<u>**The Commons as a New Narrative for the 21st Century**</u>

**Silke Helrich's Introductory Talk and Presentation at the
World Commons Forum**
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1. When we talk about the commons, what are we talking about?

Helfrich states: "the commons are shared prosperity." Wolfgang Sachs says in his simple but strong message: "When we talk about the commons, we talk about 'a hidden secret of prosperity.'" Commons are everywhere; problem is they are often invisible and may then get lost or forgotten. Helfrich says the real "tragedy of the commons" (referring to the famous metaphor coined by G. Hardin) is that we only think of the indispensable value of the commons when it's about to vanish.

2. What exactly is a commons?

In answering this question, Helfrich acknowledges the groundbreaking contributions made by Elinor Ostrom in developing the commons theory. Ostrom, her colleagues, et al are convinced that no single definition for the commons exists; nor is there a "master inventory" because each commons has its own historical, cultural, economical and ecological factors. **The important question, says Helfrich, is to identify and understand what all commons have in common.** She adds: "The commons allow us to unify in thinking what is separated in our mind but belongs together."

All commons share a function: Natural commons (necessary for survival), social commons (ensure social cohesion) and cultural/knowledge commons (required for self-directed passion) are all essential to us.

All commons have architecture and are based on three generic building blocks:
> <u>**First building block of a common architecture**</u>: Common pool resources (CPR)
>> CPR is the first fundamental element of a commons architecture.
>> Examples: biodiversity, water, our genetic code
>> Underlying principle: "All of us have the same right to use these resources."

> <u>**Second building block of a common architecture**</u>: The community, the group of people which share a common pool resource.
>> Example: In the case of the atmosphere, the group is all of mankind
>> One solution: Grant (temporary) use-rights in lieu of exclusive private property rights.
>> Note: Temporary possession is not the same as ever lasting property.

> <u>**Third building block of a commons architecture**</u>: A set of self-ordained rules.
>> The community trusts each other to abide by agreed-upon rules.

A commons-based society will be based on rules in a manner that they automatically maintain and recreate the commons.

3. What is Wrong and How to Change it

What's Wrong:
Our idea of success is linked to old paradigms
- Account balances
- Media presence
- Hording prevails
- Scarcity mentality

How to Change It
Core Idea of the Commons: Sharing
- The importance of renouncing control about what people do

Helfrich says new ideas are urgently needed for the 21st century. According to Helfrich "Contribution to the commons can occur in many ways by focusing radically on:
- Decentralized production using new levels of networking with digital tools
- Cooperation at local and global level
- Diversity of resources, communities, designs and rules
- Relationality (corresponds to "I need others and others need me.")"

These core ideas underpin the shift to a common-based society.

Table Comparing the Present Paradigm with the Commons Paradigm
By Silke Helfrich

Design Framework	Present Paradigm	Commons Paradigm
Purpose:	GDP/Accumulation	Social Prosperity
Main Actors:	Economic player/ State	Communities/Citizen
Decision Making:	Hierarchical	Horizontal/Peer-Review Processes
Decision Taking:	Judgment/Command	Constructive Criticism/Participation
Condition:	Control (Proprietary Standards)	Openness (Open Standards)
Incentive for:	Profit & Accumulation	Creativity & Innovation
Results:		
On the Resource Level:	Erosion, Enclosure	Reproduction, Fair-share
On the Social Level:	Dependence	Interdependence within Community, Autonomy
On the Level of Rules:	Acceptance Enforced by Power, by Money or by Law	High Level of Acceptance
Dominant Strategy:	**Out-Compete**	**(Out-)Cooperate**