an "us and them" framework creating a decades-old "environment versus the economy" battle.[190] A multi systems approach to respond to the crisis is lacking, as is inquiry into how we might attend to our seemingly diverse and incompatible needs while building new beliefs and systems for achieving social justice and environmental sustainability. From my own experience, I saw that aspects of the environmental movement took on a self-righteous ideology about saving the ecology, making the people whose incomes were dependant on resource extraction the enemy. They were, therefore, addressing one part of the issue, the enclosure of natural resources and not considering the interconnected issue of enclosures of labour.

Similarly, the 1992 Brundtland Commission Report to the UN also failed to mobilize a systemic response to the crisis. The Commission proposed an ideal marriage between the terms "sustainable" and "development" but never did work out how this seemingly contentious relationship could reach a synthesis. Although based on admirable goals of refraining from economic development that would use common resources in a manner that would compromise the wellbeing of future generations, there has not been an adequate analysis of the root causes of what makes this relationship contentious. The discussion never was bumped up to the level through which a new paradigm could be created.

A split occurred between the populist grassroots movements and larger environmental groups with the latter, in order to have more political clout, forming high profile administrative organizations. In order to keep themselves sustainable, these were often receiving funds from the very groups whose activities they were protesting. Questions of compromise were raised and infighting occurred. Hopefully, the commons approach can learn from and anticipate these pitfalls of polarized communications and actions.

Also, there is something to be learned from the language of the environmental movement. Citizens have gathered around terms such as "the environment" in ways that leave the issue "out there" whereas "commons" indicates an interactive set of relationships: the issues, resources of concern, the praxis and "us". However, it is also easy to slide into

[189] Source accessed November 2012 at *http://www.thwink.org/sustain/glossary/KuhnCycle.htm*
[190] Speth, J. G. (2008). *The Bridge at the edge of the world: Capitalism, the environment, and crossing from crisis to sustainability*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

using the term "the commons" that reinforces a sense of "it" being outside of our relationships, actions and responsibilities, in an artificial way, much as if we were talking about our own bodies as "the hand" or "the heart" that does not reflect the inalienable nature of the parts of our body. Possibly a verb based language, as described earlier, would bridge this separation. Buckminster Fuller attempted to describe this experience by saying, "I live on Earth at present, and I don't know what I am. I know that I am not a category. I am not a thing—a noun. I seem to be a verb, an evolutionary process—an integral function of the universe."[191]

Commons Differs from Civil Society

Civil society is often looked to as the domain outside of the home, the state, or the market where individuals can find forms of collective action in support of common interests. However, does civil society today really function in a way that supports shared interests and protects shared resources for the long term, or do we need to look at our assumptions and experiences of this sector?

Civil society is an old concept stemming from Roman times. Cicero used the term *societas civilis* as meaning the "good society" where good citizens behaved civilly to keep from harming each other. In more recent times, Habermas summarized the impact of civil society by suggesting that:

> The ideal of a public sphere asserts itself as a bulwark against the systematizing effects of the state and the economy. The public sphere is located in civil society; it is where people can discuss matters of mutual concern as peers, and learn about facts, events, and the opinions, interests, and perspectives of others in an atmosphere free of coercion and of inequalities that would incline individuals to acquiesce or be silent. This involvement develops individual autonomy; is a learning process; and creates a politically relevant public opinion.[192]

Civil society today is definitely a place where many vital skills are learned and meaning shared, but is it really the place where people can discuss matters of concern free of coercion and inequalities to the degree that it could be? What are we meaning when we use the term "civil society" today? The term has become vague, with a wide range of meanings including "the public," "grass-roots organizations," "citizens," etc. Sometimes, it is used interchangeably with the term "third sector," referring to non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In the latter sense, it seems that civil society is expanding. For instance, the Yearbook of International Organizations reports that the number of

[191] Fuller, R. B., Agel, J., & Fiore, Q. (1970). *I seem to be a verb.* New York: Bantam Books. p.32.

[192] Fleming, T. (2002). Habermas on civil society, lifeworld and system: Unearthing the social in transformation theory. *The Teachers College Record* Accessed November 20,2012 at http://www.tcrecord.org

international NGOs increased from 6,000 in 1990 to more than 50,000 in 2006.[193] So with all of this history it is understandable why many people look to increasing the voice of this "third sector" to right wrongs, whether environmental or social.

Although most local and national NGOs have community representation through a board of directors, they are not voted on by citizens-at-large, or given legitimacy to act as trustees of a recognized shared commons, for the long-term wellbeing of the people of that commons. They arise from smaller special interest groups seeing a need in the community and using public funds to meet that need. They usually are required to apply to the state for sanction to use that funding, and, therefore, may not have, or cannot afford to risk having, an open critical reflection on whether the state is really operating from principles that support the commons.

A widespread NGO survivalist tactic, especially at a grassroots level, is to spend endless hours writing grant applications, packaging whatever they are doing in a way that might gain funding so that their few staff, who may just consist of a volunteer coordinator, can keep the office open. To be able to offer charitable tax deductions, foundations must comply with government regulations to avoid what might be considered political activity. For example, Tides Canada, a well-established national charitable foundation that provides services for philanthropists, foundations, activists and civil organizations involved in social and environmental education and change work, had its charitable status strongly questioned by the federal government due to a concern that donor-directed funds were being used to question tar sand development.[194] Also, in the developing world, Barry-Shaw and Jay [195] suggest that well-intentioned NGOs can be co-opted to pave the way for the expanding neo-liberal agenda.

As these examples demonstrate, civil society organizations can easily become enclosed by economic and government constraints. A new way for civil society to self-organize and free itself from these constraints needs to be both valued and sustained, which is what the commons paradigm is attempting to offer.

Commons is Not Anarchy/ Communism/ Marxism

In an interview with commons author David Bollier[196] about how commons is being received, he said there was a knee jerk assumption, especially in the US, that critiquing capitalism must mean promoting the dreaded "communism." This is an unfortunate

[193] Accessed July 2012 at http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/CSO/0,,contentMDK:20101499~menuPK:244752~pagePK:220503~piPK:220476~theSitePK:228717,00.html

[194] McCarthy,S. CRA audits charitable status of Tides Canada amid Tory attack. *Globe and Mail*. Accessed on February 2012 at http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/cra-audits-charitable-status-of-tides-canada-amid-tory-attack/article4105719/

[195] Barry-Shaw, N., & Jay, D. O. (2012). *Paved with good intentions: Canada's NGOs from idealism to imperialism* . Nova Scotia: Fernwood.

[196] Bollier, D. (2012). Skype conversation on Dec. 20, 2012.

interpretation of a commons paradigm. Although it does address the limitations of capitalism as currently expressed by unlimited economic growth, it does not imply replacing capitalism with communism, socialism or any form of state ownership or control of the economy. Although affirming the need for shared responsibility, a commons paradigm does not advocate management of resources through a central collective control. Instead, it strongly advocates following the principle of subsidiarity whereby resources are co-managed through a trusteeship model, at the local level as close to the resource as possible.

In addressing the assumption that a commons paradigm is built upon Marxism, James Quilligan points out that although Marx was concerned about the damage done by the enclosures of labour, he failed to foresee, or take into account, the damage done to the commons by an economy built on the back of depletable resources such as fossil fuel.[197] Although many people gathering under the banner of commons are advocating for a rising up of the people to protect their rights, commons should not be mistaken for anarchy. Most people who are developing commons theory and methods of application are presenting a need for highly organized, collectively agreed to, methods of long term governance that involve rights as well as responsibilities.

Commons is Not Everything Good in the World

From my work with groups new to the concept of commons, I have noted a desire to imbue commons with a projection of the good life. In fact, this romanticized view still lingers with some more experienced proponents of commons. Charlotte Hess was quite critical of this romanticizing stating, "This is an emotional application of the commons and fits well with god, mother, and apple pie."[198] Commons management is not "the next Golden Age" or the perfect world. It is just a more appropriate response to the life conditions we are currently facing in the world. Implementation of a commons paradigm will still be subject to the pitfalls of inefficiencies and abuses that befall any social organizing. Many yearn to go back to a time of assumed simple goodness. This motivation can provide a beacon for some core values we wish to live by. However, in moving towards those core values, the current complexities cannot be ignored. If it was that easy, we would have not left that life in the first place, or would have found our way back to it sooner. For a paradigm to actually improve the limitations of the previous situation, the complexities need to be understood and transcended, not rejected or glossed over.

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[197] Quilligan, J.(2011) See blog post at http://blog.p2pfoundation.net/james-quilligan-beyond-marx-towards-a-developmental-theory-of-the-commons

[198] Hess, C. (2008). *Mapping the New Commons.* Presented at "Governing Shared Resources: Connecting Local Experience to Global Challenges;" the 12th Biennial Conference of the International Association for the Study of the Commons, University of Gloucestershire, Cheltenham, England, July 14-18, 2008.

"Greenwashing" happened in the 1970s and '80s when the environmental movement became popular, and advertisers saw a market they could align with, whether their product was helpful to the environment or not. There is a similar move to "commonswashing" in which the term commons can be associated with many things to give it a positive, populist spin. Trendy downtown cafes may be referred to as "commons" to promote their homey community appeal, even though the property is owned by a business and users have no formal roles as trustees of that area. In addition, governments can refer to working for the common good although little public engagement has ever occurred. This is an expected occurrence, although it does make it harder to construct more substantial shared meaning. Many well intentioned efforts to create social justice, ecological sustainability and economic reform that do not question the limitations of our deeply entrenched meaning and structural arrangements regarding law, property, and profit may save some trees but not the forest.

COMMONS AS BOTH A SOCIAL MOVEMENT AND EPISTEMIC COMMUNITY

To further assist the analysis of how commons concepts are being constructed, it is helpful to look at a tension that potentially lies within any social change endeavor and which is likely to exist within the commons community. This tension can surface between the general social movement aspect that needs to build a large community of support, and the more specific epistemic community that is needed to refine and clarify concepts and roles. The purpose of a social movement, as described by political scientist Sidney Tarrow, is to find shared interests and tap into a sense of solidarity and identity so as to make "claims against opponents, authorities, or elites."[199] The movement may include large numbers and have fuzzy boundaries of membership. With a strong desire to create unity and present a strong front, definitions about specific language and the framing of issues may seem less important and, therefore, remain loose. This can result in unchecked assumptions about whether people are really talking about the same thing. In contrast, the purpose of an epistemic community – is to refine and agree on what they are talking about and why they are making the choices they are. They tend to have a smaller, more defined membership with shared principles, analysis, language and growing expertise in responding to an issue. "Members of epistemic communities share a common knowledge base, causal beliefs, and criteria of judgment, whereas participants in social movements often diverge on causal explanations, their knowledge, and evaluations."[200] Foucault [201] emphasized that a challenge of the former is that they can begin to narrowly define one version of a story. Thus, one drawback to the epistemic community that

[199]Tarrow, S., (1998). *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.4

[200] Dobusch, L. & Quack,S., (2008). *Epistemic communities and social movements Transnational dynamics in the case of Creative Commons*. MPIfG Discussion Paper Max-Planck-Institut für Gesellschaftsforschung, Köln. Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies, Cologne. p.11. Accessed on January 27, 2013 at http://www.mpifg.de/pu/mpifg_dp/dp08-8.pdf.

[201] Foucault, M., (1980)

commons advocates could take note of may be lack of openness to critical reflection and inquiry if there is a tendency towards firming of consciousness and identity.

The lines between a social movement and an epistemic community and their functions may blur and become sources of tension over time if the valid differences are not noted and appreciated. An example is provided by Dobusch and Quack[202] who reported on a study regarding the organization of the Creative Commons, an alternative copyright license process. They documented the stages groups went through to address an interest in creating a license. Initially there was a loose ideological motivation to support open source software and free access to knowledge. Eventually more defined structures, rules and standards were needed to provide the clout to legitimize and legalize those beliefs and move them into social actions. This need to set rules and definitions for credibility and accountability in due course created a tension with the need of the social movement that wanted to keep the spirit of freedom, openness, and diversity of membership. The epistemic community was even accused of creating a corporate machine that was non-democratic. This tension led to a decoupling, acknowledging the difference between, but importance of, both the functions of activism and the function of institutionalization, to the goal of protection of the Creative Commons licensing process.

The difference between an epistemic community and a social movement might also reflect a difference in motivations and capacities of those involved. The time, commitment and structural demands of the epistemic community's performance may be more complex than those required of the social movement. For example, the social movement's "claims against opponents, authorities, or elites." And motivations to define solidarity could indicate a less complex belief: that there is one truth and one best action. The epistemic community, in contrast, has encountered diverse language, perspectives and layers of implications resulting from choices for action, and is able to see a more complex situation. I can relate this to my own journey. My initial activism was expressed with others through protest slogans on banners in demonstrations against some perceived wrong doers. As I understood more of the complexity of the situations, I had to adjust the complexity of my responses. I joined non-profit organizations, attended conferences, wrote articles, and set up meetings with those who had differing opinions. People may typically start their engagement with a cause through the broad door of a movement. They then later, having studied the field more and networked with others, begin to construct a language and roles that matches deeper observations of the complexities of the issue. In so doing, and often to their embarrassment, according to Dobusch and Quack, they may feel they are being seen as the very "elite" of separate insiders that they were previously distrusting. A similar dilemma may be observed between practitioner and academic communities.

A tension can understandably arise between a movement's loyalty to include breadth i.e., all people and issues, and the epistemic community's need to create depth i.e., understand complexity of issues, refine language, develop principles and appropriate structures. A tendency can be to flatten the experience of differences to avoid the inherent tensions. Both the epistemic community and social movement must reconcile this dialectical

[202] Dobusch, L. & Quack, S., (2008).

tension in order that a new synthesis can be found and comprehensive social change can result as discussed in Chapter 2. This reflects the classic either /or horns of a dilemma, that hold a potential synthesis of these tensions into something more comprehensive.

These differences between the broader social movement and epistemic community, and the resulting tensions, are experienced in the formative stages of the commons paradigm. I am aware of these tension as I write this paper, attempting to be inclusive of those new to the concepts as well as meaningful to those who have been refining their understanding of the concepts. I will refer more to the significance of this tension and its impact on the formation of a new paradigm in my next chapters.

SUMMARY

This chapter has offered a broad, but not exhaustive, overview of concepts that are being articulated under the banner of commons. These concepts are very much in process in both the commons movement and the epistemic community. However general directions and meaning are surfacing, with tentative agreements being made. In fact "streams" of interest were identified for the second International Commons Conference held in May 2013. These include: Doing away with Labor; Working and Caring in a World of Commons, Treating Knowledge, Culture and Science as Commons, Money, Markets, Value and the Commons, New Infrastructures for Commoning by Design, and Life, Meaning and Spirituality. It will be interesting to observe how these streams keep informing each other and do not fragment what is attempting to become a comprehensive paradigm for change. Will they be able to respond to both the depth of complexity of issues as well as the breadth of diverse issues and views? Having laid out some of the relevant concepts, in Chapter 4, I will provide examples and analysis of specific situations where commons concept are being negotiated and applied.

By way of modelling the integration and application of the above concepts I am including an article I wrote in response to an enclosure of a commons resource, a glacier near where I live, that applies some of the concepts named above.

Who *Owns* A Glacier?

