



## Autumn 2013 · Number 15

Welcome to the Autumn 2013 edition of the *Commons Digest*. In this issue we present a report of the 14<sup>th</sup> Biennial conference of the IASC: *Commoners and the Changing Commons: Livelihoods, Environmental Security, and Shared Knowledge* held in Kita-Fujiyoshida, Japan June 3<sup>rd</sup>-7<sup>th</sup>, 2013. The issue opens with the Conference Report by **Steven McGreevy** and **Daniel Niles** of the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature (Kyoto, Japan), and **Margaret McKean**, of Duke University (USA). The Conference Report report is followed by **Michael Heller's** keynote address on the tragedy of the anti-commons. In this piece he presents his argument that when too many people own pieces of one thing, nobody can use it. Next we include a summary of the Policy Forum by **Jin Sato** which focused on Recovery from Disaster and the Future of Depopulating Areas in Japan. The Forum was a moving event which not only included panelists from the tsunami impacted areas of northern Japan, but also had a large number of local citizens in the audience, as well as a member of the Japanese Imperial Family. The Commons Forum closes with **Leticia Merino's** Presidential Address on the challenges and promises of the IASC.

The 14<sup>th</sup> Biennial conference was an exciting event and we were glad to see so many members in attendance. With this issue, we hope to re-live some of those memories and for those unable to attend, we offer to you a small taste of what was missed. **Enjoy!**

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## Commons Forum

### Report

## Report on the 14th Global Conference of the IASC

### Steven R. McGreevy and Daniel Niles

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### Margaret A. McKean

Kitafuji Conference Co-Chair, Duke University,  
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The 14th Global Conference of the IASC took place June 3rd -7th on the northern slopes of Mt. Fuji, Japan's most revered mountain and most recent contribution to UNESCO's collection of World Heritage Sites. Conference attendees enjoyed remarkably fine weather in the early summer rainy season, and Mt. Fuji was visible on every day of the conference, save one. This was a special treat; Fuji-san was a presence throughout the conference, surprising to see again and again from many of the session rooms, by glimpses from the shuttle buses and city streets, and looming above the venues and events. Conference participants—407 from 57 countries—and thousands of local citizens who contributed to the conference delighted in the chance to experience and to share Mt. Fuji's majestic stature and silence.

This year's conference was further distinguished by the unusual collaboration



that made it possible. The conference was organized by three partners: the IASC Secretariat, the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature (a national research institute based in Kyoto, Japan), and a group



Photo: Alyne Delaney

Mt. Fuji from the Fuji Calm Venue

of commoners known as the Onshirin Regional Public Organization of Kitafuji, who also hosted the conference on their common lands. The Onshirin community contributed immeasurably to the success of the conference and especially to the experience of their international guests. Local restaurants were prepared with English-language menus and open late with special concerts and entertainment. Conference nametags sported by all participants were engraved on wood that came from the Kitafuji commons, truly a first for IASC conference-goers. Beautiful conference bags were sewn by the local textile industry (a century earlier, Kitafuji commoners had worked in textiles to earn the money to buy back their own government-confiscated commons). Breakfasts served at one of the venues featured local products, several of which (some delicious jams and vegetables) were gathered and made specifically for the conference. While providing local delicacies to participants, Onshirin community members also managed to provide a wide variety of special options to meet the needs of conference participants from all over the world. Local children drew special messages to many conference

participants, recommending favorite features of the Fujiyoshida area. Indeed, it seemed impossible to find anyone in the city who did not know of the IASC conference.

Over the course of the five-day conference, participants presented 369 papers at 102 panels scheduled into 41 sessions and displayed 15 academic posters. 96 people went to pre-conference workshops held on Monday at the FujiYoshida Citizen's Hall on topics ranging from the history of the commons and commons theory in Japan to the design of field experiments. And 251 people attended 15 field trips.

On Monday afternoon, a rumble of Japanese taiko drums signaled the advent of the opening ceremony, which also featured a choreographed performance of group calligraphy by local high school students. International participants were then introduced to the formality which surrounds such events in Japan as, one-by-one, a full complement of local officers and government bureaucrats welcomed conference goers to Kitafuji. Dr. Leticia Merino, president of the IASC, welcomed conference participants and thanked the organizers for their challenging but obviously successful hard work. Dr. Tomoya Akimichi, co-chair of the conference and Professor Emeritus at the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature, introduced Dr. Michael Heller (Columbia Law School) who delivered a provocative keynote address entitled "The Tragedy of the Anticommons: A Concise Introduction and Lexicon." Following the opening ceremony, a bus tour of the area treated participants to iconic views of Mt Fuji from the edge of Lake Yamanaka as well as a view of the vast acreage of common lands managed by the Onshirin commoners organization. The final stop for all ten buses was the Onshirin Gardens, actually located right on the commons, at Onshirin headquarters. Dr. Margaret McKean, Co-chair





of the conference and Research Professor of Environmental Policy at Duke University, officially opened the dinner reception with a toast, along with Fujiyoshi Takamura, who chairs the Lake Yamanaka Commoners' Association. Fujiyoshi-san dedicated his career to successful battles with both the Japanese military and the national government, fighting all the way to the Supreme Court, to win back the North Fuji commons for the 11,000 commoners of this region who possess common access rights to Mount Fuji. For Mr. Fujiyoshi, and others, who struggled for the Kitafuji commons, the conference was a magnificent achievement.

