

Commons glossary

Acequias: A centuries old cooperative irrigation system in New Mexico Hispanic communities. Acequias refer both to the irrigation ditches and the community of farmers organized around them.

Biopiracy: The appropriation and privatization of genes, plants and other biological resources in developing countries by multinational corporations.

Cap-and-trade system: A market-based system of environmental regulation in which companies buy and sell a limited number of permits to pollute.

Cap-and-dividend: A commons-based system of environmental regulation in which companies pay for pollution permits, and the proceeds are given back to citizens on an equal basis.

Capitalism 3.0: An evolution of capitalism, in which the economy's operating system is redesigned to protect the commons. Taken from the title of a book by entrepreneur Peter Barnes.

Commodification: When non-commercial goods or services are converted into a commodity for sale.

Commons: What we share. Creations of both nature and society that belong to all of us equally, and should be preserved and maintained for future generations.

Commons paradigm: A worldview in which reclaiming and expanding the commons is central to the workings of society. The goal is to assure the vitality of various commons, which in turn will boost economic, social, scientific and cultural advancement.

Commoners: In modern use, the people who use a particular commons;

especially those dedicated to reclaiming and restoring the commons.

Commoning: A verb popularized by historian Peter Linebaugh to describe the social practices used by commoners in the course of managing shared resources and reclaiming the commons.

Commons-based society: A society whose economy, political culture and community life revolve around promoting a diverse variety of commons institutions and the basic principles of the commons. There is an important role for a flourishing economic market in a commons-based society, but its value is not treated as more important than the value of healthy commons.

Commons-based solutions: Distinctive innovations and policies that remedy contemporary problems by helping people manage resources cooperatively and sustainably.

Creative Commons: A nonprofit organization based in San Francisco that provides a series of free, public licenses that allow copyright holders to make their creative works legally available for copying, sharing and re-use.

Enclose: To convert a commonly shared resource into private property. The term derives from the notorious enclosure movement in English history in which the landed gentry seized land used collectively by village commoners. (Similar to privatize, below)

Linux: A highly popular open-source computer operating system.

Market paradigm: A worldview that holds up the workings of the marketplace not simply as an efficient economic tool, but as a moral code dictating how all elements of society should operate. The paradigm holds that the quest for profit should dictate all human endeavors from education to health care to the arts.

Market-based society: A society where most decision making is driven by the rigid dictates of the economic marketplace.

Net neutrality: A public policy principle for the Internet that assures open, non-discriminatory access for all users.

Open source: A type of software developed by volunteers and made widely available to the public at little or no cost.

Peer production: A new mode of economic and cultural production on the Internet that enables large numbers of people to collaborate in the production and maintenance of shared information resources. Prominent examples include free software, Wikipedia, and the Flickr photo-sharing website.

Privatize: When a commons or other public service or asset becomes private property. (Similar to enclose, above) This has been a key plank of libertarian and right-wing political activists over the past 30 years, who have been successful at dismantling government services or handing them over to private interests in many nations.

Public assets: Elements of the commons that are publicly owned and usually managed by a government body:* parks, water utilities, public transit, libraries, schools, streets, etc.

Public domain: A body of creative and cultural works that are freely available for anyone to use, most often because the term of copyright protection for them has expired.

Public spaces: Places that are open to everyone, and often play a central role in the social and public life of a community.

Public trust doctrine: A legal principle dating back to Roman law which says that the state holds certain resources in trust for its citizens, prohibiting any transfer of those resources to private interests.

Tragedy of the commons: A term popularized by ecologist Garrett Hardin in 1968 to describe how exploitation and ruin of commonly shared resources is inevitable. Hardin later conceded he was actually describing the tragedy of an unmanaged commons.

Trust: A legal entity created to manage assets on behalf of beneficiaries. This can be a useful tool in preserving and managing commons outside the realm of government.

Water Commons: A longstanding ethic that water is no one's private

property; it rightfully belongs to all of humanity and the earth and needs to be managed accordingly.

Wiki: A type of Web-based software that enables any number of people to contribute and edit a shared body of information and collaborate in its evolution. The term “wiki” is a Hawaiian word for “quick.”

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