The recent decision by the British Columbia Liberal government to permit Jumbo Glacier Resort Ltd to develop a year round ski resort on 6000 hectares of Crown land and First Nations territory raises many questions about how our commons are managed. The project, which plans to build the only year round ski resort in North America, will have 6000 units and 23 ski runs built on top of glaciers and in the watersheds and ecosystems surrounding Jumbo Glacier, Karnak Glacier, Commander Glacier and Farnham Glacier in the Purcell Mountain range of southeastern British Columbia

Traditionally watersheds and ecosystems were recognized as the common wealth of humankind, or our commons. The term "commons" describes the gifts we inherit from

nature or create together, as well as the intrinsic set of relationships amongst people and the agreements and rules we co-develop to manage these resources for current and future generations. The rights associated with commons arise from a local or global community's dependence on certain resources for current survival and security, as well as their responsibility for the welfare of future generations. People have legitimate rights (and responsibilities) to access, preserve, manage, produce and use the resources their lives depend on. These rights arose out of traditions and were later articulated in the Magna Carta which underlies much of the foundation of western democracy. Although the early English term "commons" referred mainly to land based resources that were enclosed for the benefit of the aristocracy in the 15 -16th centuries, it now includes both biophysical commons such as fresh water, atmosphere, oceans or seeds as well as social technical commons such as language, culture, internet, inventions or knowledge.

The Jumbo Resort approval signifies a decision to enclose a natural area for the specific development by a few with the assumption that economic benefits will trickle down to the "many." However, the local "many" who have voiced both support and opposition in the past 20 years, will not officially be part of ongoing decisions. Although $900 million will be invested in the project, potentially offering significant employment to what some define as the financially strapped area of the East Kootenays, some of the main actors, the investors, are from France. In addition, in Canada the provincial government can trump local regional district decisions. The area was separated from local jurisdiction by designating it, in a precedent-setting move, as a "mountain resort municipality." As the resort does not have any residents at this time, the municipal council was appointed by the distant provincial government for a yet undetermined length of time, to make decisions within a yet undetermined electoral boundary. This could give the privately owned resort the same rights and authority as other local governments without needing local democratic elections to sanction their mandates. This all flies in the face of one of the significant principles in commons management i.e., that decisions regarding management of assets are best made by those closest to and most impacted by their use.

In February 2013 the West Kootenay EcoSociety filed an application requesting the B.C. Supreme Court review the legality of this procedure. They did so based on this appointment not complying with common law that requires a municipality to act in the public interest and therefore that a public has to be present to indicate that interest. The Ktunaxa Nation also filed a judicial review application that challenges the government's approval of the project.

Public, Private, and Common

Our current laws governing how humans relate to land (and other sources of livelihood and sustainability) are based on early Roman law which defined the four categories that still impact our present legal framework: *res publica*, *res communes*, *res nullius*, and *res privatae*. *Res publica* included resources managed by government for the public's benefit such as roads and lakeshore access. R*es communes* referred to resources or assets that were accessible to all and, therefore, could not be controlled by any person or government to the exclusion of others, such as air, whales, or possibly glaciers. *Res nullius* were resources considered worthless or wasteland and had no rights of ownership

assigned to them. The fourth category, *res privatae* referred to resources or assets taken over for the explicit use of individuals or organizations. In Canada, although we often consider our wilderness as *res communes* or *res nullius,* all land is held by land tenure through the Crown, and administered by the federal and provincial governments. Based on the agreements in 1867 special arrangement were to be made with aboriginal peoples already inhabiting the land. In the United States, the public trust doctrine serves to protect the commons to some extent by requiring government to protect public resources for public use. There is no equivalent legislation in Canada, except for the Environmental Rights Act in the Northwest Territories and the Environment Act in the Yukon.

It seems that the four glaciers in the Purcell Mountain Range and their surrounding ecosystems have just passed, in practice at least, from *res communes* and *nullius* to *res privatae*. With no sovereign and organized voice for trusteeship of the *communes, publica* is acting as an instrument for *privatae* while saying it is operating for *communes* but actually locking *communes* out of the decisions.

At a global level, the oceans and atmosphere fall under the vagaries of *res nullius* to even a greater extent. As a result, there are no coordinated global agreements about how to care for these areas whose sustainability we have taken for granted. Private industry has been allowed to freely dump their wastes into these shared spaces thereby externalizing their expense that has to be picked up by the public. Peter Barnes raised these issues in his book "*Who Owns the Sky"* and offered some suggestions for creating a new model of commons governance that would ensure full economic accountability through a cap and dividend sharing system.

Our resources are at risk because we have failed to understand the differences between public goods, private goods and common goods. We have passively assumed that governments (public) are there to protect the public interest with the intent of using markets (private) for our mutual common good. We have relied on an illusion that democracy would counterbalance the individualistic forces of free markets. However, governments are aligned with the worldview of John Locke who, in the 18th century, advocated that the primary role of government was to uphold the rights of private property owners. Nearly 70 years ago, Karl Polanyi warned of the consequences of subordinating the needs of society to the rights of a free market. He said that a great transformation had occurred that few were aware of: the market was no longer embedded in society, but society had become embedded in the market system. This market system now operates at a global level beyond the purveyance of public sanctions. In this unconstrained situation, we cannot seem to put the brakes on climate change.

In a market society, nature is viewed as property, and human activity is viewed as labour both of which are merely treated as commodities bought and sold in the market for the highest price. There are few restrictions to protect the vital relationships between people and assets that make up the commons. These relationships include significant values that are not reflected in the pricing equations of markets.

Defining Value

To neo-liberal economists, if something cannot be "enclosed" it has no economic value. So Jumbo Pass has been enclosed so that it can fit this narrow definition of value that many governments feel compelled to promote. It is a commodity useful for creating purchasing power for some. But social value lies beyond that which can be purchased such as health, clean water, creativity, community relationships, silence, accessibility etc. This narrowing of the definition of value, this exclusion and control of the commons, is what deeply disturbs many people in ways they can hardly articulate because commons is almost lost to our conscious frames of reference. People are gathering to protest the enclosure of a portion of the Purcell Range for the purpose of economic activity to the exclusion of other values. They are gathering to protest that short term wealth can be extracted from the area for private use whereas longer term costs such as road building and damage to water systems will be tossed out for the public to bear. After 20 years of what they feel are failed negotiations, civil disobedience is now being seen by many as the only course of action The complex situation might descend into an overly simplified "us against them" fight. In the Kootenays this outrage is voiced as fighting for the grizzly habitat, for clean water, for traditional rights of aboriginal people, for local democracy or for political ideologies. It is all of these, and deeply more. It evokes a knowledge that as a species we have inalienable rights and responsibilities to common resources and these cannot continue to be privatized, commodified, enclosed and thus separated from that which is by nature inseparable if life on earth is to continue.

We have many wild areas, which over the last century have been privatized for commercial use. Our economic quality of life has been enhanced because of them, whether from logging old growth forest, damming rivers for power, or building ski resorts in beautiful mountain valleys. Many of those decisions were made when we still were under the false assumption that nature was ever abundant and resilient. However, in the last few decades many are waking up to the fact that there are limits to growth. Natural resources are finite and ecosystems can only bare so much disintegration before their vital systemic interconnections collapse, taking many life forms down with them. Therefore, making decisions now to build a small resort city on a glacial fed watershed in the context of a planet facing grave water shortage and ecosystem collapse due to climate change, represents short term, insular thinking.

A Movement to Organize Commons

Continuing to demand that the government will respond to demands of civil society and fix situations of enclosure means we are not seeing possibilities outside of habitual but dysfunctional frames of organizing which than adds to the sense of despair. As an alternative, taking care of our common resources will mean thinking outside of this grid locked box of our current economic and democratic premises. It will require thinking differently and organizing ourselves through new structures that operate with, but also have sovereignty beyond, the market and government structures. Significant developments in this direction are occurring, especially over the last three to eight years. Research by Nobel Laureate Elinor Ostrom, has revealed how people are capable of successfully managing their own commons and avoiding the tragedy of overuse and competition that was assumed by Garrett Hardin in his 1968 article in the journal *Science*. The concepts of citizen-created social charters and trusts are being presented, forms of

common law are being studied, facilitated methods for citizen decision making are being tested and new monetary standards based on sustainability indices are being considered. A new paradigm that restructures our current governance and economic systems resulting in coordinated relationships with each other and the earth is emerging under the banner of commons. Taking on the identity of global citizens while working and learning for both our local and global commons will take a lot of commitment, time, study, and practice but it may result in new organizing principles that structure the sustainable practices for the next generations, avoiding the tragic enclosures of commons like the Jumbo Watershed.

Jan Inglis

Written April 2012, updated March 2013

CHAPTER 4

4. HOW ARE WE DOING AT CO-CONSTRUCTING THIS NEW COMMONS PARADIGM

In this chapter, I will start by giving an overview of my areas of inquiry that focused on the use of commons concepts in workshops, a conference, interviews, and a think tank. This is followed by a description of the processes I used for my inquiry. I will then describe each of the four areas including observations and analysis of each. This is in preparation for the final chapter in which I summarize my reflections on what the diverse nature of all these areas when considered together can tell us about the process of constructing a commons paradigm.

AREAS OF INQUIRY

My inquiry took place in both in-person and online settings in Canada, US, and Mexico between January 2010 and January 2013. This inquiry included four areas: (1) observations and field notes drawn from online or face to face introductory workshops on commons concepts; (2) a conference regarding the Great Lakes as a commons; (3) several semi structured interviews with individuals with diverse experience and perspectives within the commons area; and (4) a small think tank with three experienced commons theorists regarding operationalizing a commons paradigm. The workshops offered a look at what happens when people are first introduced to commons. The conference, which I look at in the most depth due to the scope of its objectives, content and participants, offered a look at what happens when a broad group of people, coming from different social worlds, meet to actually apply the concepts to a very wide and complex commons resource. The interviews offered an in-depth setting for inquiry into experiences and assumptions about commons that was not available through the other studies. The think tank provided a sense of what can happen when a small experienced and focused group digs into layers of questions regarding the operationalization of a commons paradigm at a global level and co-generates responses to these questions.

Having four diverse areas of inquiry offered a wide net that has afforded a large overview and chance for comparison of what may be happening in different settings. I was able to enter several different discursive communities to see how meaning was being created. I could question if there were differences in the meaning based on the contexts these communities occupied. Instead of taking one snap shot and drawing conclusions from analyzing it singularly and in depth, I was able to take a series of snap shots at different places and times and, from analyzing and comparing these, construct some insights of how the story of the commons paradigm might be developing. Most of the areas of inquiry resulted from projects I had already been involved in and were not set up for the purpose of this dissertation.

PROCESSES OF INQUIRY

In my reading about different types of research, I came upon several frameworks that seem to resonate and give language to my inquiry process. Based on Ollman[203] my inquiry is dialectical since I examine differing perspectives and ideas within their interactive contexts to see what new understandings might be emerging. This form of research differs from empirical research in that I am not seeking to prove a hypothesis based on collecting detailed objective data. The differing perspectives I examine lie largely in the dialectic between what is being defined as commons principles and concepts, and how these are being implemented; between what is being stated as problematic in the current market state paradigm and what people were saying about their experience of the commons paradigm as providing a more viable alternative: between what is being named as commons concepts in general and the relevance these concepts have to specific individual or group contexts; between my assumptions of what processes support engagement regarding complex issues and what I saw being used.

Patton,[204] discusses the difference between inductive and deductive research. Using his criteria, my research could be characterized as inductive because my inquiry process was broad, involving observations of patterns and meanings across several settings to see what conclusions might be drawn. This differs from deductive research in which data is being gathered regarding the possible confirmation of a previously determined and specific hypothesis. My inquiry was however oriented by what are described by Blumer[205] as "sensitizing concepts", or a prior general sense of reference. I certainly did not enter my research as a blank slate; I was looking at how people are constructing the meaning of commons as a paradigm. I was also interested in identifying the various stages of this articulation, what challenges are being faced, and what processes seem to be supportive for moving through those challenges. In Chapter 3, I presented several specific commons concepts regarding principles, governance, resources, economics, social movements and epistemic communities that provided orientation to the content I was exploring in the areas of inquiry. Also, one particular motivation I brought into my research was to consider paradigm change at a global level. However, not all of my case studies or interviews were engaged in that level of commons investigation or practise, so then I needed to extrapolate some conclusions from my observations. As Patton states, "Extrapolations are modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical, conditions." [206] I speculate that the observations, in my research settings that are local or regional, are different in scale and, to a certain extent, in complexity from those of a global setting. However, these are not necessarily different in regards to the general questions and implications that people are grappling with as the relational dialogical processes of analysis of issues, deliberation of different options and decision making are similar no matter what the scale.

My research was based on a naturalistic design as it involved real world processes and uncontrolled situations that I observed with an open-ended inquiry, allowing the questions and knowledge to assemble and morph as I went. Although very comfortable with this open-ended process in general interactive situations, I was not sure how to make it into "research." At times, I struggled with what "research" meant in general, what it meant to me, and how I could sit in a place of believing I was offering anything valuable. I entered what Sheila McNamee referred to, when discussing research as social construction, as an inquiry into my " own unspoken assumptions about (1) what is the "right" way to proceed, (2) what are the "right" questions to ask, (3) what is the "right" analysis to employ, and

[203] Ollman, B. (1993). *Dialectical investigations.* New York: Routledge.
[204] Patton, M. Q., (2002). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
[205] Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic Interactionism*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
[206] Patton, (2002). p.548

(4) what is the "right" conclusion to draw."[207] At times, my assumptions were changing so much that I felt anything I wrote might be viewed as inadequate, especially if read by some unknown reader who I assumed would want definitive, objective conclusions. Considering research from a social constructionist stance as inquiry allowed me to be more present and curious about the process in which I was engaged. Over time, I became less concerned with this outside standard of "real" research as something having to be objective and became drawn into the observations and interactions in which I was engaged. When going back and forth over the audio tapes, notes, and written communications gained from the workshops, conference, interviews or think tank I began to see some commonalities in what was being expressed as well as in what was not being expressed. I began to observe and draw some conclusions regarding themes. These were drawn from both reflections on the theoretical material regarding how meaning is constructed and how paradigms are defined, and from circumstances of specific situations where concepts were being applied. I identify and elaborate on these themes in my upcoming observations and analysis section presented in each of the four areas of inquiry. I also share direct quotes from participants in my various areas of inquiry, albeit ones that I have chosen based on what I have deemed to be useful, and thus allow readers to place their own meaning and significance into this dissertation.

According to Moustakis[208] this journey can also be termed as an heuristic inquiry as it reflects my personal insights, lived experiences and growing self-awareness. My observations from my studies and interviews were by no means distant and objective but instead reflected my own passionate quest for ways that might support positive change in the world.

Another form of research I have drawn on is auto ethnographical reflections taken from my journal. The field called commons, and those in the field, as well as myself, are rapidly forming, critiquing and changing theories, perspectives, questions and practises as well as collegial groupings, even as I write. I therefore found using personal reflections an effective means of capturing the dynamic, unforeseen and transformational nature I was (and still am) experiencing. Some of this is a reporting of my inner dialogue as I sat in front of my computer or mused while doing dishes, but felt no means individualistic in context since it held the quality of "relational being" involving multiple dialogues with others' ideas and experiences. It is important to note here that an understanding that emerged for me during the process of doing this research is that commons represents social construction in action. Knowledge is a renewable common resource and arises through processes of social interaction. Deepening my recognition of this allowed me to see my research as both about the commons, as well as the experience of creating a commons between and amongst those with whom I was currently engaging, and amongst those potentially unknown future individuals or groups.