At the reception, planned down to every detail by local organizer Jun'ichi Horiuchi, participants received and donned happi coats and tenugui (towel headbands) and entered a full-blown Japanese matsuri (festival) featuring booths with a range of local delicacies to eat and drink and a number of different festival games, dances and music. Local elementary school children performed a coordinated dance and song ("my town has Mount Fuji!") across the open grounds, and as the grills smoked and sake flowed and evening turned to night, the rhythmic twang of the Japanese Tsugaru-style shamisen led locals (and a number of jet-lagged but well-fortified outsiders!) into a traditional festival dance circling the raised platform on which the musicians played.

The second day of the conference featured morning and afternoon sessions that took place at three separate venues, all of which offered magnificent views of Mount Fuji itself: the Fuji Calm Conference Center, Jiba Sangyo Center, and Onshirin Forestry Center literally on the North Fuji commons. Buses circulated rapidly among the three venues and magically got participants wherever they needed to go next. Posters were on view during a walking lunch at Jiba Sangyo, where participants

could also explore the extensive gardens and enter a traditional thatched-roof home. After the IASC business meeting, Professor Bonnie McCay (Rutgers University) gave a Keynote Address entitled "Tragedies, Comedies, and other Dramas of the Commons." A plenary session on Japan's system of Iriai (common rights) took place immediately afterwards at



Photo: Alyne Delaney

Japanese staff working hard preparing for check in

Citizen's Hall and was hosted by Dr. Hidetoshi Nakao of Seinan Gakuin University and Dr. Yoshiki Kurumisawa of Waseda University.

The sessions on day three were followed by a policy forum held at Citizen's Hall on the theme of "Commons and Disaster," focusing on the role of the commons in recovery and new urban planning for sharing risk and reorganizing land use in vulnerable areas. This topic greatly interested participants as well as a large local contingent present at the event. A passionate advocate of ecological concerns, Prince Akishino of the Imperial Family attended this plenary policy forum, as did Yamanashi Prefectural Governor Yokouchi, Fujiyoshida Mayor Horiuchi, and several other high-ranking government officials. Dr. Jin Sato of Tokyo University organized and chaired the event and engaged the panel and audience effectively.

To honor IASC co-founder and visionary Elinor Ostrom, who received the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2009 for her work on the



commons but who died a year before the Kitafuji conference, friends and colleagues of Lin and her husband Vincent spoke of their memories against a backdrop that included photographs as well as Barbara Allen's video interviews with the Ostroms. From Margaret McKean, Jamie Thomson, Abwoli Banana, and others we learned more of the Ostroms' contributions to the field of commons studies, of their intellectual and personal generosity, as well as of their profound effect on the personal lives of a large number of IASC members.

President Leticia Merino made brief remarks as president in introducing the Elinor Ostrom International Awards on Collective Governance of the Commons. These awards were then given to five individuals and three organizations for their excellent research and practical work in commons governance, and awardees added their own memories of the Ostroms. (A later issue of the Digest will feature all of the award-winners.)

Finally, local high school students who participated in an ethnographic kikigaki ("listen and write") project designed to feature Lin's style of asking people to relate their own thoughts and experiences also received Ostrom kikigaki awards at the conclusion of the memorial events, which gave them a keen understanding of Ostrom's importance and even greater appreciation of the scholar who inspired their own investigations into the Kitafuji commons. The night was capped off by a sumptuous banquet and entertainment at the Fuji Highland Hotel that opened with the traditional breaking of sake-barrels (kagami-biraki) and continued with juggling and festival dancing.

The fourth day of the conference was dedicated to 13 field trips to explore a diversity of Japanese commons first-hand. Annual firing of the grasslands, restoring

fisheries, developing mini-hydropower, eco-tourism, restoring habitat, communal living, slash-and-burn forestry, the lucrative shrimp fishery of Sagami bay, the urban water commons created by Mount Fuji's snows, and sharing work on the commons with urban forest volunteers were just some of the themes investigated on these carefully planned trips.

The final day of the conference offered another full schedule of papers and sessions. The conference closed at Fuji Calm with an intimate gathering thanking the hard work of conference organizers and dedicated student and local volunteers, and officially announcing that the 15th Global IASC Conference will take place at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada in 2015. While many conference participants proceeded to leave, some departed for two multi-day post-conference field trips (a) westward to study the water system of Lake Biwa and the Kyoto-Osaka area, and (b) northward to investigate the recovery of fisheries and communities in tsunami-affected areas as well as the Kotsunagi archive of legal disputes centering on commons. As the evening light faded, Fujisan gazed down for one last time, on an intellectually stimulating, culturally-rich, and thoroughly successful conference.

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## Keynote Speech: The Tragedy of the Anticommons

**Michael Heller**

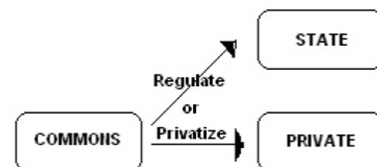
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**T**hank you to the commoners of the Onshirin federation for welcoming us to your spectacular home here on Mt. Fuji. Thank you to the 2013 IASC Conference organizers for bringing together the world's leading commons scholars and practitioners. It is a profound honor to speak with you today. I dedicate my remarks to the late Lin Ostrom, whose life and work continues to inspire us all. She encouraged and shaped many of the ideas I present to you now. This essay is a summary of the Keynote Address which was presented in Kitafuji, Japan.

