

# Our Global and Local Commons: The New Narrative for Justice, Peace, Environmental Security and Shared Prosperity for All

## How Can the Commons Movement Solve The Climate Crisis?

**The power and promise of the commons movement is in its ability to balance the relationship between government and the market sector.** Neither of our existing property regimes — private nor public — have a mandate to guarantee long-term protection and use of these critical commons resources and thus ensure the common capital of the planet. Our imperiled commons require the creation of new institutions to ensure this balance, empowering government to fulfill its role in serving the will of the people to maintain their commons for security, prosperity and the needs of future generations. **The vacuum in commons protection is clearly seen in the burgeoning climate crisis. Since the people want to ensure the safest, most equitable measures for a safe climate, we need atmosphere commons institutions that are independent of political maneuvering and the continual push for market profits.** (MB Steisslinger, [www.wiserearth.org/group/commonsgroup](http://www.wiserearth.org/group/commonsgroup))

**Co-Governance:** Until the modern era of enclosure and commodification, communities had always made up their own rules for creating and maintaining local resources. Unlike the world's public/gov and private/corporate sectors, commoners have broad experience in the supervision and sustenance of living systems to ensure equitable ways of sharing their uses and benefits. This knowledge is now being rediscovered. People across the world are returning to the transparent stewardship of their local commons, becoming involved as providers as well as recipients of resources, goods and services. Co-Governance involves the principle of subsidiarity, taking decisions at the lowest possible level of authority and creating new checks and balances on the overall decision-making activities of the state. Co-Governance entails developing non-centralized rules and institutions pertaining to the questions of access, control, use and distribution of the wealth generated on a commons. (James Quilligan, *Kosmos Journal*, Fall/Winter 2009). **eg. A Sky Trust allows for co-governance of the atmosphere for climate safety, moderating political and business biases in the equation for global climate stability.** (See *Commons Trust Diagram [3.1] Kosmos, Ibid* and <http://commonstrust.org>)

**The Power of Peer Production/Co-Production:** "Commons-based peer governance and production will tend to prevail over closed, proprietary business systems... companies that open up their organizations will out-compete and out-cooperate closed companies in the marketplace." (Michel Bauwens of the Peer to Peer Foundation, P2P.org, Bangkok, Thailand). Some emerging forms of co-production include resource-based economies, bartering, gift-economies, free shops + exchanges, complementary currencies, fair trade markets + unions, producer cooperatives, entrepreneurial networks, scientific + academic commons, internet modalities such as open source software, open e-media, creative commons copyrights etc. (James Quilligan, *Ibid*). **eg. A Sky Trust for the atmosphere would include the creation of a complementary currency. Everyone on Earth would have an equal claim and thus get an equal share.** (Cap and Share, Feasta, 2008)

**New Commons Institutions:** Society is in need of a complete paradigm shift in economics and the political structures that support our current bi-polar system of militaristic governments developing and protecting markets for unlimited neoliberal-style growth. This is the Tragedy of the Commons (Dawning of Commons Trusts, *Diagram, Kosmos Journal*, Fall/Winter 2009). None-the-less, many leading progressive thinkers still insist that tweaking the current model will somehow solve our multiple crises. The most creative communities of visionaries are moving beyond this stalemate; their ideas will inspire humanity to find the "hidden secret of our prosperity, the Commons" (Wolfgang Sachs). "As global citizens, regardless of national obligations, we have a responsibility to engage in areas of community and transborder action where the state and private sectors have little jurisdiction, authority or experience." (Quilligan, *Ibid*). **eg. Climate Crisis: The great cooperative opportunity for developing shared prosperity thru the atmosphere commons.**

**Social Charters:** Commons rights affirm the sovereignty of human beings over their means of sustenance and well-being. They empower us with a moral authority and social legitimacy to make decisions and create agreements on the sharing of resources that ensure our rights to survival and security. Commons rights provide an important basis for creating covenants and institutions that are not state-managed to negotiate the protection and sustenance of resources and ensure that the mutual interests of all stakeholders are directly represented. Creating a social charter requires the support and involvement of people across a region or community of interest who depend on specific common goods for their livelihood and welfare. A social charter can be developed for a single commons or for overlapping commons. **A social charter should include a summary of traditional or emerging claims to legitimacy; a declaration of the rights and entitlements of users and producers; a code of ethics; elaboration of common values and standards; a statement of benefits; a notice of claims to reparations or re-territorialization of boundaries; and a practical framework for cooperation.**

Citizens who create a social charter thus ensure that administrative power is decentralized in order to maintain community access to, and sovereignty over, their own commons. Through the assertion of people's inherent rights to a commons, the role of the state would become much more balanced between enabling the corporate sector and enabling citizens. (James Quilligan, Global Commons Feature, Kosmos Journal, Fall/ Winter 2009). **eg. A Community of Interest with representation from across the globe can develop a Social Charter for a Global Sky Trust (envisioning atmosphere commons subsidiaries in each country) to help overcome the current lack of effective governmental climate leadership.**

**Commons Trusts:** While social charters ensure a broad political foundation for the co-governance and co-production of common property regimes, they do not make them operational. Commons trusts establish the specific legal conditions for people to help each other manage and produce what each of them needs. Commons trusts are institutions usually involving both physical and financial assets, which preserve and manage resources inherited from past generations on behalf of present and future generations. Broadly speaking, the creation of local commons trusts worldwide entails four significant changes:

- government shifts its primary emphasis from issuing corporate charters and licensing the private sector to approving social charters and open licenses for resource preservation and cultural and social production through commons trusts
- commons trusts exercise a fiduciary duty to preserve natural, genetic and material commons but can decide to rent a proportion of these resource rights to businesses
- businesses may rent the rights to extract and produce a resource from a commons trust, creating profits and positive externalities through innovation, competitive products and services, and adjustment of the market to the actual costs of resources
- this rent will stabilize the principal of commons reserves to maintain the diversity and sustainability of the overall economy, and additionally decrease market volatility

**The primary obligation of trust managers is to keep the value created through the commons within the commons to the extent possible**, so that the community can hold in reserve the larger portion of its natural, genetic, and material stock for the benefit of people and species yet unborn, while generating cultural, social and intellectual capital for current generations. (Quilligan, Ibid). **eg. A Global Sky Trust, along with local subsidiaries, could facilitate such changes, addressing the climate crisis and resulting inequities through a scientific, multi-cultural and ethics-based governing body. Sky Trust Shares would have the multiple affect of helping to off-set increasing fuel prices, providing critical income for the world's poorest and reduce reliance on fossil fuels thru investment in sustainable decentralized energy systems** (Cap and Share, Feasta, 2008)