FOUR AREAS OF INQUIRY INTO COMMONS PARADIGM DEVELOPMENT

In the following section, I will briefly describe what happened in each of the four areas immediately followed by my observations and analysis of each. I lay these studies out in a progression based on the degree of engagement with commons concepts they reflect: (1). introductory workshops, (2) a

[207] McNamee, S. (2010). Research as social construction: Transformative inquiry (Pesquisa como construção social: investigação transformativa). *Saúde & Transformação Social/Health & Social Change*, *1*(1), 09-19. n.p.

[208] Moustakas, C. (1990). Heuristic research: Design, methodology and applications. Newbury Park, CA. Sage Publications.

conference of those wanting to consider the Great Lakes as a Commons, (3) interviews involving deeper inquiry into individuals' appraisals of commons concepts, (4) a small think tank with those very familiar with the concepts and attempting to apply them to global issues. To indicate the separation of the areas of inquiry I use a line of asterisks.

The Online and Face-to-face Introductory Workshops

Description

I will describe diverse introductory workshops in which commons concepts were introduced: a set of online workshops, and two different sets of in-person workshops. All of the workshops touched on some of the key concepts described in Chapter 3. The online workshops, sponsored by Commons Learning Alliance, were advertised through diverse networks that the organizers had developed. The workshop included pre-assigned weekly reading materials, key discussion questions, online forums, and 90 minute facilitated phone calls every week over a four-week period. These free courses occurred in 2010 and 2011. They were very popular, with up to 90 participants registered from all continents of the world. However, only 10 -20 participants were regular contributors. I was a participant in the first workshop and then co-facilitated the last two. One set of in-person workshops included three 90 minute events that I co-designed and presented with colleagues in Cancun, Mexico to both youth and adult NGO groups. These groups were gathered in conjunction with the UN Conference on Climate Change in November 2010. Also in 2011, I delivered a four-week, face-to-face workshop at a local community college using power point materials, lectures, resource readings, and discussion. With permission, I taped the final feedback session so as to listen to it in more depth later. All the workshop participants were diverse in age, ranging from late 20s to over 70. Ethnicity and educational background of participants were usually unknown in the online courses, and diverse in the in-person groups, especially those held in the international setting of Cancun. In Cancun, participants were more heavily weighted towards those with post secondary education.

All of the workshops involved much preparation by facilitators**.** Discussion time was required to consider what outcomes we wanted from the course, and chose the best words to accurately describe the proposed experience and attract people to attend. Time was also needed in order to decide which reading and presentation materials to use and how to facilitate interactions to maximize participation and engagement with concepts. A short time was set up for evaluations and reflections after the course was finished.

Observation and Analysis of Themes in These Workshops

Considering the differences in venues and length, there were many similar themes in these workshops. In general, most people who were attracted to these various kinds of introductory workshops, whether young or old, online or in person, were already concerned about the well-being of the planet and were cognizant regarding our critical situation. There were differences however in how articulate people were about how society had, over time, co-constructed the current situation. From the reading materials and from people's sharing their responses and experiences, some further understanding was gained regarding this historical development. Although the term modernism was not specifically used, there was recognition that if change was desired, a more systemic approach involving conscious relationships amongst humans and with nature was needed. This was seen as different from how we habitually engaged in our economic and governance practices The importance of this relational context was

expressed in this statement by one participant, "the health/wealth of a commons inheres in the relationships between its participants (and not only the human participants)." Some people fell into using language of victimization, indicating it was "those out there" who were harming nature and people. Several indicated that their attraction to commons was based on it holding a positive vision for a collective way forward. As one participant said, the commons approach was "not just creating more 'negative intelligence' learned from negative feedback from disasters (e.g. oil spill)." For some, after reading the course materials, or possibly from other experiences outside of the course, there was strong attraction to commons as creating an almost magical awakening to a new consciousness as suggested by this set of posts.

> New narrative as a fairy-tale with a new twist to awakening of Sleeping Beauty. ….Kiss that awakens is 'spontaneous love-gesture in response to what is beautiful – human, connected, passionate and ordinary. Feel in ourselves both Sleeping Beauty and Prince present – we have the capacity to awaken ourselves and each other.[209]

For some, the incentive was quite pragmatic and personal: reduce our carbon footprint, create farmers' markets and co-ops, eliminate debt, compost and stop drinking bottled water. Some spoke more organizationally in terms of public policy, legal and economic systems.

Most participants had a sense of the systemic nature of issues as cutting across disciplines of social justice, ecology, and economy. All were looking for a different way of living and relating and found the language of commons appealing. There seemed to be an immediate recognition of, and attraction to, commons concepts as integrating wholeness, practicality, and inspiration. This shared attraction did not mean that all forum or phone call exchanges flowed easily. Some forum exchanges were especially difficult and mirrored the microcosm of communication challenges present in the macro situation of many public interactions in society. One example was the domination of the online forum both in terms of number and length of posts and in terms of argumentative stances towards other participants. After encountering such incidents, the facilitators reflected in the forum how our abilities to interact right here, right now as participants of this workshop were also part of the commons approach we were saying we wished to develop. As a result, there was much discussion about our particular interactions as being relevant to the challenges and hopes regarding the social justice and environmental issues participants wished to address. Finding ways to address both the process of our interactions, while sharing commons concepts and weaving them together, was a challenge to do well in the short time we had together. This challenge did however expose the necessity for and complexity of this integrated learning.

Considering how commons principles could be applied to specific local or global issues revealed itself as being more challenging than was the engagement with the vision of a new commons paradigm. This was understood in part as resulting from the shortness of the courses, the newness and complexity of the material and the breadth of participants' interest and commitment. In addition, the online, phone, or in-person discussions were not structured to support in-depth inquiry into assumptions or deliberation and agreements regarding taking any of the collective actions envisioned in the commons approaches. What people conceived of as follow-up steps to apply the concepts were, of course, quite different due to their various life circumstances. Without a shared real issue to work on, much of the discussions

[209] Taken from a summary of online commons course posts gathered by Robin Temple. June 2010

were at an ideological level. Little contact occurred with participants after the workshops and I do not know whether the concepts were integrated or applied.

The facilitators' understandings of commons concepts certainly deepened from this co-construction of meaning through shared deliberation and decision-making. We were very involved in collaborative learning stimulated by our commitment to building trust as well as our capacities as facilitators to carry the projects together. Some differences arose in our choice of terms to use or readings to present which we resolved through further emails or discussions. I assume that if we were to work together on longer events, we would need more time for negotiations of meaning and agreements. This experience has created the basis for ongoing collegial relationships.

As workshop designers and facilitators, we regularly addressed the question of how to best present the material and engage people so that it was useful and not too theoretical; i.e. how to meet both the breadth of inclusion and yet stimulate a depth of complex thinking.

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Great Lakes Commons Conference

Description

The second aspect of this inquiry, the conference, provided a valuable venue in which to observe how a broad group of concerned people might apply commons concepts in order to care for a specific resource upon which their lives depended. The study offers insights into the enormous task of co-constructing understanding and action regarding the need for, as well as practices of, co-managing and protecting a very large and very damaged commons resource. The gathering was precedent-setting in North America in terms of (1) a focus on planning a new form of governance of such a large common resource (involving two countries, eight states, two provinces, about nine large cities, over 40 First Nations tribes and approximately 34 million people), (2) an initiation from the grassroots instead of the usual government organized meetings, and (3) a stepping beyond the dominant culture's voice and supporting a strong First Nations leadership role. Scholars and practitioners may find observations from this project transferable to other situations.

The Great Lakes, located in the eastern part of Canada and the US, are the largest surface freshwater system on the Earth. Their water level is dropping dramatically. The quality of the water is threatened due to hydro-fracking, radioactive waste shipping, and copper-sulfide mining as well as from agricultural and municipal waste.

After several months of prior discussion and consultation with organizers, I attended this conference on the Great Lakes Commons in October of 2012 held at Notre Dame University in Indiana.[210] Based on long-term concerns for the health of the Great Lakes bioregion and frustration over methods to respond to those concerns, 70 people were invited to explore the concepts of the commons in relation to taking actions. In the invitation [See Appendix 1], the commons was proposed as a offering a "whole systems solution," meaning it would need to address the multiple interconnected problems concerning the Great Lakes. The invitation described this commons approach as offering both a world-view as well

[210] See this announcement of the conference. http://onthecommons.org/work/great-lakes-commons-gathering

as practical approaches for establishing a different set of operating assumptions about the value and care of the Lakes than those currently practised. The invitation came from a collaboration of several organizations: The Mendoza College of Business at the University of Notre Dame, Vermont Law School's Water and Justice Program, On the Commons (a commons based strategy centre doing both online and in person organizing to increase the visibility and capacities in the commons movement,) and the Blue Mountain Center (a learning centre for writers, artists, and activists set in the heart of Adirondacks.) The invitees ranged from scholars, economists, indigenous leaders, attorneys, environmentalists, social justice activists, engineers, and artists mostly from the Lakes bioregion. Staff from On the Commons played a catalytic role in organizing, facilitating, and finding funding to make this event happen with the assumption that a new leadership team would take over the long term organizing. The two-day event started at 3 pm on Sunday and ended at 3 pm on Tuesday and included shared meals and working sessions in the day and evening. Over the two days, the conference included information on the problematic condition of the lakes, overviews of commons approaches as well as indigenous approaches, small break out discussion groups, plenaries, and artistic sharing. Consecutive workshops were offered on Public Trusts and Legal Frameworks such as Treaty Rights, Sovereignty and Environmental Justice. There were workshops on both Indigenous Governance Models as well as Commons-Based Governance Models. There were workshops on Community Organizing and Advocacy as well as workshops on Academic Programming, Teaching and Research. The gathering opened and closed with a First Nations water ritual. People had been requested to bring water from where they lived and introduce themselves while pouring their water into a shared container. The water was blessed by an elder and at the close of the gathering each person was invited to take some water from the shared container back home with them.

The organizers were influenced by the material described in Chapter 3 that Ostrom[211] and Quilligan[212] had developed regarding how to care for commons resources. As a result, a stated goal of the conference was to co-create a Great Lakes charter or set of principles, rights, norms, rules, and practices that would define the communities' relationships to and governance of the Lakes commons. Participants were invited to begin the process of defining a guiding vision and set of principles to re-orient Great Lakes practices of governance. At one of the consecutive workshops by commons specialists, people were engaged in a discussion of what some basic concepts of these practices might entail specifically regarding social charters and trusts. However, due to time constraints and the complexity of the endeavor, little headway about content and processes was made during the conference. After the conference, a committee of eight to twelve people[213] was gathered to assist in the development of a charter. This committee meets through teleconference for one hour every three to four weeks. Having a goal of developing a usable charter in three years was suggested. It is not clear, at time of this writing, how this charter will be created so as to represent the diversity of perspectives of 34 million people. It is evolving as we talk together. To help us develop capacities and possibilities, the meetings are designed to include both learning and planning components. Other committees are also meeting regularly to continue to explore intervention through public trust law, public engagement through art, and social charter development. Also a website on the Great Lakes Commons[214] has been created so that updates can be widely shared.

[211] Ostrom, (1996)
[212] Quilligan, (2010)
[213] I am named as a resource person to this committee since I do not live in the Great Lakes area
[214] See http://www.greatlakescommons.org

Observations and Analysis

The following observations and analysis reflect only my perspectives. These are presented without the benefits of interactions and negotiations of understanding with others involved in the conference. I feel discomfort with this incompleteness as it cuts across the social constructionist practices of collaborative knowledge formation. This sense of incompleteness is experienced in this area of my inquiry more so than the other areas, partially due to its complex and ongoing nature, and due to less opportunity for deeper discussion with participants My preference would be to share what I have gleaned from the conference with several participants and organizers and over time collectively construct the variety of meanings it holds for us. I see this as a next phase of my inquiry.

Many of the observations of the conference overlap in an organic manner as reflective of the conference itself. However, to assist the reader in finding his/her way through this lengthy analysis, I will set some headings for themes. My observations are grouped under headings in relation to: preparation (the pre-conference planning), the scope (the breadth and complexity of the agenda) , uniqueness (how the conference differed from conventional conferences), framing (how the organizers influenced the focus of the conference through selected actions), legitimacy(challenges of shared acceptance of the commons approach across the Great Lakes region), defining who, what, and where (the implications of who gets to decide about what resources and in what area), participatory practices (assumptions and processes that impacted conference interaction) the complexities of economics (the degree to which this topic was engaged) , and addressing differences (what differences were noted and how these were responded to) . I will **bold** terms where a topic appears woven within another heading.

Preparation: Preparing the Ground for Shared Learning. The planning of this gathering showed the amount of thoughtful consideration and foresight that is required to engage a diverse cross section of people in a manner that supports an inclusive conversation. Preliminary workshops had been done in various communities to introduce concepts of commons so that these concepts became the attractor that people gathered around. Even with all of this preparation, changes were made during the conference as the organizers attempted to be responsive to what they were noticing in the event itself. Background information and articles were sent to participants prior to the gathering with the hope that this would help us find some common ground. Implications of this preparation will be named in the section on **framing**. An online forum was set up for prior discussion. However, as is often the case, until deeper engagement arouses motivation, not everyone had made reading the material a priority, and only a few participated in the online forum, consequently reducing our capacity to build shared understanding.

Scope: Navigating A Broad and Complex Agenda. The conference objectives were all encompassing. They included building strategies for a commons based approach to the Great Lakes that would engage people in actively caring for their resources as well as honouring First Nations wisdom and leadership. The conference planners attempted to respond to the need for both depth of understanding the layers of the issues relevant to addressing the Great Lakes issues as well as the breadth of including all 70 participants who attended. Having just one of these objectives would have been complex, but attending to all of them in two days was both challenging and necessary if the project was to develop systemic approaches to a complex issue. There can be a dilemma regarding addressing complex issues amongst diverse people. Where do you start? How do you not overwhelm everyone? How do you not just pay lip service to the issues? Dealing with this dilemma by focusing on one aspect seems very reductionist but focusing on them all is almost impossible. Possibly having participants in small groups name and map all the connected issues including their root causes and then

chose a few points where further engagement seemed a priority would have been a helpful exercise. These responses could have been later shared in a plenary. This exercise could have promoted shared inquiry and knowledge of the systemic nature of the issues as well as developed joint recognition as to why certain directions were seen by participants as priorities for action. It could have supported both small manageable groups forming relationships without splitting up the larger group. This exercise was described earlier in Chapter 2 in the Scale of Public Interaction as SPI 5 under the heading of Comprehensive Social Change.

Uniqueness: Not a "business as usual" conference. Participating in First Nations protocols right at the beginning and end of the gathering shook up the 'this is how things are done" frame of assumptions that habitually guide most Western conferences. These protocols included a tobacco offering and the water ritual. It also included an acknowledgement of the land and the traditional inhabitants of that land around Notre Dame where the conference was being held. These deviations from traditional conference practices created a contrast from conferences that take place in non-descript, anonymous hotels disconnected from the place, the people, the issues, or early history of their setting. The protocols also included a request that women wear long skirts during the rituals. This protocol was not explained or justified but just presented as another "this is how we think things are done" assumption. Given these deviations from the Western"norm," it is not surprising that the conventional term of "conference" was critiqued by several participants and the term "gathering" was presented as an alternative. There were times of shared singing and presentations of art. These variances on the familiar conference format, mingled with the usual presentations, power points and small break out groups gave a less formal, more relational perspective of the two day interactions.