**Introduction** In a nutshell, my thesis is this: when too many people own pieces of one thing, nobody can use it. Again: when too many people own pieces of one thing, nobody can use it. Usually, private ownership creates wealth. But too much ownership has the opposite effect—it creates anticommons tragedy. This is a free market paradox I discovered and it shows up all across the global economy. If too many owners control a single resource, cooperation breaks down, wealth disappears, and everybody loses.

**Commons Theory** First, consider our familiar conceptions of property. Property has long been seen as comprising three distinct ideal types, a trilogy of private, state, and commons property (Figure 1).



**FIGURE 1: TRILOGY, TRAGEDY AND SOLUTIONS**

For private property, the most enduring description we have is William Blackstone's image of "sole and despotic dominion," that is, a single autonomous decision maker who can exclude all others from some scarce resource and authoritatively direct its use. With state property, resources are, in principle, answerable to the purposes of society as a whole, rather than to any one individual's needs. The choreography of resource users on public lands is a great understudied area, but outside the scope of this talk. Finally, the third type, commons property, has been viewed as opposite to both private and state property in that there is no single authoritative decision-maker. In principle, anyone may use a commons, no one may be excluded. As we know, the sum of individual rational choices in a commons may be its destruction, a dilemma captured by the "tragedy of the commons" image. How can we avoid this tragic outcome?

Traditionally, scholars saw only two solutions, I think, because the old property trilogy so limited our imagination. One approach is for the state to dictate use. In recent decades, however, command-and-control approaches have lost favor. Then, the only alternative for conserving scarce resources is privatization. In theory, with private property, a single owner



will internalize most potential external effects of any decision concerning resource use.

But this framework is fatally incomplete. A hidden cost of the trilogy image is that it obscured successful resource management between commons and private. Professor Lin Ostrom identified and filled that gap by distinguishing two distinct types of commons. In “open access,” no one can be excluded and tragedy is indeed hard to avoid without state coercion. But open access is not so prevalent. By contrast, “common pool resources” – which arise when a limited number of commoners can exclude outsiders but not each other – predominate globally and need not be tragic at all. By breaking away from old trilogy, Professor Ostrom pointed us to commons-based solutions to resource tragedy (Figure 2).



FIGURE 2: GROUP ACCESS SOLUTIONS

This work can be extended further to address also the creative role law plays between commons and private. I label legally-constituted solutions to commons tragedy as “liberal commons.” A liberal commons gives a limited group of owners the economic and social benefits resulting from cooperation, while ensuring individual autonomy through a secure right of exit. Marriage, co-ownership, partnerships, condominium associations, and corporations are liberal commons forms that now hold most of the world’s wealth and are the locus of our collaborative lives. But this goes beyond our topic here. The point is that the trilogy obscures solutions to resource tragedy between commons and private.

**Anticommons Theory** There is a second way that the old trilogy is misleading. It suggests that if some private property is good for wealth-creation, resource conservation, and

liberal autonomy, then more privatization must be better. In this view, privatization can never go too far. Even adding the group access insight, private property still anchors the continuum. But beyond private property lies the anticommons.

I define this phenomenon of excessively fragmented ownership as anticommons tragedy. It can be most easily understood as the mirror image of commons tragedy. A resource is prone to overuse in a tragedy of the commons when too many owners each have a privilege to use a given resource, and no one has a right to exclude another. By contrast, a resource is prone to underuse in a tragedy of the anticommons when too many owners each have the right to exclude others from a scarce resource, and no one has an effective privilege of use. Once an anticommons emerges, collecting rights into usable private property often proves brutal and slow.

In a world of costless transactions, people could always avoid tragedy by selling to higher valued users. In practice, however, people face tough collective action problems, transaction costs, and cognitive biases. When the Nobel economist James Buchanan first modeled my anticommons construct, he showed it was symmetrical to the commons on a formal level. However, empirical studies are showing that in practice anticommons tragedy is harder to overcome than an equivalent dilemma framed as commons tragedy. Commons tragedies, like air pollution, are often painfully visible. But anticommons tragedies can be hard to spot. It’s hard to solve social dilemmas when the problem does not even have a name.

Notice what the anticommons does to the traditional ownership categories. Private property is no longer the end point, but is now a subtle optimum poised between tragic



extremes (see Figure 3).



FIGURE 3: THE NEW OWNERSHIP CONTINUUM

From a social welfare standpoint, underuse in an anticommons is just as costly and wasteful as overuse in a commons. While we have always stressed the importance of clear entitlements, we can see now that the scale of ownership may be just as important. Just as we now distinguish between open access and group access, we should distinguish between anticommons and full exclusion (Figure 4). Only state coercion can cure open access or full exclusion tragedy. But with core commons and anticommons ownership, we can look to a rich array of law and norms to support successful property governance.

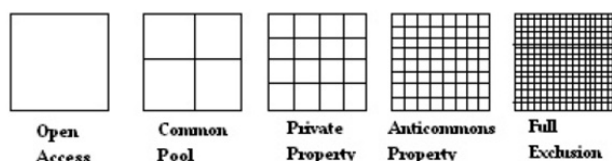


FIGURE 4: THE FULL SPECTRUM OF OWNERSHIP

Private property is a hearty institution, but one that is vulnerable to initial allocations of entitlements and to later mismatches between ownership and socially desired scale of use. The anticommons concept makes visible the hidden half of our ownership spectrum. It upends our core intuitions about private property. Private property can no longer be seen as the end point of ownership, but as a hard-fought balance between extremes of commons and anticommons, overuse and underuse. Privatization can go too far, so it destroys rather than creates wealth.

**Anticommons Puzzles** There are a near-infinity of everyday puzzles share that this common structure—one whose solution could

jump-start innovation, release trillions in productivity, and help revive the global economy.

Consider a life or death example that is happening right now. A drug company executive told me he may have a better Alzheimer's drug. But he cannot test it without getting access to dozens of patents. Picture the drug developer walking into an auditorium filled with the owners of the biotech patents needed to test the drug's safety. Each believes his or her patent is the most important, so each demands a corresponding price. Unless the drugmaker can strike a deal with every owner, the drug cannot come to market. And indeed, the Alzheimer's drug has been shelved even though it could save countless lives. In the past 30 years, drug R&D has been going steadily up, but discoveries of major new classes of drugs have been declining. This drug discovery gap results from patent anticommons tragedy. Paradoxically, more biotech patent owners can mean fewer life-saving innovations. Drugs that should exist, could exist, are not being created.

The same dilemma appears in the copyright domain. 25 years ago, Harry Hampton, a filmmaker created *Eyes on the Prize*, a documentary about Dr. Martin Luther King. Hampton used video clips from 80 archives, photos from 90 archives, and about 120 songs. The film was broadcast in 1987, won prizes, and then disappeared into a vault – it could not be rebroadcast or viewed on DVD. The most important film account of the American civil rights movement went unseen for decades. Why? Because its creator couldn't identify the rights owners, couldn't bargain with them, and could not assemble the licenses he needed. This film is just one example among many thousands of innovative artistic products lost to copyright anticommons tragedy.





One last example: telecommunications. Probably the world's most underused natural resource is the air waves. In America, for example, over 90% is dead air because broadcast spectrum ownership is so fragmented and restricted. The US created thousands licenses are limited to obsolete uses and that cannot be easily sold. Assembling spectrum for high-speed national wireless broadband is costly and difficult. So, spectrum goes unused while American cell phone service lags far behind. A decade ago, the US was a global telecom leader and innovator. Now it's fallen almost out of the top 20, a self-inflicted loss that creates trillions in economic losses resulting from spectrum anticommons.

My goal in mentioning these puzzles is that you see that this free market paradox is nothing fancy. It is all around us, once you know to look. All these problems are really the same problem. Private ownership usually creates wealth. But too much ownership creates anticommons tragedy and blocks innovation.

There's been an unnoticed revolution in how the world creates wealth. A generation ago, you secured a patent and marketed your product, you copyrighted your music and sang your song; you subdivided land and built houses. But that is the old economy. Today, the leading edge of wealth creation requires assembly. Drugs, telecom, software, semiconductors, banking, anything high-tech demands the assembly of innumerable patents. And it is not just high tech that's changed – today, cutting edge film and music is about mashing up and remixing many bits of culture. Innovation has moved on, but we're stuck with ownership that's easy to fragment and hard to put back together.

**Conclusion** Rather than wasting time and money dealing with anticommons ownership, many of the world's most powerful businesses

simply redirect investment toward less challenging areas, towards extensions of existing products, and let innovation quietly slip away. But this debacle has a flip side. Assembling fragmented property is one of the great entrepreneurial and legal reform opportunities of our era. We can reclaim the wealth lost to anticommons tragedy through patent pools, collecting societies, and other property rights innovations. For example, in other scholarship, I show a simple legal tweak that would create a fair, efficient way to assemble land for economic development, a process that today is often abusive and corrupt.

Fixing anticommons tragedies will inevitably be a key challenge for our time. The first and most important step, though, is to name the problem and make it visible. With the right language, we can all spot links among ownership puzzles, and we can all come together to fix them. Nothing is inevitable about an anticommons. Every ownership dilemma results from choices we make, and can change, about how to control the resources we value most.

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## Policy Forum Report: Recovery from disaster and the future of depopulating areas

**Jin Sato**

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Since the 14<sup>th</sup> Biennial IASC conference was held in Japan, site of one of the largest natural disasters in living memory, we had a number of questions in mind in forming this policy forum: How did the 3.11 Tsunami affect the use of primary natural resources, particularly fishery resources in coastal Japan? What role did commons play in the long recovery process? There are many questions we must ask on the connection between one of the largest natural disasters in history, and the commons. The lessons derived from the answers to these questions should go beyond disaster context; disaster was an added, albeit tragic, trigger to the on-going trend of depopulation and resource under-use in rural areas, characteristics uncommon from where Western commons theories were derived. Disaster is, in a sense, a challenge to the commons theory.