Establishing Legitimacy. Frank Ettawegeshik, Executive Director, United Tribes of Michigan and Odawa Elder advocated taking initiative in claiming rights to ones' resources by stepping out of our assumptions of waiting for authorization from a central authority. "It is that simple," he said, "Until we act sovereign for our land and our resources, we can never be sovereign. No one will give us the permission until we make that decision for ourselves and believe it."[215] This raises a question of how legitimacy is granted, since claiming sovereignty of a large area such as the Great Lakes commons is not just a statement that can be made in isolation by an individual person or group, as it occurs within a context of many other issues and peoples viewpoints. The social charter process would need to address both this step towards acknowledgement of direct relationship amongst people and resources as well as the context in which it was being declared. Ettawegeshik also challenged the use of the word "sacred" as it was often applied to justify the care of certain lands. He stated that all life is "sacred." I had also observed this use of the term and was grateful that he spoke to this, as I felt the reflection might hold more legitimacy coming from a First Nations elder.

Framing the Great Lakes Issues. Whenever we enter a social change process, some prior framing will most likely occur that can impact the direction and scope of the shared activities. Frames represent beliefs, assumptions, and experiences gathered over time through many interactions. They may be constructed intentionally or not but involve language and actions that describe why a process is needed, who it is for, and who it may benefit. This is a very significant step in directing how those invited into a process may be influenced. If we are not cognizant of this influence, we may create limits to broader explorations. If we are cognizant of how frames are constructed, then we can realize that there is no one

[215] Outcomes from the Great Lakes Commons Gathering. School of Commons blog. Accessed January 16, 2013. http://www.schoolofcommoning.com/content/outcomes-great-lakes-commons-gathering

right or final way of framing. If the process is allowed to be fluid and ever changing, frames can adapt to new perspectives especially if these are regularly and openly invited. If approached responsibly, initiators, organizers and facilitators can provide a great service to a new group by framing some of the parameters ahead of time so that the participants have at least some focus with which to begin their conversation.

There can be a perceived tension between providing structure and supporting inclusiveness. Broad participation in all aspects of organizing is often held as an ideal. Yet, realistically, how can a new group coordinate decision-making before they develop some processes that build trust, thereby supporting collective inquiry and decision-making? As described in Chapter 3, Ostrom[216] stated that trust is a key component of a successful common pool resource regime. To build trust there must be social stability in the group (i.e., commoners must have a "shared past" and expect to "share a future").This sense of "being in relation" versus operating as if separate, self-contained, individuals reflects a constructionist stance that underlies much of the commons approaches. From this stance trust is seen as not a something that we give each other but an experience we mutually build or dissolve within the confluence or intermingling of an ever-changing ever-negotiated flow of relating.

The organizers of the Great Lakes conference approached this process of framing with much thought and **preparation**. Their definition of the problem, the proposal for a new approach, the definition of who the people were who should be involved, the resource, and the resource boundary, all determined the parameters within which the participants related. The organizers were transparent in publishing the parameters they had developed, based on months of consultation prior to the conference. They provided an orienting structure to support the conference to begin but also stepped back to encourage a participatory process that allowed a great deal of engagement and emergent leadership. The scaffolding they provided was adequate to support participants to engage in the short time we had together. The organizers' roles and starting assumptions appeared to have generally been awarded **legitimacy** by those attending, at least enough for energetic engagement to happen for the two days we were together.

Defining Who Gets to Decide About What Resources and Where. However, **framing** who was involved in the issues, what was the resource in question, and where the resource boundaries were drawn, in my mind, neglected some significant elements that would need to be attended to if solutions to the Great Lakes are to be comprehensive. This is not raised as a criticism as I believe only so much can be done in one gathering, and a great deal was indeed accomplished, especially considering the time and resources available. Newly forming groups need incubators where they can safely begin to share experiences and create understanding and identity together. However, the way in which this group interfaces with absent others who may have different viewpoints would need to be addressed at some point. Otherwise, us /them polarities could form and continue a duality that is at the root of the dysfunction of the current paradigm. When is incubation needed and when is it serving to build walls? Exploration of each of these **frames** (i.e., *the people*, *the resource* and *the boundaries*) are offered below to seed into the conversation some questions that still need to be considered.

The people who make up a commons are, as described in Chapter 3, those who need to be most involved in the care and long term management of a resource upon which their well-being is dependent. Those who attended the conference were, as described above, those who already recognized the threat to the Great Lakes and were attracted to the commons approach and to the organizers'

[216] Ostrom, E. (1990a)

proposal of a new action plan. This conference did not include those who may not yet have done any inquiry into the interconnected systemic issues concerning the Great Lakes or arrived at any conclusions as to why, or even if, such a massive change was needed. They did not include all of the stakeholders such as those who might rely on the activities that are considered by others as damaging to the Lakes. This might include those employed by the Nestles' water bottling plant, by large scale agricultural operations, fracking operations, or commercial fishing companies. In fact, some of these people might find the activities and assumptions of the conference did not hold **legitimacy** for them and were disparaging of their needs and fears. If this is the case, they could feel excluded from the language used and solutions proposed and thus block further planning. However, they are people whose well-being is also dependent on the Great Lakes and thus, they are people who need to be involved.

The tension between diverse needs and perspectives cannot be ignored. Including this broader group of Great Lakes residents is not about being polite or politically correct. Fundamental to achieving a whole systems response is the inclusion of those experiences, perspectives, and actions that make up the system and keep it going. It is also important for establishing **legitimacy** of new approaches and for moving beyond the polarities that have plagued other attempts at solutions for years. What has kept the many past efforts to resolve issues from working is usually, in part, due to the fact that very valid tensions amongst diverse needs have not been adequately explored and addressed and, therefore, no new meaning or practices have been created. Of course, for the Great Lakes, this would involve massive public engagement processes with adequate scaffolding to support the kind of co-learning and meaning making described as in Chapter 2 as comprehensive social change (SP1 5) within the Scale of Public Interaction. Comprehensive change is more likely to result when people collectively analyze issues, share their assumptions regarding causes and solutions, anticipate that others will have different perspectives, chose priorities of where to put their attention, and deliberate actions they wish to take. Questions that could be asked of the Great Lakes Commons participants to broaden the inquiry could be: Who else should be included in this conversation? Who else do these issues impact? Who else might be impacted if changes are made? Who else has the power to impact the direction we are taking? What responses might we anticipate from people who have different experiences? Does it matter to us how other people are impacted by our views and actions? What might happen if they are left out? How will we perceive and respond to these differences? How may others have arrived at different perspectives than we have? What are the implications if we take an approach of convincing others that the commons approach to the Great Lakes is the right one and others are wrong? Are we willing to commit to a much deeper inquiry to raise these questions amongst ourselves and with others who may hold different views? How will we do this?

The definition of *resources***,** as discussed in Chapter 3, is important regarding the practices of management, or enhancement. Although the conference used the term "Great Lakes Commons," the main common resource that was chosen as the focus of this conference was the natural physical resource of fresh water with the main issue being damage to that water ecosystem. It might better be referred to as the Great Lakes Fresh Water Commons. I raise this not to be exacting but because it has implications regarding the many other interacting resources associated with the Great Lakes such as fish, agricultural land, recreation, transportation, a sink for city sewage, a moderator of climate etc. – all issues that were not discussed in the conference. These other resources involve economic, political, social and cultural practices in which the Great Lakes communities are steeped. Changes in the commons practices surrounding one resource may affect other commons. Some questions that might broaden an inquiry towards a more systemic approach could be: What are all of the other resources we might think of and how might they be related to our relationship with and sense of problems about

water (i.e. mapping the interconnections)? How could the practices we are promoting regarding stewardship of water impact the use, protection and co-management of other resources? What tensions between diverse resource types and established practices can we anticipate and plan to engage? What processes and agreements need to be in place to support joint action? How can the capacities to take joint action themselves be considered a resource worth enhancing?

The *boundaries* of this Great Lakes Commons, for the sake of this gathering, were pre-defined as being the bioregion. A bioregions is defined by the watershed as well as other unique physical characteristics such as climate, landforms, soil, flora and fauna, instead of the typical political boundaries. Bioregional boundaries of the Great lakes cross the political boundaries defined by Canada and the US which then immediately **frame** the focus as beyond, but including, these habitual structures of national, political identities. Bioregional boundaries are one way of defining the boundaries of a commons that are concretely recognizable and therefore practical. Bioregional governance models may offer a less fragmented, more long-term means of ecosystem protection than more artificial national boundaries. Examples of this long-term management across boundaries can be found in the indigenous groups such as the Coast Salish Aboriginal Council[217] and Yukon River Intertribal Water Council.[218] Bioregions are not isolated units but sit in larger systems and are not separate from water tributaries, underground minerals beds, or overhead climate patterns. Defining boundaries bioregionally also raises unresolved tensions between what decisions can be made in the bioregion and what decisions are in the larger area. For example, can the Great Lakes Commons make decisions about the bioregion or do the decisions need to be made regarding the adjoining St Lawrence Seaway. This brings into question the tension between the comfort of organizing at a local grassroots level based on the rights of subsidiarity, and the challenge of whole-systems coordination to address interconnected regional or global commons. Attempts to respond solely to water issues of the Great Lakes may require broader negotiations of definitions. There are also other interacting regions and other constructed boundaries such as national, provincial/state, municipal, tribal or those set by historical use around which people have formed relationships. This concept of a bioregional boundary might cut across these. Many of our collective activities are also economically motivated, therefore establishing boundaries must address those situations where our economic activity moves across boundaries. A good question to ask is, what implications might there be regarding choosing this certain boundary and how might we address them? Can the stewardship of this fresh water source be considered as part of a network of stewardship approaches to global fresh water resources?

Participatory Practises. The intent of the conference organizers was to be participatory. To use Sheila McNamee's[219] phrase, it was about *what people do together* and how we might remain together and expand the conversation after the conference. Although there were a few presentations by individual "experts," it was understood that their information was presented in order to stimulate small and large group processes for the purpose of developing new understandings and potential action choices. The opening ritual or water ceremony was a participatory experience involving the introduction of

[217] Norman, E.S. 2012. Cultural politics and transboundary resource governance in the Salish sea. *Water Alternatives* 5(1): 138-160

[218] See Yukon River Intertribal Water Council at http://www.yritwc.org/

[219] McNamee, S. (in press). "Constructing Values and Beliefs: A Relational Approach to Sustainable Development." In J. Appleton (Ed.), *Including Attitudes and Values in Sustainability Development Research.* Cheltenham, England: Edward Elgar Publishing.

ourselves as people with different experiences and locations coming into the confluence of the collective. We each had been asked to bring water from our area. We introduced ourselves by saying what watershed we were from, and poured our contribution into a collective bowl that was then placed as a central feature in the room. Also, in the first phase of the conference, three hours (spanning two sessions) were spent making agreements to support group process. Considering the short time we had together, this amount of time seemed disproportionate, but certainly highlighted early on that attention to interactive processes was important at this gathering. It also might have indicated some fear amongst the organizers about the complexity of their topic and concern that polarization be avoided at the early stage of people coming together.

This attention to participation appears to be one of the assumptions of commons practices, especially in the initial stages. This need for inclusion may take the shape of a revolt against the overbearing and narrowly focused exclusive hierarchies of expertise frequently detected in the market state paradigm. This distrust of oppression by experts can trigger an opposite stance: an oppressive dogma of inclusiveness and relativity. One participant I interviewed after the conference said he experienced an anti-expert bias as he felt experts were being seen as perpetuating the oppressive dominant worldview. He was concerned that any group wanting to protect the Great Lakes needed to be more open to engage with and be informed by the most recent science about water quality. He did not know how to offer that perspective to this group without triggering immediate rejection. Another participant said that although he agreed that the inclusion promoted by group experiences of ritual and art was really important, he felt the amount of time these activities were given also impeded his need to get on with making some concrete decisions to move forward into action. There were obvious tensions, and even with such a commitment to participatory processes, this short conference could not explore them all.

The Complex Realm of Economics. It was interesting to note that some participants assumed commons referred to governance and connection to land and had not included in their definitions of commons the analysis of the impact of shared activity under the term economics or labour. In fact, the mention of economics, and concepts of banks (i.e., the construction of new local banks that would serve to protect the values, resources and lifestyles of the Great Lakes[220]) was contested by some native elders as separating them from lived ways of relating. This interaction is an example of how different assumptions emerge in interaction and can be associated with certain patterned activities. Some participants experience activities associated with economics as disenfranchising and therefore react to the use of the word. Others see that economics stands for aspects of human interactions that need to be reclaimed to reflect values of justice, sustainability and creativity. More time would have been required to inquire into and unpack those assumptions, to determine if old words could have a renewed understanding or if new words are in fact needed. Some said the term commons was questionable as the umbrella term to cover their understanding of the relationships to land and nature. In addition, it was suggested that if we use the phrase "water as sacred" instead of "water as a resource" this language would evoke in us a new sense of relationship. I wondered if every newly forming group needs to work through each term and find agreement. And if so, how could we ever create a shared global language by which to organize, as well as do so in the short time we have? Is shared understanding really a

[220] Quilligan, J. (2010). *Great Lakes Commons Trust and Community Bank: A Scenario.* Presented at the Great Lakes Commons Gathering. Notre Dame University. September 30 - October 2, 2012

requirement for being effective? Can knowing that there are differences be enough to support going on together with a commitment to engage with them as they arise? In what contexts? There instead was an apparent fear of raising **differences** that I will mention again in a later section.

Robert Lovelace (Ardoch Algonquin Elder and Adjunct Lecturer in Global Development Studies at Queens University, Kingston, Ontario) set up an exercise as one of the conference wrap up experiences. In this exercise, some people called out gifts they had to offer and others called out a need they had. For example, "I need a ride to the airport," "I need someone to return my rented car to the airport." Many mutually beneficial matches were made. This modeled and reinforced the basic relational exchange that used to be associated with the term economics. It seems important to remember this context of person-to-person sharing and valuing that underlies what we have eventually built as structures of economics in society. And also, it seems like wishful thinking to imply, in the context of climate change, that we can go back to those pre-globalization, pre-industrialization, face to face exchanges and just operate on local scales and avoid scaling up to address and transform the global exchanges and habits that are impacting our planetary well being. To leave out economics, or whatever language is used to describe these interactions, implies leaving out a lynchpin of the social meta-system in which we are intricately engaged. Can there be paradigm change in relationships surrounding the Great Lakes Water Commons if this vital means by which people interact, and indicate their values, is not surfaced, reconsidered and restructured to meet the current set of beliefs and circumstances?