The problem of an aging labor force, depopulation, and significant proportion of youth neither in education nor in employment are just a few examples why Japan can offer lessons to the late-comers. What do these “advanced” issues tell us about the management of commons, and more importantly what are the efforts done by the commoners on the ground? Unlike the typical image of a predominantly industrialized country, 70% of Japan is covered by forests and a significant number of people are engaged in primary industries such as fisheries and agriculture.



Japanese public figures waiting for Prince Akishino and for the Policy Forum to begin

Photo: Aylene Delaney

The conveners of this particular policy forum thought of focusing on the disaster affected regions of Tohoku to examine these questions since the people there experienced the problems of de-population most intensely due to the 3.11 Tsunami. The tsunami and the nuclear disaster had devastating effects on the rural communities that rely heavily on the primary industries such as agriculture, fisheries, and forestry. Even before 3.11, a continuing trend of aging and depopulation was present in most parts of rural Japan, particularly in fishery communities; 3.11 has dramatically accelerated this process. This general trend is not limited to Japan; the whole of Asia is aging.

The policy forum focused on the various responses to such crisis by the state and most importantly by the commoners themselves. The convener of the forum, Dr. Jin Sato of the University of Tokyo, made an opening speech by highlighting the problem of resource underuse as one of the key issues in countries which have entered into the post-development



period. Sato stressed that dominant literature on the commons have based their arguments on the assumption of over-use and completion whereas in regions experiencing depopulation and increased resource imports from abroad, this assumption requires a critical modification.



Photo: Alyne Delaney

Policy Panel Members. From left to right: Dr. Jin Sato, Mr. Suematsu, Mr. Mori, Mr. Hatakeyama, Mr. Kato, Mr. Kikawada.

With the effective chairmanship of Professor Mikitaro Shobayashi of Gakushuin Women's University, the forum opened up with the general introduction to the Tsunami and its effects on Japan by Mr. Mori from the Reconstruction Agency of the Japanese Government.

Three "commoners" offered their perspectives on the contemporary issues in the disaster-affected regions in Tohoku. Mr. Kizo Kikawada, the Director of Onagawa Temporary Container Housing, emphasized the importance of human resources and introduced his initiative of establishing a "Rainbow College" where business experts will be produced locally for the locals. His efforts have been focused on how to invite people to the area and how to encourage them to stay longer. Mr. Yoshimasa Kato the president of the Iwate prefectural Union of Consumers Co-operatives highlighted the importance of coop activities that relied on an established a network of people, a network which became crucial in the time of emergency. Makoto Hatakeyama, Executive Director, NGO Forest

Loves the Sea (*Mori wa umi no koibito*), claimed government enthusiasm for tall sea walls as the primary defense against future tsunami is nonsense. He also highlighted the potential of combining powers of commoners by linking strength of each stakeholder, such as lab experts at universities and local fishermen who knows the local conditions of the ocean, together to monitor the ecology of the region. The three presentations were followed by the comments from a senior official from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Mr. Hiroyuki Suematsu, Director General, of the Forest Policy Planning Department.

Despite the limited time for each presenter, the discussion session was lively and interactive. The audience seemed particularly moved by the fresh perspective of local people in their daily struggle to recover their lives. The auditorium was packed with over 800 people in the audience, half of which was comprised by local people. Thanks in part to the presence of His Excellency the Prince Akishinonomiya, the event was widely covered by local media. The next step is to theorize some of the insights posed in the lively and stimulating discussion; this is our task for the future.

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## Presidential Address: The challenges of the IASC, the promises of the IASC?

**Leticia Merino**

**Professor and Researcher**

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"We need to be able to understand complexity and not treat it as synonymous of chaos."

Elinor Ostrom

"A democratic environment does not solve knowledge problems by itself, but creates an environment where adaptive collective knowledge is possible."

Fikret Berkes

Welcome to the many of you who have traveled from far away to this mythical land of Japan. We are together believing in the value of learning from each other; searching opportunities to find common interests, experiences and create joint initiatives. Welcome to the newcomers to the IASC gatherings, to many young faces and longtime friends and colleagues, members of the "IASC community." My own perspective, my work and my professional and friendship networks have always been enriched from each of our conferences: from Bloomington, to Zimbabwe and Oaxaca; from Bali to Cheltenham and Hyderabad and now in the XIV IASC Conference, facing Mount Fuji.

Since the very beginning in the late 1980s, the IASC -then IASCP- acknowledged the value of diversity and cross fertilization among sectors, disciplines and regions of the world. This is our great strength and richness; it is also a source of many of our challenges. There are many barriers to be international, interdisciplinary, multi-method while working about different types of

resources. It is not easy to be academic innovative and rigorous, but also relevant for people working in the field. As academics we are not taught to learn from and with practitioners and communities, to work with them as close colleagues, not merely "case studies."

In the name of the International Association for the Study of the Commons I deeply thank Onshirin Regional Public Organization, the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature and Dr. Margaret McKean for their generous reception, for the many hours of work, travel and meetings they have invested in the XIV IASC Global Conference. I deeply thank all our Japanese and international fellows working on and in Japan for this unique opportunity to learn from this unique country: There is so much to be learned from Japan's long history and culture of the commons. Plenty of social creativity has been displayed in Japan during centuries for the use, governance, restoration, defense and creation of commons. From the traditional "irai" that through ages sustained the management and use of lands, forests and fisheries to contemporary experiences that include local efforts and volunteer civil society associations working on a wide variety of commons. Onshirin managing the Northern slope of Kitafuji is an emblematic example, but others include: collective restoration of the native *satoyama* forests, irrigation associations and fisher cooperatives, watershed districts; local markets practicing fair trade, and the powerful community responses to natural disasters as the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami. Stories of struggles in defense of local





commons are also abundant in Japan, from the resistance of members of forested "irai" against the appropriation of their commons by municipalities during the Meiji period, to contemporary resistance to the imposition of nuclear plants and destruction of coastlines based on corrupt interpretations of the public interest.

A powerful lesson from the vitality of Japanese commons is the value of shared culture, identities, trust and shared perception and knowledge of the commons. Sustainable governance, careful appropriation practices and sufficient provision efforts are based on social capital. It has been shown that Japan –together with the Scandinavian countries- is a country with one of the lowest effective levels of economic inequity in the World. For people like myself, coming from the global South, the viability, richness and potential of commons in Japan today have very empowering messages: that commons are not obsolete remnants from the past, or the only options left to the poor, but an important ingredient of true development, quality of life and sound environmental governance. This is indeed a rich opportunity for the IASC.

A month after Lin Ostrom received the Nobel Prize, I visited and interviewed her with a crew from TV-UNAM - the video is still available both on the IASC web page and in the Commons Digest. At the end of the interview I asked Lin if she thought the IASC was still relevant after twenty years of existence. She strongly stated it was because the IASC provided a unique "forum that disciplinary meetings do not do, where scholars working in a variety of common-pool and public goods, could meet and engage in serious cumulative discussion about how diverse institutions help or hinder the solutions of common resources." I also asked her if she thought the IASC would be relevant in the next 30 years. Positive and proactive as she was- her answer was: "Oh, for much longer than this."

The IASC has followed a rich and long road initiated by great minds and spirits, some of which are no longer physically present any more. As my friend and predecessor Ruth Meinzen-Dick stated in her presidential address at the XII IASC Global Conference five years ago, our association has many achievements of which to be proud. IASC scholars have widely shown that tragedies of commons managed by communities are far from being universal; that local citizens are fundamental for production, protection and governance of local common goods; including those resources that are nested into larger systems, even global systems; that involved and informed communities are critical for cultural and knowledge commons; that rights to use and control natural and/or cultural goods matter even more than formal property regimes.

These theoretical lessons have been acknowledged in certain circles (even with the Nobel Prize on Economics given to Elinor Ostrom), but the pace of their acceptance and understanding is in general too slow and insufficient. A large, and ongoing work remains to be done. Let me mention some of the frequent challenges I find we face as individual scholars and as the IASC:

- We know that knowledge and scientific evidence is required for better governance, but governance is rooted in power relations and power inequities that pervade our world. Scientists working on the commons need to work closely with civic society, while maintaining objectivity and rigor, avoiding partisan positions that would erode the value and credibility of scientific work and its potential policy impact. A difficult equilibrium that needs to be continuously redefined and rebalanced. The boundary between policy and politics is not always clear. Some IASC members, such as the practitioners getting the Elinor Ostrom Award (the Foundation for Ecological Security from India, the Grupo de Estudios Ambientales from Mexico and the Open Spaces Society from the UK) provide role



models on how theory and practice on commons governance can and should match and cross-fertilize, creating jointly relevant and useful knowledge. We need to work with them, learn from them, and build shared visions.

- We also need to be innovative and build new instruments to communicate and influence public opinion and policies affecting commons and communities in many different settings, beyond our small IASC community, reaching wider and diverse audiences; different sectors, different regions of the world. How can we effectively coordinate around this purpose, overcoming the important transaction costs implied in the maintenance of a living academic and civic international association? How can we create possibilities to learn, work and communicate together?

- The success and recognition of "Commons/Collective Action" theory is becoming a victim of its own success, misunderstandings of the commons and commons governance, ideological discourses based on poorly defined concepts, commons and communities proposed as universal panaceas; these are new challenges that may undermine the credibility of participatory governance systems, an even our own academic work. How can we build bridges of understanding with those who recognize "the commons" basically in terms of a social/political movement?

In the last decade, the framework of the commons has increasingly dealt with complexity, studying with different lens the varied relations among processes taking place in diverse scales, involving diverse dynamics. The work of Fikret Berkes, Oran Young, Tom Dedeurwardee, Marco Janssen, Lin Ostrom herself and other IASC scholars in this direction has an enormous added value as it provides new theoretical and research questions, inputs and frameworks to face the dramatic contemporary challenges of the global commons, that more frequent than not



Photo: Simone Buratti

Leticia Merino, President of the IASC

affect the local commons with whom we traditionally work. The inter-connectedness of many processes taking place in distant scenarios is increasingly evident, but challenging to understand and address in its full complexity. Poteete, Janssen and Ostrom (2011) propose that complex governance systems are required to address complex socio-ecological changes and challenges. Thinking about the IASC, I would add that complex socio-ecological challenges demand adaptive and complex knowledge production practices and schemes, learning and communication institutions and practices. Would we be able as IASC to build in this direction?