In reflecting on those responses, I began to see that currencies are like words in a language that convey meaning and values. We may not like to talk about economics since much of what we value has been left out of that language. What people seem to be really searching for is a language that communicates their values. However, when economics is discussed as "a new global currency and monetary system based on sustainability," it can be out-right rejected as it may be assumed that only "they," the outside experts, could possibly have the power to create such a thing. The next assumption following that one could be that if it is just involves outside experts then domination would result. We need ways to see ourselves as something other than victims to our economics. Ways that allow us to negotiate meaning in every interaction we have where money is used. If we want to negotiate a different meaning, then a new currency might be helpful to reflect this new meaning just like finding different words helps us share different meanings. Locally created barter or currency systems serve as examples of people experimenting with different forms of economic exchanges. Scaling these interactions to global currency systems seems to be considered in the realm of fantastical and was not discussed by most at the conference. We have no positive, co-created models of such collective action at that scale to which we can point. I will speak more to this gap in the section on the Commons Paradigm Think Tank.

Addressing Differences. In some ways, the 70 carefully chosen participants at the gathering were the "choir" in that they had a shared concern for the Great Lakes, a high respect for participatory practices, and a motivation for creating change. However, even in this setting, just in one afternoon, I went from completely different experiences. One conversation suggested the whole stock market could crash and it would not matter as people could just carry on living simply, growing food and living off the land. Another conversation warned about the increasing vulnerability of any commons. This concern was based on reports about recent plans of international financiers that were planning increasing enclosures of more commons and using the potential risk of commons collapse as hedge fund derivatives. If within this group there was this yet unaddressed span of diverse worldviews, then there is an even broader span in the larger population that would need to be addressed if movement towards new ways of going on together were desired.

One interviewee spoke to difference in worldviews at the conference when describing her observations. She observed many native elders were saying that relationships to each other and the land were so simple that she wondered why the Westerners were making it so difficult by trying to deal with structures, theories, laws, policies, etc. The interviewee indicated she heard a high distrust of Western ways of organizing being voiced. She indicated however that she also heard some non-natives, indicating a need for a relational context but looked to new structures, laws, and policies to reflect those relationships. Her understanding about this difference was that society is "at different places of awareness ….not everyone, in fact the vast majority of us, are not going to get it through [just changing] consciousness, but we are at different places of awareness, need guidelines, rules and legalities, to help us live appropriately until we develop a larger cultural model to support us to connect."

It would be easy to frame some of these differences under labels of native vs. non-native perspectives. First nation's experience of thousands of years of managing local resources to support abundance according to the seventh generation principle and natural laws does not guarantee that some tribes will not engage in resource management that fits corporate industrialization. Meaning is not racially predetermined, but is dynamically, socially constructed and open for change within every exchange that occurs. Not all non-natives think alike or can be presumed to have the same life experiences, nor do all natives think alike or have the same experiences even though impacted by shared experiences of marginalization. At the beginning of the conference, a Commons approach and a First Nations approach were presented and seemed easily complementary regarding motivations for taking care of the Great Lakes. However, one approach refers to an identified *way of thinking* that could potentially include anyone who thought that way. The other could be seen as referring to an identified *group of people* that could only include those of that racial heritage. Can a racial identity define a way of thinking? Can an ideology really be meaningful to everyone regardless of their current situation? Either approach could potentially and inadvertently define meaning in a manner that could lead to ongoing separation and alienation, exactly the opposite to the deep hope for a better world that the Great Lakes Gathering espoused.

There was general agreement that the current paradigm of government and corporate management was resulting in exploitive actions to the people and ecology of the area. In fact, it was stated by many participants that the Great Lakes were so important that their care should not be left to the centralized authority of the government. There seemed to be a shared assumption that this situation could not be tolerated any further and large-scale action was needed. This was the basis for seeking new options for how a new paradigm might be spawned. However, there were vast differences in what these options might look like. For some, new options meant including all voices in the Great Lakes, yet for others this breadth of inclusion felt impossible. For some the new options needed to be based in spiritual ritual to support connections with the water. Others feared this would not be a direction with which the entire region could engage. For some it meant legally invoking the public trust doctrine, for others this was not a commons principle. For many it was about new forms of economics, while some felt **economics** should not be part of commons. In addition, for some it was about stepping into new frames of mind through art. All of these avocations were given equal space. The conference did not push us to agree on one right way to proceed and provided fertile ground for exchanging possibilities, a process that was necessary at this stage of hearing each other. However, these paths, and the theories of change they might represent, are quite different, and potentially divergent or contentious. More time would be needed to consider these. Going ahead without further inquiry into, and exploration of, these variations

means they may have been pushed down the road to surface elsewhere. Not responding to them keeps the discussion within a level of first order change (i.e., moving around current facts and actions with some reflection and adjustment), but not second order change or a total system transformation or paradigm change as was discussed in Chapter 2. This again is not a criticism but a reflection on potential challenges needing attention as well as a validation of both the challenges of this project and the immense steps that have already been taken.

As observed in the section on **economics,** it seemed there might have been a fear of raising differences of perspective amongst participants. Opportunities where inquiry into differences could have deepened the understanding were quickly passed over in order to move to the next part of the schedule. These loose threads do need to be noted and woven into ongoing inquiry so that they can be fuel for generating deeper understanding. In addition, this could provide a chance for participants to move beyond the assumption that differences pose a threat but instead through dialogic practices experience how difference can be the catalyst for transformational learning. Exploring questions about assumptions we hold and what experiences they are based on, if built into processes early on, can become part of the cultural norm of the group, creating a means to explore polarities before they harden into identities.

As McNamee stated "The responsivity of dialogue requires questioning one's own world view just enough to a allow space for the rationality of the other's view. The focus is on making space for multiple rationalities. In professional practice (i.e., in our work with families and communities, as well as in our educational practices), this means that our job is not to impose our "expert" understanding on the other but to create a space where multiple (and often diverse) understandings can co exist."[221]

Personal Reflection

For me the engagement with First Nations participants opened up a reflection that continued for several months after the gathering. It stimulated a deeper inquiry regarding my culture's ignorance of treaty rights and negotiations, both past and present. After the gathering, I looked back with a new examination at how I had grown up and gone to school with First Nations and Metis students yet knew little if anything about why they lived on "reserves" and why I lived on a "family farm." And what if anything they had to do with the arrowheads that were thousands of years old that we delighted in finding in our fields. And why no one spoke of how their lives came to be this way, and why being a curious child, I did not ask. Or if I did, how I learned not to keep asking. And why it would never have occurred to me to use the term "settler" to refer to myself. And how it was, and is, for the First Nations to bear our ignorance of their marginalization and injustice. And how apt the name "Idle No More" is for the current First Nations movement. My culture was so steeped into its privileged perceptions that there was no recognition of the presence of the original governments that pre dated Canadian governments. I also reflected on how, much later, I had initiated a bioregional education program through the Calgary Eco Centre of which I was a board member in the early 1990s. Bioregional mapping is more sophisticated now but this grassroots project seemed innovative. Based on the weather patterns of the Chinook winds that came down from the Rocky Mountains and the watershed of

[221] McNamee, S. (n.d.) Transforming conflict from right wrong to relational ethics. Accessed March 2013 at http://estudiosdefamilia.co/ucaldas/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Sheila-McNameeTransforming-Conflict-From-RightWrong-to-Relational-Ethics.pdf n.p.

the Bow River we roughly drew a map of the region and declared it the Bow Chinook Bioregion. We often introduced ourselves at events as living in that region instead of identifying ourselves with the social political region of city or province. We even named the local currency we assisted in developing as the Bow Chinook Dollar. However we did not even think to find out what the traditional First Nations boundaries or pre-settler names were for that region!

I now live with a sense of how I, unintentionally, was part of perpetuating a damaging cultural marginalization and how easily this can happen and is still happening. We can so readily, in hindsight, berate the ignorance that led to the Nazi persecution of Jews, or the exploitation of credit default risks that led to the 2008 financial crash, or the lack of response to climate change. But I humbly can apply these reflections to understand how easy it is to be so embedded in what has been articulated as the normal workings of society, to the point that it is hard to find a footing from which to step outside and inquire into this received reality and the identities that surround it. I am hyper-sensitive regarding my assumptions and language, but even so, I will likely still use terms or frames that are culturally biased as my perspective like everyone's are so culturally constructed.

These reflections have also led me to question how we can both adequately attend to the long term injuries of injustice between dominant and marginalized cultures, and, at the same time, move forward together quickly, to act together as global citizens responding to a global crisis. The crisis of a warming planet is a new situation that none of us can claim any prior expertise in handling, but we are all impacted by it, some sooner than others and are all needed to solve it.

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A Small Sample of Interviews

I conducted a small sampling of interviews in order to create the space to ask deeper questions about what sense people were making about commons concepts as well as what experiences they were having with the applicability of these concepts. Although it is not an in-depth study, it does offer further insights that I found very valuable and worth sharing.

Description

I interviewed nine people: five of these were participants of the Great Lakes Commons Gathering and four were individuals with considerable investment in the study and implementation of commons concepts in general. All of the interviewees lived in Canada or the United States. They ranged in age from early thirties to mid-seventies. All were university educated. I chose them for several reasons. One reason was quite pragmatic related to their accessibility. I had made enough contact with them in prior interactions that they would recognize who I was and why I would want to interview them. I also was looking for diversity of experiences and exposure to commons concepts. Their backgrounds included law, university professor, theology, student, business, writer, and nonprofit volunteer. All had some exposure to commons concepts, with some having been steeped in them for many years. Several other potential interviewees were approached but either did not respond to my request, or a mutually

convenient time could not be found. Due to non-response to my requests for an interview, I regret that I was not able to interview any of the First Nations participants. The interviews, conducted via phone or Skype, were taped based on prior consent and tended to be about one hour in length. A list of focus questions found in Appendix 2, were emailed to interviewees prior to the appointment and formed the basis for our semi-structured discussion. The questions were focused on people's experience of commons concepts and what if anything changed for them over time since first engaging with the concepts. The questions also involved interviewees' observations of the applicability of these concepts to situations where resources are threatened. I did not stick to the original question but followed my participants' leads with deepening inquiries. During the call, I often reflected back a perspective I was forming, based on certain sections of our conversation, to confirm accuracy or additions. At the end of each interview, I checked with the interviewees regarding their sense of how the material might be used to benefit them or others and what if any constraints they might wish to place on the use of the material or their specific name. My respect of their wishes has guided my use of quotes and observations.

I transcribed these interviews and went over the content looking for themes similar or different to those emerging from my consideration of commons concepts, workshops, the conference, and think tank discussions. Throughout, my curiosity was alert regarding what was perceived as happening under the banner of commons, what seemed to be the attractors and challenges, and how, if, and to whom this might be useful in constructing the conditions for a paradigm change. I have woven some of these interview responses into previous sections but I will draw on key reflections below.

Observation/Analysis

Most of those interviewed had been involved in social change work for years and moved towards commons as it felt like it, in my words, transcended and included their previous focus. Most were working without pay for their efforts. Some were able to add this to already busy schedules often connected to university teaching. Some were doing menial work to support their efforts in doing commons work and some had retirement savings. Their commitment to doing unpaid work indicates a high degree of passion, motivation and concern for the greater good. It also, I would say, indicates an issue of the sustainability and wider influence of their efforts due to limits of finances. These constraints impacts the time and support needed for developing presentations and networks that could be helpful. It reflects challenges that occur when innovative, out-of-the-box thinking is not yet perceived as socially beneficial, and not supported by funds that are primarily still only flowing amongst networks inside the box. I was very touched by the privilege of being able to talk more deeply with these people. So much was revealed in these interviews that I would not have been able to see by the more surface contact that I had had through the workshops or conference. This afforded me a glimpse of another deeper layer of how the meaning of commons was being constructed.

Several themes emerged including wholism, relational being, legitimacy, institutionalization, reverence, engagement processes, and the scale of changes. As these are so intertwined in the organic confluent nature of people's expression, I will not attempt to fragment them by creating separate, arbitrary headings but will **bold** the terms when they arise in the text to aid the reader.

Most people spoke of the commons as having a certain rightness or satisfying **wholeness** to it when they first were exposed to the concept. One person who was a very experienced community organizer said, "it was an immediate ah ha for me. It was like someone had offered me a word that I had ten words for before…. environmental, sustainable, justice, equity, international etc. …, and I could step

outside of so many different issue silos, and it offered a framework instead of just the separate individual issue. With a way of seeing both what was wrong and what else could be right, theory and practicality…, but then it took me a long time to really understand it." This sentiment relates to the concept of **relational being** in which there is a realization that we, and our futures, are intricately woven together.[222] Several spoke of how they felt the broad concept of commons could be usefully inserted in university courses on ecology or law, or into city council business, or community gardening. It was expressed that this would allow people to see a context for whatever their specific "good works" were about and how they combine to contribute to a larger whole. "….like if people get together to start a garden or clean up the river or protest the tar sands. They are expressing their humanity and commons becomes a way of naming all of that."

Most people I interviewed could readily perceive these kinds of interconnected local systems linkages, and a few said they should be coordinated globally so that we had a **wholistic** approach to global issues. When questioned as to what that might look like or how that level of coordinated action might come about, there was little sense of how it could happen. Most people easily referred to how commons could be beneficial at the local level and a few struggled with the question of how it ever could be **scaled** up to address global issues such as climate change. It felt that when considering this question, people were looking into a long, dimly lit, gray tunnel where their vision could not quite penetrate. I did not observe despair from this lack of clarity but just that new meaning had not been created to light a future path together.

A few spoke of the incredible growth they felt in being able to work with others who were gathering around the commons framework. "I signed on and was on the ride because it was good people, intelligent people, an opportunity to learn….cutting edge, smart brains involved." Another person said, "Anytime I mire myself into mainstream political dialogue I feel depressed, but I have never felt more enlivened and not depressed than when I am engaged with people in the commons. It does seem that there are many, many courageous and resourceful people who are doing important things, who are not recognized, validated or connected adequately…..that is the source of frustration, and they are also a source of great energy." There seemed to be an energy, hopefulness and **legitimacy** formed from the experience of **relational being** This grounding in meaningful **engagement** seems to provide a different way to approach that long dimly lit tunnel into the future I mentioned above. This indicates the importance of creating generative forums when discussing some of the challenging issues before us and tapping into that abundant and renewable commons resource of our own human creativity mentioned in Chapter 1.

This relational nature of commons was emphasized by one person who said, "initially I thought the commons was about stuff….but over time now I see it is a human community of relationships with one another and the resources we share, and what is the nature of relationships and capacities that would make that possible, necessary…" Another also emphasized the need for **good processes** to bring out that commons resource: "and we need to bring together people who can dialogue and people who understand what that is, not just 'I give my idea and you get your idea'…through conversation we both are changed, and for me that's what this is about…..these things are hard to talk about and people concerned about conflict, might not agree with you, and we have got to the point where instead of talking something through and struggling with it to come to a better place, it's easier to just ignore, or

[222] Gergen, (2009)

people can say I don't have time to talk about it. We have made ourselves so busy with all the things we say we need to do every day…"

A few spoke about their need to perceive the commons as holding some **legitimacy** and not just being an ideology or a bandwagon. One person said, "I was an activist caught up in the sixties, there was a lot of pie in the sky stuff, radical stuff, ultimately I rejected as I got older…… thought we could all just go to a commune and smoke pot but that's just not the way the world works. So initially commons, this sounded like another crazy idea, but then to learn that no, there are dozens of societies self organized around these lines….systems for resource management that were outside of the private property market basis, so then it became legitimate to me." For several this sense of legitimacy came from initially reading Ostrom's work, followed up by many other writers they considered to be offering well thought out, well researched material .