In order to do so, let me try to apply some of the learning acquired through the study of others to our own practice and to our own commons: the IASC, our shared production, our shared history, our social and human capital, our shared potential. Do not worry I am not using the eight design principles, the three attributes of the resources and the six attributes user groups that foster institutional



robustness (Ostrom. 1991, 1998) as a check list, applying each of them to the analysis of the IASC. I only try to reflect on some of our current dilemmas and potential through some of - what I see- as key lessons from collective action research, theory and practice.

From Foucault to Hess and Ostrom knowledge is regarded as a collective venture. Poteete, Janssen and Ostrom specify that knowledge on the commons is necessarily an outcome of collective efforts. Collective action, networks of shared understanding and inter-exchange, based on norms, rules, trust and reciprocity are fundamental for academic initiatives on the commons. But as we fully know, collective action is not a given, and incentives for collective action are scarce in academia. Trust and reciprocity are fundamental to overcome social dilemmas develop through "working together." Collective action within the IASC is costly, hard to build and maintain, so we need to develop ways to create incentives, treating it as one of our main assets.

Knowledge on the Commons, the good we produce, communicate and store, is in itself a public good; as a public good it faces provision problems, people can access most of our "knowledge products" without bearing the costs involved in its production and maintenance. The social value of knowledge comes to a large extent from its nature as a public good: it is a good that enriches from being accessed and used, whose value increases when it is shared and applied, but erodes when it is not used or is misused. Provision to enable knowledge production and exchange on one side, and promotion of the use of knowledge are challenges related with the social relevance of the knowledge in question. They are also inter-related challenges. The "access and use" of our "knowledge goods" by different actors should be a priority for the IASC, in order to do so, we need to enlarge our partnerships and cooperative efforts. Please join us in our different initiatives, propose new initiatives,

use and own the IASC.

The third principle for the design of robust institutions in Ostrom's scheme, the need for the "rules of the game" to be based on collective choice, is a critical one as it relates to democracy, trust and legitimacy. I wonder if time has come to create a "members task force" involved in the revision of our governance system and our working strategy, taking into account the values of adaptive knowledge and poly-centricity. This task clearly goes far beyond the capacities of a person or a group; it requires the involvement of the wider community.

The IASC is an increasingly complex community, heterogeneous in terms of interests, ages, languages and backgrounds, a "community of communities." The initiatives and governance of the IASC today require nestedness (perhaps the least frequent and least understood of "Ostrom design principles"). While maintaining our "global commons" we need to foster particular regional and "thematic" communities of interest. This has already happened as a result of initiatives coming from the membership. During the last years aside of the Global meetings, the IASC has held nine regional meetings: in Europe, Africa, North America and Asia. Hopefully one will take place soon in Latin America. In 2012 the community working on "New Commons," organized the first and important IASC thematic meeting on Knowledge Commons, this group is planning a second similar thematic meeting. We need to work more in this direction, developing new schemes and institutional design.

In 2010 Lin wrote a note for the annual IASC membership drive, her reflection was thus: the IASC is now itself a "global commons" committed to the production and dissemination of knowledge, which is a "public good." As members we face a social dilemma in keeping IASC. In summary I would add to Lin's reflection that the social dilemmas we confront,



our challenges, are not only related to funding, but centrally with relevance, decentralization and governance. They are inter-related dilemmas that can only be overcome by continuously collective effort. This is for me a way to honor Lin's memory as well as the founders of IASC whose work and persevering commitment have sustained our association along this road of over decades.

Lin Ostrom's legacy is rich and wide in not only academic, but also in human terms. She was a strong believer and a practitioner of egalitarian relationships, of trust and reciprocity, of respectful listening. She repeatedly warned against the dangers of authoritarian practices and panaceas. But she was also very capable to make dreams -collective utopias versus imposed panaceas- come true through collective action. The Workshop of Political Theory and Policy Analysis (now renamed Vincent and Elinor Ostrom Workshop) is an example of the reach of carefully sustained collective action, wise and generous leadership. The IASC is also an achievement of the group who created the association more than twenty years ago, a result of their innovative vision and sustained commitment.

I hope for a common future that gives the IASC the chance to keep on building knowledge on the commons, for the commons and commoners, to find ways to understand and foster human capacity for trust and reciprocity, fundamental to address many of the challenges our planet and our societies face today. May the richness of Japan's common culture and the beauty of the sacred Fuji-san inspire us to work and have fun together, based on the goal to contribute to a better world.

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## Recent Publications

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## Announcements

**Send Letters and Announcements to Alyne Delaney, Editor, Commons Digest, Innovative Fisheries Management, Aalborg University, Skibbrogade 5, Aalborg 9000, Denmark. [ad@ifm.aau.dk](mailto:ad@ifm.aau.dk) Tel: +45 99 40 36 94**

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Renew your membership or join the association to be part of our vibrant community. Take a look at the groups of CommonsNet, the exclusive platform for the IASC members: <https://membership.iasc-commons.org/og>

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### Be part of the IASC!