Some spoke of how, when they first engaged with the commons concepts, there was a sort of bandwagon euphoria associated with the ideas. One spoke even of how there was a sense of "going out and selling it, to rally people." But once he started doing more critical thinking about what was involved in the dynamics of analyzing and changing our current systems, he was both impressed and also realized that more than marketing was involved. There is an inkling here again of **relational being** in that there is a recognition that it is not about "us" having the knowledge and expertise to make it work right and then needing to get "them" on board. Seeing that knowledge and motivation are achievements constantly negotiated and co-created amongst us, opens up new possibility for interactions.

Some interviewees indicated the need for an organic engagement from the grassroots and others added that there had to be **institutionalization** such as structured learning situations, public education, legal jurisdiction, policy changes, and media involvement. This would involve developing frameworks for transparency, inclusiveness, and fairness, plus addressing questions of what is **legitimate** power, how is it held accountable, what are the structures involved. Some felt that going through the current systems of government to demand policy change was the only option for change, and others felt that this assumption was part of the problem, i.e., that the current system was co-opted and new governance systems were required. One cautioned against having institutions jump too far ahead of the on-the-ground developments at the grassroots. This raised the question of where the locus of **legitimacy** was assumed to lie. If we see that institutions are also socially constructed realities, this again opens up more possibilities for how to perceive that overwhelming dimly lit tunnel. Institutions are not atomistically fixed, but are reflective of negotiations of meaning that have happened in different contexts over time. Institutions also could embody a relational trustable conception of governance and economics.

Some spoke of this relational aspect of commons in terms of **reverence**. This was named as an importance of feeling the energy of a prior unity (prior to the dogmatic structures that now separate us), as well as an importance of meeting in nature and bringing the Lakes into our conversation. For others, this approach felt like it held a sort of romanticism, took up time and was contrary to the work on policy change at an **institutional level** that they felt was a priority. This was the biggest point of possible contention I noted in my interviews. One possibly interpretation of this difference again relates to an atomistic assumption of institutions needing a certain kind of force from "us" to change "them". Possibly, for some, it reflected that the rituals at the Great Lakes gathering were not co-developed and did not hold meaning or relevance for everyone. However, I did not observe a sense that this difference

meant people felt they could not go on together. There did not seem to be a sense of defensiveness or competition. This indicated that the there was an interest to continue to work together.

In terms of **the scale of change** covered by the commons paradigm, some easily moved into embracing global economic change and others found this scale daunting**.** One person said, "I get the monetary system as being so foundational and that was like a light bulb going on for me. ….we wouldn't need commons concepts at all if we're already operating sustainably.…obviously we need to, for planetary survival, treat commons differently, but [caring for the] commons is the means to an end, not the end itself." Several interviewees indicated they knew economics was important for developing a new approach to address our current situation but did not know enough about how to engage with the world of economics to comment. One person said it was too big of a jump to go from water ceremonies and reverence to discussions of banks and currencies and did not know how to integrate this. One person speculated about needing something almost like the Big Bang that could change everything all at once. Therefore, instead of having to adapt over the next years to each dysfunctional result of our current paradigm (such as more storms or financial crisis), we would just respond to totally new conditions created from a totally new structure based on a premises of sustainability. These multiple scales and layers of complexity are a challenge for commons engagement. The **wholism** of commons as previously mentioned is enticing but is a challenge to discuss especially when our minds are used to relating to categories and static separate functions. However, considering the challenges faced in working with this fluid concept of commons, I was amazed at how eloquent and authentically passionate the interviewees were about what commons meant to them. There is plenty of room for criticism or disillusionment when considering a proposal with such a large vision as commons presents. Instead, I found people *were* the proposal. By this, I mean they did not at all seem to think it was something that had been given to them but something they were vitally part of trying to understand, create, and apply in very different ways. This reflects the philosophical stance of social construction mentioned in Chapter 2 that suggests no prior singular absolute truths exist for individuals to unearth or take off a shelf to gain knowledge. This knowledge was dynamically emerging through interactions. \

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Commons Paradigm Think Tank

I will now discuss another experience I have been part of called the Commons Paradigm Think Tank to help offer more understanding of how the commons paradigm is being developed. This brief study offers a glimpse into the thinking that can occur amongst those who have the time, space, shared understanding and capacities to allow their thinking to flow together. This area of my inquiry is challenging to share coherently as it is like dropping midway into some other groups brainstorm and trying to have it make sense.

Description

Three people, including myself, have been meeting in various contexts related to commons for several years. In September 2011 we decided to more formally claim what we were doing as significant by giving ourselves a name: Commons Paradigm Think Tank. Eventually, we defined a mission to "engage creative minds for thinking through the steps, processes, questions, theory, and education

needed for transitioning to an operationalized commons-based paradigm that sustains life processes on earth."[223] Overarching questions that drive our think tank process include:

-How can a commons paradigm be most effectively articulated and thus communicated?

-How does this paradigmatic response to our current local and global crises become operationalized?

- How can the structures, resources, and capacities to do this be developed, and in a short time, given the urgency of today's crises?

We have met mainly online for two to three hours in two-week intervals, as well as for one three day face to face meeting in Philadelphia. We co-generated much inspiring learning and new thinking during this time. One challenge we faced was to find an online platform that really supports collaborative inquiry and co-creation of writing and graphics in real time. However, we did mange to generate about 60 pages through google doc. We have co-written one document in response to a paper entitled, "Economics, Finance, Governance, and Ethics for the Anthropocene" presented by the Capital Institute that had similar motivations to ours.[224] We all have great dedication to this process and would meet more often if time and financial issues were not limiting us. However, we are working without any funding and off the sides of already busy desks. Our meetings start with a check in and so our connections weave the personal contexts of our lives, such as reports on family visits, sick cats, work deadlines, and medical bills, with this larger work in the world.

Observation and Analysis

In general, this group started from a similar framework. We shared a deep understanding of the global crisis we were in, as well as having an understanding of the commons concepts that were being presented as a response to this crisis. Our focus was to think through the sequence of how this paradigm could actually be implemented beyond the conceptualizations that were being presented. We found, at times, that we were on the same page in our thinking. Our articulations were so fast that we could not keep up in note taking. At other times, we were dumbstruck at realizing we had big differences in assumptions and we needed to slow down to unpack these. However, from this inquiry, and from this pushing and pulling on our frames of reference we were operating from, even more productive thinking was created. We audio taped most of our meetings although that left us with the time consuming task of transcribing later. We realized that this kind of co-generative thinking and inquiry in real time was so necessary for constructing new understandings and yet very rare to find, especially regarding complex issues. It both required us to be meta systemic in our thinking and also to de-center, i.e., to let go of previous assumptions and stop protecting or clinging to our individual thoughts. We could stop thinking about what we needed but onto what the issues needed. Our interactions did create some snorts and ruffled feather at times and once in awhile one of us was a bit "off" due to tiredness or technical difficulties.[225] At these times, our sessions did not yield as much, although at other times there was an electric quality to the capacity to build on each other's thoughts. Together we were creating more than we could possibly do as individuals.

[223] For information see http://www.commonsparadigm.org/

[224] See http://www.capitalinstitute.org/capital-lab/3me

[225] At one point the real world issues of climate change interrupted our meeting since one person was forced to leave the east coast and head outside of the path of Hurricane Sandy and was not able to find a stable network connection for our appointed call.

We had two important parameters influencing our considerations: (1) the short window of time to find means of addressing the destructive warming of the planet and (2) the complex systemic issues to be addressed with complex systemic responses.

At one point we used the Great Lakes Commons initiative as a case study for helping us spot what issues may need to be addressed regarding operationalizing a global commons paradigm. The fresh water in the Great Lakes was one area of commons in which actions were being contemplated for the care of fresh water. We wondered how those commons activities could relate to other commons, especially at a global level. The challenges of how multiple, separate commons (physical, social, or digital), situated at different scales of local to global, could be coordinated from something other than a centralized bureaucracy (as discussed in Chapter 3) was mind boggling! The commons approach seemed to offer means of connecting human activity to the sustainability of the local ecosystems such as forests or rivers upon which the people were dependent in ways that could address the disconnections that have occurred over generations. However, we felt it was paramount to engage in detailed thinking that might reveal the linkages and details that would be required to connect human activities to the integrated planetary systems on which our collective lives depend. At a local level, feedback loops of information about the well-being of the commons were vital to making decisions for the management and enhancement of a shared resource. How could this work at a global level? We considered methods of sharing feedback loops regarding sustainable activities that would let global societies make decisions about which activities to increase, and which to decrease. For example, how do we decide globally to increase the use of wind or solar energy and decrease the use of oil or coal? How does this become the legitimate way forward? Taking the conversation to this global level seemed necessary to envision the theory of commons paradigm as something that was actually more than a pipe dream.

As there are so many possible commons to be considered, we decided we needed to place our priority on the most threatened global commons: atmosphere, oceans, fresh waters, arable land, forests, air, internet, space, and human capacities. We tried to plot where the best points might be for citizens' engagement in meaning making and action about the health of their commons. As described in Chapter 3, responsibility for taking care of a common resource should lie among those most reliant on that resource. But how are these areas defined? As fresh water exists at various inter-connected places from local tributaries to larger bioregions such as the Great Lakes, who should be making decisions about which area? Who are defined as the users and caretakers of larger commons such as the oceans? Should they be considered at a continental level or a global level? We attempted to make a table so that an overall global map of the scales of commons could be created.

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Personal Reflection

At this point, the reader might be feeling this is preposterous hubris, which I, of course, have thought and still do think many times over. Not only are the thoughts extravagant in scope but they have little cultural legitimacy as they are about getting outside of the box, the very box that customarily grants legitimacy. I have struggled with this sense of legitimacy and the fear of being dismissed. In certain circumstances, I tend to share little about what I am doing as it sounds so preposterous and tends to make eyes glaze over and the conversation end. When working independently of systems such as universities or government departments, how does innovative exploration gain legitimacy and value? Although universities have been traditionally considered incubators of necessary new thought, they have become increasingly funded by conservative corporations and attended by debt ridden students

trying to jump through academic hoops as quickly as possible so that they can get a job to pay off debts. Writing and publishing peer-reviewed articles are ways for independent scholars to engage and gain credibility but this is a slow and largely one-way means of conversation that still reifies the individual thinker. Often professional networks gather to meet both the need of shared learning as well as the need of establishing legitimacy of their work.

I often wonder why I have come to be so committed to exploring such seemingly extravagant thoughts regarding changing the world? I really don't know, but in many ways I feel it is absolutely necessary to do, and I wonder why many people are not compulsively drawn to this too. In the midst of facing such global challenges, I feel incredibly grateful to have the opportunity to be so actively engaged in what to me feels like the most useful contribution I know how to make, and to find at least some others with whom I can lear, inquire, and co-create.

After several months of work, we abandoned further efforts on this line of thought. It was a useful and necessary road to look down and gave us a great deal of shared learning. But, in consideration of our parameters, and especially regarding the short window of time for putting this kind of interconnected commons structure in place, we felt it would take too long. We considered 1) the steep learning curve this entailed, 2) the amount of citizen engagement it would require, and 3) the availability of adequate scaffolding for that engagement, and realized it was not feasible to assume this process could be up and running within the constraints presented by a looming climate and financial crisis. Based on the living laboratory that the Great Lakes Commons process offered, as well as years of experience in public issues work, we were not seeing evidence of how citizen engagement could scale up, especially to a globally coordinated process, without something more in place.

After considering how overwhelmed we were feeling while sitting in front of the large global map we had just created, one person suggested this was an indication that we needed to apply Occam's razor to our framing. That principle advocates not using a complex approach when a simper approach could work more adequately. According to systems theory, as described by Donella Meadows,[226] there are leverage points in which a small shift in one aspect of the system can effect everything in the system. What we deemed was essential was to have our human activities anchored to planetary well-being. Simply put, if we understand that what we are doing is harmful to us, we are much less likely to do it. If we understand that what we are doing is beneficial, we will do more of it. How could we develop this shared agreement of which activities to stop or what activities to do more of, at a global level? We jumped forward in our thinking, envisioning what it would look like to be already operating sustainably within the constraints of the planetary system. This movement into considering a shared positive future, compared to digging down into past causes of the problem - as described in Appreciative Inquiry[227] - changes the focus and opens space for co-creativity to occur. We saw that a significant leverage point for that picture of the future was that people's daily joint activities would reflect an understanding of the need to take care of the sustainability of their commons at a global level. We envisioned that having a new global currency in place could provide the concrete and daily feedback loops regarding planetary well-being based on sustainable values discussed earlier. For example, if common resources such as forest and water were kept healthy by the local users, this would add value to both the local

[226]. Meadows, D. (2008) *Thinking in systems - A primer* .London: Earthscan Publications

[227] Cooperrider, D.L. & Whitney, D (2001) A positive revolution in change. In Cooperrider, D. L. Sorenson, P., Whitney, D. & Yeager, T. (eds.) Appreciative Inquiry: An Emerging Direction for Organization Development (9-29). Champaign, IL: Stipes

commons as well as the global commons. With the kinds of sustainability indicator measurements available, this value could be tabulated by an indexing system. Reports on whether the index was going up or down could be shared much as we share the stock market exchange information. However, reporting based on the sustainability index would be reflecting completely different values. Instead of being indexed to the value of gold or the US dollar, a currency could be indexed to the increase or decrease of sustainability. People could be reinforced for taking care of the sustainability of their commons! The currency could act as a means of recognizing the value of human activity in terms of increasing sustainability instead of commodifying this relationship.

In creating this big picture of possibilities, we, of course, faced many questions. What would it look like to switch to using a global currency based on sustainability? What would need to be in place for that to be operational in a few years? Where would the legitimacy come from to support such a change? From this vantage point, we could back cast to explore what activities would be required to build towards it.[228] As one member described, it was as if our thinking (and the commons movement) had built the bridge part way across the river but then needed to jump across the river and build the pylon on the other side that could support the structure to be completed. We seemed to be motivated by the same intention articulated by Buckminster Fuller, "to make the world work, for 100% of humanity, in the shortest possible time, through spontaneous cooperation, without ecological offense or the disadvantage of anyone."[229] We also understood that the "100%" of humanity had diverse life conditions and would not likely move as one.

For this bridge to be sound and trustworthy for people to cross, we know that a new currency would need to be valid, efficient, equitable, and recognizable by diverse people as meeting their diverse needs. Many generative think tanks and public processes would be needed in order for a transition phase to be created and tested. For example, I have come upon Belgian economist Bernard Lietears's[230] conception of a possible world currency called Terra (The Trade Reference Currency, TRC) based on a basket of several significant tradable resources. He sees this being adopted as a complementary currency, not attempting to replace the current currency standards, since he perceives that as too big a jump. This suggestion poses many questions to the logics and scenarios we were forming and therefore provides excellent material for joint inquiry.

We wished to engage in such joint inquiry. We had, from the beginning, known that our small group of three was certainly generative but not adequate in terms of the depth and breadth of resources required to actually implement anything we were envisioning. We had been continually seeking how to connect with other radical, passionate yet grounded, out-of-the-box thinkers who were not just operating as lone wolves but could engage in co-construction. At the time of this writing, outreach has become our primary focus as a group although other individual life demands have cut into our time to work together.

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[228] Backcasting is a term used especially in sustainable development. See Dreborg, K. H. (1996) Essence of Backcasting. *Futures* .Volume 28 - 9 p 813-828

[229] Although often quoted I have not been able to find a specific citation for this quote.