IASC is itself a commons, and depends on its membership dues for many of the critical activities it undertakes. Become a member! <https://membership.iasc-commons.org/>

Suscribe to the newsletter! Tell a friend! The newsletter is the easiest way to receive all the news about the association Click here to sign up, or contact us at [iasc@iasc-commons.org](mailto:iasc@iasc-commons.org) to post announcements - conferences, job positions, etc. - and reach the +3K members of our community: <https://membership.iasc-commons.org/civCRM/profile/create?gid=12&reset=1>

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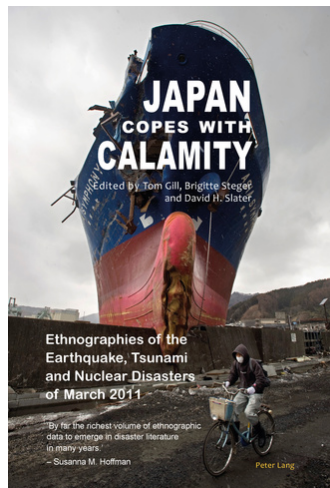
### IASC Bylaws: vote to proposed amendments.

The IASC is going to invite its members to vote for the proposed amendments to the association's bylaws as discussed and elaborate by the IASC Council. Members in good standing position only will receive an e-mail to express their opinion. The procedure will take place through an on-line platform.



## BOOK ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Japan Copes with Calamity, a new ethnographic book on the events of 2011



Japan Copes with Calamity:

Ethnographies of the Earthquake, Tsunami and Nuclear Disasters of 2011 is the new book published by Peter Lang Press and edited by Tom Gill (Professor of Social Anthropology, Meiji Gakuin University), Brigitte Steger (Senior

Lecturer in Modern Japanese Studies, University of Cambridge) and David H. Slater (Associate Professor at Sophia University in Tokyo).

This is the first collection of ethnographies in English on the Japanese communities affected by the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami of March, 2011 and the ensuing crisis at the Fukushima nuclear power plant. Interested Scholars, Students and Practitioners will find articles by Nathan J. Peterson, Johannes Wilhelm, Alyne Delaney, David McNeill and Ikeda Yoko, among other experienced researchers who explore the struggles faced by affected communities since the events of March 2011: from the sudden loss of life from the tsunami to the reconstruction of the fishing industry and campaigning to obtain compensations by the state and the nuclear industry.

## POSITION ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Mary Derrickson McCurdy Visiting Scholar At The Duke University Marine Laboratory, Beaufort, NC

Recharge while on sabbatical at the Duke Marine Laboratory. The Nicholas School of the

Environment at Duke University invites you to apply to become the Mary Derrickson McCurdy Visiting Scholar resident at the Marine Laboratory in Beaufort, on the North Carolina coast. The McCurdy Scholar will engage in the intellectual life of the Marine Laboratory, including research, teaching, and mentoring in an intimate world-class multidisciplinary research and teaching environment. Our ideal candidate for the position is a gregarious natural or social science scholar in the field of Ocean Science, broadly construed. We strive to understand environmental processes and human behavior broadly framed (e.g., social-ecological systems, human dimensions of natural resource management, human-environment interactions). We are particularly interested in individuals with insights or new perspectives on conservation and enhancement of the environment and its natural resources and especially with clear or potential applications to society. The McCurdy Scholar carries an appointment as Visiting Research Professor appropriate to the rank of the successful applicant. The term of the appointment is for one or two semesters (preferably the nine-month academic year), with the possibility of expansion to one full year. The appointment includes funds that may be used to augment salary, offset living expenses and enable research.

Interested individuals should submit a single file with a cover letter, curriculum vitae, summary of research interests, reprints of three recent papers and names of three references. Send to:

Belinda Williford  
Re: Mcurdy Search  
bbw[at]duke.edu

The search committee will begin reviewing applications on January 15, 2014.

The search will remain open until the position is filled.

Duke University is an Affirmative Action/ Equal Opportunity Employer.



## **Research Assistants graduate program in the Department of Ecosystem Science & Management, Texas A&M University**

Prof. Forrest Fleischman is recruiting masters and/or PhD students to work as research assistants on several projects related to forest policy, administrative decision-making, and the influence of institutions on human behaviour, in the graduate program in the Department of Ecosystem Science & Management in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Texas A&M University.

Funding is available beginning August 2014, and may cover up to three years of study - potentially enough to complete a masters degree or to the initial requirements of a PhD up to candidacy (additional funding for the writing of a doctoral dissertation may be available pending future grants). Student funding will be provided through a combination of research and teaching assistantships, and will be sufficient to cover tuition fees and a basic cost of living.

To apply for these positions, please consult the details of the application process at: <http://forrestfleischman.weebly.com/potential-graduate-students.html>. The website also contains much more detail about the research projects & the programs at Texas A&M. Applications are due January 1st.

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## **Assistant/Associate Professor in Human Dimensions of the Environment**

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

The Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (<http://nres.illinois.edu/>) seeks an Assistant or Associate Professor in human dimensions of the environment, expected to begin August 16, 2014. Qualified applicants will have expertise in applying theories, concepts, and

methods from the social and behavioral sciences to the study of environmental and natural resource issues and policies. A Ph.D. and substantive research in the social sciences is required. Potential disciplines include sociology, geography, anthropology, political science, or psychology. For full consideration all requested application information must be received by December 16, 2013. Please visit <http://go.illinois.edu/F1300162> to view the complete position announcement and application instructions. Illinois is an AA/EOE [www.inclusiveillinois.illinois.edu](http://www.inclusiveillinois.illinois.edu)