[230] Lietaer, B. (2004). *The Terra white paper.* Accessed March 27, 2013 at http://www.slideshare.net/LocalMoney/bernard-lietaer-global-complementary-currency-the-terra-trc-white-paper-2004

This group modeled the creative potential of relational construction. By this I mean the new innovative thinking emerged out of our ability to collaborate, to inquire into territory beyond our habitually known spaces, and move beyond owning and protecting thoughts as if they arose inside our individual heads. Our communication was not a means for transmitting pre-defined information but a process for co-constructing new meaning that could eventually result in new patterns and structures being developed. Our inquiry and basis of trust supported joint actions with transformational potential. We were experiencing interactions that support comprehensive social change as discussed in the Scale of Public Interaction (SPI 5) described in Chapter 2. These included an ability to analyze issues, perceive their interconnections and root causes, define priorities of where to start, anticipate different perspectives, deliberate options, and consider implications and tradeoffs. However we did not need a facilitator and were able to quickly design our process that supported our interactions as we went. If more people were added, it would be interesting to see at what point, either in terms of numbers or diversity of thinking, a facilitator and pre-designed process might be needed. Much more collaboration needs to occur in broader circles before the ideas which emerged from our think tank have any legitimacy. More transformative inquiry is needed to build on these ideas and create the structures and activities that could adequately replace the previous habits of economics that commodify nature and human activity. Also these specific constructs may become just fodder on which other meaning and actions may develop. As McNamee says,"One reason that future-oriented discourse can enhance the coordination of diverse worldviews is because we all understand that we do not yet *know* the future. We have not embodied it yet. And thus, to the extent that we engage *with others* in conversation about the future, we underscore the relational construction of our worlds. We fabricate together the reality into which we might collaboratively enter."[231]

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The next and concluding chapter will provide a summary of these four areas of inquiry related to the theories of social change found in Chapter 2 and the outline of a commons concepts found in Chapter 3. The chapter will also suggest places for further inquiry and possible next steps.

[231] McNamee, S. (in press) p.21

CHAPTER 5

5. CONCLUSION

Things are getting better and better and worse and worse, faster and faster.[232]

SUMMARY OF THE JOURNEY

Where has this "who dun it/we dun it" journey brought us? I started in Chapter 1 by naming the challenges of a world heating up, compulsively moving like a train towards a cliff, moving on a rigid track of our own making. The rigid track is made up of socially constructed beliefs, operating systems and structures, reflecting simple linear logic and modernist reductionism that have organized our relationships between each other and nature. These have permeated economics, governance, law, and civil society under the market-state regime. That track can be changed if we see its limitations, and if we see that we have co-constructed it and can co-construct an alternative. A new track or paradigm is being suggested called the commons paradigm that supports a relational way of being, coordinating our human systems with our planetary systems. In the opening statement of *Regenerating the Human Right to a Clean and Healthy Environment in the Commons Renaissance* the stage is set for what is possible:

> The regeneration of the right to a clean and healthy environment is entirely feasible if we can liberate ourselves from the tyranny of State-centric models of legal process; enlarge our understanding of "value" in economic thought; expand our sense of human rights; and honor the power of non-market participation, local context, and social diversity in structuring economic activity.[233]

We need to switch tracks fast, but comprehensive social change tends to be slow. We have a dilemma. As a human race, we have never faced anything of this magnitude before. However, we need to rush slowly, that is, take the time to deeply understand the interconnected roots of this dilemma and what we already understand regarding how social change comes about. How have we constructed the dilemma, how have our previous ways of being led to fragmented assumptions of relationships, and how could we construct a different track? How could this track be built from assumptions of dynamic interdependent relationships, and the complexities and diversities of making meaning and going on together? Based on this question, in Chapter 2, I presented theories and reflections on these large questions on change. These reflections gave an overview of several approaches to change including: the philosophical stance of social construction, systems theory, the significance of language, social transformation, legitimacy, diversity

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[232] Atlee, T. (n.d.) *Learning to Be Evolution*. Co- Intelligence Institute website. Accessed August 10, 2013 at; http://www.co-intelligence.org/Evolution-Learning2BEvol.html. n.p

[233] Weston, B., & Bollier, D. (n.d.) Regenerating the human right to a clean and healthy environment in the commons renaissance .Part one. Available at http://commonslawproject.org/ n.p.

of views, public engagement processes, complexity of decision-making, scaffolding, and how paradigms are thought to dissolve and be formed. Social construction highlights the relational nature of transformative change. These concepts emphasize the implications of living in a relational universe engaging in ongoing co-creative processes. The language and dialogic practises that reflect these theories provide generative conditions to build a new track compared to practises that operate from assumptions of separate concrete objects being manipulated by separate individuals. Creating well-supported spaces for public engagement can allow us to see the market-state regime not as the external enemy but as a situation where earlier beliefs, overtime, have firmed but are still malleable and open to transformative inquiry. A new social reality and new ways to coordinate our local and global actions can emerge and be legitimized only through engaging with the dialogical tensions inherent in complex public issues.

Having given this overview of changing social realities in Chapter 2, I then went on in Chapter 3 to describe ways in which a commons paradigm seems to be in the process of forming and presenting a new track, or social reality. I noted some of the principles, language, and meanings being developed. I attempted to indicate how this track is being constructed and how far the construction has succeeded in actually leading our "train" onto a new viable paradigm. This chapter included concepts associated with governance, resources and economics. It also included a section on what the commons paradigm did not include. I have inquired into some of the hives of activity in which I have been involved where the track building is actively occurring. These became my areas of inquiry that I shared in Chapter 4. They included introductory workshops, a conference called the Great Lakes Commons Gathering, several individual interviews, and a Commons Paradigm Think Tank.

REFLECTIONS ON THE FOUR AREAS OF INQUIRY

In reflecting on the four areas, I see that movement is definitely happening. To provide a frame to summarize the observation and analysis of this movement, I will return to the stages involved in social change and paradigm development referred to in Chapter 2. The description of this movement will integrate several theories mentioned in that chapter, including Kuhn's[234] phases of paradigm change, and Hegel's[235] and Ross's[236] dialectical process of movement from thesis to antithesis, chaos to synthesis, and McNamee's[237] depiction of the process of constructing multiple moral orders (realities). All of these stages are socially created realities resulting from negotiation of meaning and language, and polyphonic discourse.

Drawing upon Hegel and Ross's notion of thesis/antithesis/synthesis, and McNamee's process of creating new moral orders, I view the thesis phase as the current operating system or market-state paradigm described and critiqued in Chapters 1 and 3. I will name

[234] Kuhn. (1962)
[235] Hegel, G.W.F. (1977). trans. A. V. Miller *Phenomenology of spirit*, Oxford: Clarendon.
[236] Ross. (2008)
[237] McNamee (in press)

the declaration to change and seek a new direction as the antithesis. I will name the presentation of the concepts and vision of the commons paradigm described in Chapter 3 as an attempt at synthesis. In the stage in between thesis and antithesis, to use Kuhn's phrase, anomalies to this thesis are noticed to the point that a crisis is recognized**.** In between the antithesis and synthesis, as described by Ross, a chaotic and possibly exhausting period occurs as new, potentially more satisfying beliefs and practises are presented, critiqued and negotiated. The new synthesis that emerges from this dialectical tension is not an end point as indicated in McNamee's description but will, over time, become the new thesis in which anomalies will be noted as this is not a linear progression from one truth to another. This staged process may be similar both in content and process to how the premises of modernity are critiqued and simultaneously serve as the premises of post modernity. These movements represent many points of dialogue, negotiations of meaning, clarification of language and coordinated action that create legitimacy to the collective movement.

From Thesis to Antithesis: Observing What is Not Working

The thesis underlying industrialization and eventually neoliberalism has led to environmental degradation and social injustice. This understanding is not new and has been voiced for generations. We see examples of this environmental degradation and social injustice in the 17th century revolutions against the Poor Laws, unfair colonial practises, the Great Depression of the 1930s, Rachel Carson's[238] *Silent Spring*, the current flurry of books, videos, and articles indicating the impacts of rising green house gases (GHGs), and the many analyses of the 2008 financial crisis. It is more recent that the beliefs and practises of this thesis or as Foucault [239]would say, "regimes of truth," have been grouped under the term market state paradigm. This term is becoming a regularly used term in commons literature. Our awareness that we have a thesis that we have been habitually using to organize our relationships has been a significant step in the development of a new thesis or commons paradigm. Sharing experiences that indicate that there are anomalies has also been an important aspect of the first stages of moving towards the commons paradigm.

As Kuhn stated, crisis can be a significant point in the change process. At this point, problems become harder to deny or to name as something else and discussions that something is wrong are attracting more people. For some parts of the world and within some socio-economic groups, there has been an experience of crisis since colonial times. The larger global experience of a shared global crisis has been occurring more recently with obvious global financial instability, repeated weather volatility, rising food shortages, and military presence. This is articulated less now as a warning of what might happen and more as a recording of what is happening.

All of the areas of inquiry involved deconstructing the thesis and naming a crisis but to different degrees. The **Workshops** were largely focused in this phase of thesis

[238] Carson, R. (2002). *Silent spring*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
[239] Foucault. (1980)

recognition and anomaly discussion. Through the presentations, reading materials, and discussions, the workshops provided places where people could jointly reflect on the thesis or regime of truth we are in and share the anomalies they have been experiencing regarding environmental or social justice issues. The highlighting of anomalies and presentation of a new vision of a commons paradigm seems to be what allowed people to decentre from the current thesis. Presenting an alternative paradigm seemed to move participants beyond seeing the crisis through a lens of permanence and despair. From this vantage point, they can more readily step outside and see the patterns and norms we have created. The patterns we have built into our economy and governance may be so entrenched, and we have learned the language game that Wittgenstein[240] names so well, that we have settled into grooves. We may have lost an awareness of our part in the dynamic co-creation of these patterns. The reflection into patterns we have created is a necessary precursor to inquiry. It is also a precursor to possible change of the underlying beliefs that lead to those patterns.

The **Great Lakes Conference** started with a shared premise of recognizable cumulative anomalies specifically regarding the condition of crisis of the sustainability of the Great Lakes. This shared recognition led to an antithesis or declaration that a change was needed. This declaration was named as a social charter. It represented a turning point away from the pattern of the current thesis and towards a new basis of beliefs and values. As people coordinated their activities together, as indicated in McNamee's cycle, new language and meaning was constructed, (e.g. ability to speak together about the need for change other than what was offered by current government and economic arrangements) resulting in new patterns of interaction (ongoing plans to meet and form a social charter) that reflected their own particular standards and expectations (developing the social charter in both English and Indigenous languages). Just the fact that the conference occurred, attended by so many, and hosted by Notre Dame University, indicated that there was legitimacy in the observations of anomalies and the need to create change.

The **Interviews** also reflected a familiarity of the anomalies, presenting language that indicated interviewees understood that the current thesis was limited or even dangerous and that obviously a new direction was needed. Interviewees spoke from a larger scope than the Great Lakes Commons that included concerns for the long term sustainability of the planet. In the **Think Tank** the critique of the past thesis and anomalies was so jointly understood that it formed a knowledge base that did not need to be discussed in order to move onto the next phase i.e. from antithesis to synthesis.

From Antithesis to a New Synthesis: Seeking a Better Way

As described in Chapter 3, many commons concepts are being discussed in relationship to basic principles, governance, resource use and economics in order to address the limitations of the market state paradigm. However, a viable new paradigm, such as an operational commons paradigm, needs to emerge as a confluence of understandings involving enough of society that it gains legitimacy. It can be accepted and gain validity

[240] Wittgenstein. (1953)

only if it adequately addresses the anomalies, diverts the crisis, and is recognizable as valid by a diverse range of people. It must have recognizable operational structures that have flowed out of people's needs and are deemed credible by a diverse range of society so they can participate in the paradigms ongoing operations. This proposition must show how it is better at addressing these issues than the various other options presented. And it will never be a stationary ultimate truth arrived at by everyone at the same time. In keeping with the stance of social construction, it is understood that people negotiate realties and coordinate actions based on situational contexts that are always in motion, as new meaning is being formed and dissolved and new relationships are engaged.

In my areas of inquiry, I observed people who are bravely engaged in finding a better way forward for a future together that addresses at least some of the anomalies. In various ways, they are addressing the questions regarding what implications the new vision has for our future together. They are considering, in Gergen's words, "How does a given set of ideas contribute to human well-being; who do they advantage and disadvantage; do they lead to more freedom or domination; do they sustain the planet or destroy it; and so on."[241] Although there are many possibilities of what a commons way of relating might involve, there are certainly no agreements about how to implement it. There has not been enough joint action from which to be able to develop new patterns or structures.

This phase of seeking new options to address the anomalies and crisis are meeting with understandable chaos. We can speak of the movement from an old paradigm to a new one as if it were easy. But it is a messy, organic transition where reactionary either/or polarities are navigated and new options proposed. These options are inquired into, compared, sorted, weighed, reframed and integrated, eventually supporting the emergence of a new, more complex paradigm.

There are so many options, viewpoints, capacities and concepts with which to work. A sense of being overwhelmed or stuck can result as going forward has complexities and risks that require more work and going back is unsatisfactory. It also can be a highly creative period if collaborative inquiry keeps the sharing open and generative. As shown in some of the interviews, engaging with others in ways that builds creativity and trust is the way forward.

The **Workshops** barely entered this phase due to their introductory nature and short, more surface means of engaging. Although the commons vision was held out as a possible North Star toward which to head, the implications of what this would entail and the diversity of opinions regarding the applications were barely discussed. The discussion stayed on anomalies, or what was wrong with the current situation, or on broad visions for the future, but without a lot of discussion about what was needed in between.

However, the **Great Lakes Conference** was well on its way into this phase between antithesis and creating a new synthesis. There were concrete anomalies regarding treatment of lake water, and a real crisis to which to respond. Participants had stepped forward into joint action in terms of participating in the conference, exploring concepts

[241] Gergen. (2009) p.158

together and declaring the need to develop a charter. The charter could gather the voices of the bioregion and eventually create new patterns and structures based on different meaning and values. However, as suggested in the observations and analysis, many groups of people and many different worldviews have not yet been engaged and therefore legitimacy is in question. In addition, the anomalies of governance were being discussed but those of economics were not included and therefore limit the scope of what a commons based paradigm needs to address. The water of the Great Lakes will not become clean without including the diverse sub issues, viewpoints, and actions associated with its use, damage, and restoration. The declaration to develop a comprehensive social charter was grounded in a dialogic framework, suggesting that a new negotiated reality could be built, drawing on assumptions and implications of discussing diverse points of focus and viewpoints. However, the fear of differences that I noted in my analysis may not yet have been addressed. As Anderson states, "We do not arrive at or have meaning and understanding until we take communicative action, that is engage in some meaning-generating discourse or dialogue within a system for which the communication has relevance."[242] How these discourses can engage such a broad region with relevance for multiple constituencies is both necessary and very challenging.

The **Interviews** indicated a need to move beyond just naming the anomalies or what was wrong with the current situation. The interviewees' reflections also seemed beyond wishful thinking about visions of a commons paradigm emerging, but included a deeper understanding of the shared work that was ahead. I feel that if all my interviewees could have been engaged together in a well-supported dialogic process for a period of time, we would have generated a great deal of new options for ways forward. Instead, those interviewed were each thinking about collective issues but not able to bring their ideas together to focus jointly. It is the benefits of this kind of small group, concentrated inquiry and creativity that I observed in the **Think Tank.** This group was far along on the journey from stating the antithesis, to declaring a need to change, and then considering an operational paradigm that could deal with the anomalies and crisis. The Think Tank could propose and test hypotheses and jump into futures speculations in ways that were not experienced in the other aspects of this project. The capacity of the Think Tank demonstrated a model for how conferences such as the International Conference on Commons could potentially operate. Instead of trying to be broad and include everyone, from those just new to commons concepts to those who were digging deeply into the nuances of meaning, the conference could potentially support small think tanks. These could work together for several days and keep using an inquiry process that allowed them to deepen their trust, co-create knowledge, and develop ongoing actions for after the conference. However, the unresolved tension between trying to meet the need for broad inclusion of the social movement as well as the deeper considerations of the epistemic community does not allow for such focused, intense work at this time.

Before moving into further questions and recommendations I will summarize key learnings.

[242] Anderson,H. & Goolishian, H. (1988)

Key Learnings

- A commons paradigm is emerging from social interactions and meaning-generating discourse.
- These interactions are focused on addressing dialectical tensions between what the market state paradigm has proposed, and what is being experienced, and between what is desired in terms of co-creating a sustainable vibrant future, and our capacities to do so.
- These interactions are supported when people are invited into generative spaces where dialogic practises that help to identify and address those tensions can be used to create new social realities and coordinate actions. If not supported, then due to habitual cultural patterns concerning individuality and competition, differences are avoided or glossed over, encapsulating our thinking into separate containers not available for co-creativity.
- This support is greater when designed to support a sequence of developmental steps that scaffold more complex interactions to occur.
- It is through collaborative interactions that a new set of relations may emerge amongst people and the resources on which their lives depend. This set of relations can evolve new values, rules, and roles in economics and governance practises.
- The capacity to evolve this new set of relations through collaboration and innovation in response to tensions, is itself a significant commons resource.
- To fulfill the needs a new paradigm this new set of relations and organizational practises defined as commons must address the limitations of the previous market state paradigm.
- The construction of new practises need to respect and draw on the long term experience of indigenous people in protecting and preserving resources.
- It is important to discern that some people are at the beginning points of identifying and addressing the anomalies of the previous paradigm, and some are further into the layers of the inquiry regarding how the new commons concpts might be tested and operationalized.
- These different points, and the kinds of conversations participants may want to have, indicates a need for skilled facilitation and well designed processes for creating different types of dialogic structures and settings to meet these diverse needs and capacities.
- The undertaking of developing a commons based approach is very complex and challenged by limited time and funding but energized by the co-creative experience of being in relation.

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FURTHER QUESTIONS AND POSSIBILITIES

There are many unanswered questions and indicators of where further research could be helpful or projects developed. I will name a few that have been stimulated through coming to this reflection point in this inquiry, some of which may be taken up by myself, or may be of interest to other scholars and practitioners.

Engaging More Responses

Although I am at the ending point of this dissertation, the material I have developed so far feels like it could be the beginning of another phase of inquiry. I am motivated to have commons practitioners and scholars read what I have articulated with hopes that it could develop further discussion and feedback regarding its usefulness and in what ways it could be adjusted. With enough time and resources, an ongoing round of communicative exchanges would be ideal to build off what I have attempted to capture and express here.

Development of Graphics

Complex issues with multiple interacting aspects are difficult to describe in the linear, two dimensional constraints of writing. It might be helpful to create a three dimensional interactive graphic to reflect the phases being discovered when engaging with the concept of a commons paradigm. Resources for scaffolding could be developed for each phase. Potentially the graph could serve as a method for people to articulate, reflect on and evaluate their activities, either in hindsight after several months, or in real time at a conference. They could share their language for their experiences at each phase, describing what meaning was made at different points, what tensions they experiences and how they met and overcame challenges. It could translate into documentation of their movement towards change, as well as point to a path others might take, learn from or critique. It could be added to as more sub-issues were being explored. It could name different lines of inquiry representing different issues. For example, those responding to the question, "How do we set up a governance system to protect the water quality of the Great Lakes?" might create a different path and set of options than those responding to an question such as, "How do we create an introductory educational workshop on commons approaches?" Although the goal would not be to build a universal methodology, naming similarities, differences or overlaps surfaced when engaging with the concept of commons might provide interesting material for discussion .

Creation of an Educational Curriculum

Further development of the phases of movement towards a commons paradigm could also be supported and modelled by an educational curriculum that involved interactive collaborative learning. Bringing in the philosophical stance of social construction is an important base from which to build the educational programs regarding commons. This would include approaching learning as a co-generative activity instead of something that is private inside the students' separate mind. Breaking down an "us and them" habit of relationship between teacher and student could, according to Gergen, mean" facilitating relational processes that can ultimately contribute to the continuing and expanding flow of relationships within the world more broadly "[243] This could include fostering collaboration, and increasing the recognition of the significance of language in creating or dissolving barriers to communication. These educational curricula would be relevant to traditional secondary and post-secondary classrooms and also find relevance in public

[243] Gergen, (2009) p. 243.

engagement regarding community or global issues. The ability to co-create meaning and knowledge is itself an abundant renewable commons resource.

Money as Language

Seeing money as a form of language seems to be a rich territory for exploration. It could expand on what is already known about the social construction of meaning, to the potential consideration of money as a language of value. As discussed in the section on the Commons Paradigm Think Tank, I see that our universal use of money, although in different national currencies, serves as a carrier of a significant conversation regarding value. If we paid attention to that conversation, with the same scrutiny that the social constructionist stance insists that we pay to our other in-the-moment languages of text and actions that we pass around amongst us, a transformation of meaning could potentially happen in every economic transaction.

Valuing, Protecting, Sustaining, and Creating our Human Resources

My inquiry indicated that many of the people in the commons movement are working from small or no budgets. This is awe-inspiring but limits the expansion, sustainability and legitimizing of their efforts. As stated previously, we overlook and take for granted our abilities to socially construct meaning, relationships and options. In order to evolve new, more effective actions that could possibly help us build the new track, we must acknowledge our capacity to construct alternatives through our interactions with others. Our interactions, in themselves, are a renewable and abundant common resource. By not recognizing this resource, we are not valuing developing, nurturing or protecting it/us and not benefiting from these riches, whether we define those in spiritual or economical terms. As Gergen states, "the future well-being of the planet depends significantly on the extent to which we can nourish and protect not individuals, or even groups, but the generative processes of relating."[244] Allocating funds, either in conventional currency or in some other form to support and sustain creative conversations regarding the issues that face the earth is necessary. Instead of being unemployed, people in communities everywhere could be given paid jobs of designing or joining facilitated scaffolded forums, and together thinking through their sustainability dilemmas, and joint responses. Just as coal and oil were the resources to be developed in the 20th century, so too are these human capacities the untapped resources for development of the 21 century. The latter differ of course as they can be only be developed through sharing not enclosing.

SOME PERSONAL SUMMARY REFLECTIONS

It is hard to stop writing and thinking and adding and adjusting. This indicates to me that this focus has been generative and useful. It also means my focus has been very large and of course cannot have a tidy final endpoint since what I am talking about is so far beyond me, my research community, the commons or social construction communities, or even

[244] Gergen (2009) p.xv

my generation and lifetime. I hope I have managed to attend to such large systemic issues but not be so general that my writing only produced surface statements, not recognizable or applicable in daily and weekly practises. The process of inquiry and writing clarified my ability to articulation to those outside of the commons community as well as deepened my connections with commons colleagues. Possibly, amongst both scholars and practitioners, this conversation can continue and new relationships can be fostered. Perhaps new meaning can be created and that some of it might tweak the construction of new operating systems regarding how to value and structure sustainable vital relationships on the planet.

Although I have used the terms social construction prior to this study, I now have a fuller, more embodied understanding and application of the philosophy. Working with this lens has pushed me to deepen and articulate my observations of interactions and meaning being formed in the commons field. The process of writing has increased my sensitivity to how others and I frequently use language in a way that reinforces a conceptualization of isolated bounded individuals, and how that language can invite patterns of behaving − the exact patterns of action that the commons paradigm is attempting to address. I see how in-the-moment short cuts can be taken with terms that have implications within these long-term patterns.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Is the commons paradigm a viable alternative? I believe its emergence is still in process and we may not know until we have done more work and are able to look back and see how our story unfolded. Is it the track, or a track? The track it offers seems to be an attractor, both for an immediate recognition of something deep and innate, as well as for longer term commitment for both practitioners and scholars. It includes a broad scope of meaning making endeavours encompassing environmental, social justice, public law, food security, economics, technology, aboriginal rights, culture, communications and policy sectors, international, regional and local interests. It has a growing social movement as well as an epistemic community. However, I could foresee the potential for there being a split, resulting in the term "commons" being mostly used by the broader social populist movement as a broad galvanizing attractor for declaring rights to resources, leaving the epistemic community to move to define more specific and complex aspects of how to put these rights into practise such as would involve monetary systems and law. Does it meet the complex requirements of operationalizing a new paradigm capable of addressing the limitations of the previous paradigm, especially in the context of those limitations being life/species threatening? This feels very uncertain at this early stage.

There has been a trend, especially in the last 10–15 years, where articles, books, and speeches have given 95% of their focus on the anomalies of the previous paradigm, stating what is wrong and advocating why we needed to change. Only a small discussion regarding specifics of what might work better is typically appended to the end of such statements. However, I am noticing in many cases that we have made the turn depicted in

my summary towards how a new paradigm needs to be put in place that could adequately replace our habituation to the previous one. Some are naming this paradigm as commons and potentially this naming will offer a shared language around which activities can be coordinated.

In my many years of inquiry into how we might conduct social change at a global level, I have not found another framework that is so broad in its scope with such a commitment to respond to systemic and long term issues. I certainly cannot offer an assurance that the commons paradigm is the silver bullet, but instead I offer a "sleeves rolled up" response. I believe our human capacities to socially construct new situational meaning and relationally coordinated actions have been barely tapped. So our "who dun it/we dun it" journey inspires questions of how we can do it differently so that possibly not all of the train goes off the track, but some cars have a chance of creating a totally new direction based on different relational assumptions and yet unknown potentials.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Our Great Lakes Commons Summit:
Water for Life

Co-Convened by Notre Dame University's Mendoza School of Business, On the Commons,
Blue Mountain Center and others
September 30 – October 2nd, 2012
University of Notre Dame, Indiana

Our Great Lakes Commons Summit
Our Great Lakes Commons Summit will bring together about seventy people from a range of fields and disciplines to engage in shared inquiry of a subject of profound importance– the future of the Great Lakes of North America. Scholars, economists, Indigenous leaders, attorneys, environmentalists, social justice activists, engineers, artists and other forward thinking participants will focus on exploring strategies that can move us toward establishing a Great Lakes Commons and a life-affirming future for this bioregion.

The Need for a Whole System Solution
The Great Lakes are a precious gift of nature that comprises most of North America's fresh water. Millions of people and thousands of species depend on this water. And yet, increasing damage, depletion and misuse are putting this life giving watershed and its residents at risk. Simply put, Great Lakes governance is failing to protect the water and the living beings who rely on the water for life.

The failure of Great Lakes governance stems from a set of interrelated whole system problems:

- The underlying logic driving Great Lakes policy is biased toward private and commercial interests at the expense of ecological and human wellbeing;
- The political and jurisdictional boundaries in the region do not correspond to ecological realities;
- The people of the Lakes bioregion are not seen as central to water stewardship and largely lack standing or structural power in the water decisions that affect them.

Fundamental change is called for to address these systemic problems. We need to put forward and legitimize a different operating system, one that values the Lakes both unto themselves and as a source of life in a vast region – and one that enables all of us to play a vital and effective role in the care of the water.

The Proposition:

We are using the commons to frame our inquiry at the Summit. The commons, as a world-view and practical approach, enables us to establish a different set of operating assumptions about the value and care of our Lakes. As such, we believe the commons opens a potentially groundbreaking path forward in our relationship to and care of these iconic waters.

The commons, in brief, is a powerful and alternate framework that humans have used to take care of and equitably share resources for millennia. Nobel Laureate Elinor Ostrom has shown it to be a highly effective form of stewardship whose governance, in accordance with commons principles, is highly collaborative and focused on sustainability, shared responsibility and equitable benefit. The strength of the commons is in its ability to orient us toward interdependence, to invite leadership from all parts of the community and to offer avenues for everyone to take responsibility for the care of the water.

A central focus of the Summit will be the exploration of strategies to assert, build recognition and gain standing for this commons based approach - legally, politically, economically and culturally - and to more fully engage the people of the bioregion in the active care of our commons. One such strategy is the co-creation of a Great Lakes Commons Charter. A commons charter is a set of norms, rules, rights and practices that define a community's relationship to and governance of a commons. We are inviting Summit participants to embark on initiating this charter, including defining a guiding vision and set of principles to orient our collective work and ultimately Great Lakes governance.

Indigenous Leadership

The Summit will honor Indigenous wisdom and leadership in a central way. Indigenous communities continue to demonstrate how a life affirming vision for the Great Lakes is viable. Resurfacing values that recognize our interdependence, that engender multigenerational thinking and that foster belonging, generosity and reciprocity over ownership – all pivotal values in Indigenous cultures— are today recognized as essential to our collective survival.

The commons are shaped by a set of kindred principles and values. Both systems reject that what we buy, sell and own in the market provides fundamental meaning to our lives. Instead, value is placed on caring for all that we share and passing this legacy to future generations undiminished.

Along with recognizing Indigenous wisdom as a legitimate and vital school of thought that can set the foundation for a commons, it is also important to recognize the disproportionate impact of unsound water decisions on Indigenous peoples and the need for First Nations and tribal communities to have a leading voice, as sovereign Nations, in determining a just water future.

Outcomes

We are setting out a bold new course. Because there are no exact templates for commons governance or charters on this scale, we see the Summit as a place to co-create a new narrative for the future of the Lakes, share learning and insights, and lay the groundwork to bring the Great Lakes commons to life. We will leave the conference with:

- A defined development process for Our Great Lakes Commons charter;
- A constellation of linked leadership that will carry this work forward through research, organizing, education, law, business and culture, and move us toward commons governance locally, regionally and trans-nationally;
- An initial set of strategies that participants can advance in their field, sector or community.

This Summit promises to be a visionary and catalyzing event that can launch the critical work needed to re-imagine and re-shape the future of the Great Lakes. We hope it is one that we will look back on in years to come as historic and game changing.

APPENDIX 2

Interview questions:

Re commons in general: What was your reaction when you first heard about the concepts of 'commons" Did they seem applicable to issues you have been concerned about, and the change in the world you see as needed? If so, in what way? Has your understanding of the concepts changed since then? How? What stages do you see others going through as they engage with understanding and applying these concepts of commons?

Re application to the Great Lakes: (for those who attended) The Commons was proposed as a way of establishing different ways to care for the Great Lakes. In what ways do you see that as a useful approach? Are there ways it might be not useful? What is needed to help it be more useful/to assist people move forward with what has been seeded so far?

Re other applications: Do you see the commons paradigm as being a useful approach to other situations where shared resources are under threat? Examples? Local / global/ both?

Re our discussion: What would you like to see happen with our interview material (or not happen)? How might it be useful to you and others?