

The Commons – Financing the Future

Paris, Thursday, April 13, 2006

The purpose of this note is to seek ideas and leads from a small circle of old friends and long time colleagues for ways to finance the work of The Commons over the coming decade. For this to be a useful exercise, I will have first to remind you of what The Commons is all about, the process behind it, and ways in which we might possibly be even more concrete and useful in the future in our work to advance the agenda of sustainable development and social justice world-wide.

One considerable advantage of what follows is that it is about not just one more plan or a proposal, but something that actually exists, does a job, and can be scrutinized, tasked and judged on the basis of its accomplishments (and shortcomings) of the last several decades. It is thus no pig in a poke. (For full information on current projects, programs and actions, please go to www.ecoplan.org. It's just about all there)

The goals of this exercise are basically three: First (a) to verify with you if we have something that is going to be worth continuing. And, if so then (b) to gather our collective thoughts on how might this be improved, and finally (c) financed and supported in the years directly ahead.

I have tried to lay this out so that you can easily click to more detail if you see something that may particularly interest you. The whole thing one-clicks into the key references on the site. For some additional quick personal background you might also want to have a look at a interview and a bit of give and take with young readers that appeared in the e-journal Grist last summer: <http://www.grist.org/comments/interactivist/2005/06/06/britton/index.html>

If you have any ideas or want to talk about any of this, my full coordinates follow. Skype, videoconferencing are easily available from here if useful for you.

Off we go.

Eric

P.S. There is something in this that is flaunting and self-promoting in ways that my Mississippi heritage cringes at a bit, but I guess that is part of the game. (So I do it, but I don't have to like it. ;-)

The Commons: Open Society Sustainability Initiative www.ecoplan.org
Le Frene, 8/10 rue Joseph Bara 75006 Paris, France
Tel: +331 4326 1323 Skype: ericbritton
E: secretariat@ecoplan.org Backup: febritton@gmail.com

EcoPlan International Innovation consultancy/advisory
New Ways to Work in an Information Society: <http://www.xWork.org>
9440 Readcrest Drive Beverly Hills, CA 90210
T. +1 310 601-8468 E: eric.britton@ecoplan.org Skype: xWork-on-line

The Commons: Seeking out and supporting new sustainability concepts for business, entrepreneurs, activists, community groups, and government; a thorn in the side of hesitant administrators and politicians; and through our joint efforts, energy and personal choices, placing them and ourselves firmly on the path to a more sustainable and more just society.

0. Three hundred words

1. The objective of this document is to seek ideas, criticism, reactions, guidelines and support for a program to finance the future work of The Commons: Open Society Sustainability Initiative
2. The Commons – a collaborative, international, and largely self-organizing program that flexibly creates and supports (largely) self-organized working groups and projects to advance the agendas of very specific parts of the challenge of sustainable development and social justice – has been around and doing its job for several decades now. The present state of the work and accomplishment of the program can be seen on the main website at www.ecoplan.org.
3. The work of The Commons is characterized by clusters of very focused project groups, supported in each case by extensive international expert networks. There are more than twenty such focus programs, of which a dozen currently very active. Several thousand experts from more than fifty countries on all continents participate in the various fora and networks.
4. One common strategic theme unites all of these efforts. Each program focuses strictly on identifying and supporting *near-term actions and projects*, which can be brought on line and show measurable results with at most a two-four year period. That is what we do here.
5. Until now The Commons has been fully financed by its founder and chair, Eric Britton – the author of this note -- but it is now necessary to secure a more structured financial base. We believe that the achievements of The Commons demonstrate that this is a process that is well worth continuing, expanding and improving. Three broad financing and work packages are set out here, of which the smallest aims at securing minimal financing for continuation at ca. \$10k/month. Two other more ambitious packages are also sketched out here.

Dossier contents:

| | |
|--|----|
| 0. Three hundred words | 2 |
| 1. Introduction | 3 |
| What is The Commons..... | 4 |
| What set's us a bit apart from the rest..... | 4 |
| Programs, Projects..... | 6 |
| Actions..... | 8 |
| An example of how it works (Carsharing)..... | 10 |
| And the "Message to Europe" – www.eurocarshare.org | 11 |
| 2. Financing the Future | 12 |
| A. Continue Core Program: | 12 |
| B. Expanded Program: | 12 |
| C. A Major Open Society Sustainability Initiative: | 12 |
| 3. How to Finance? Options? | 13 |
| Foundations: | 13 |
| Industrial/Financial sponsorship: | 13 |
| Creation of a "Friends of The Commons" Club: | 14 |
| Sell working papers and site access via credit cards/subscriptions: | 14 |
| Specific Program Finance: | 14 |
| 4. Next Steps | 15 |
| Tasks that need doing: | 16 |
| A short history of my personal path to The Commons:..... | 17 |

1. Introduction

The Commons is an independent, well structured, wide open, peripatetic, human, hot blooded, and not least highly flexible world-wide peer network, activist and support program supported by low cost widely available information and communications technologies and concerned with improving our understanding and control of technology as it impacts on us all, ordinary people in our daily lives. Our shared goal is to seek out and advance robust new sustainability concepts for business, entrepreneurs, activists, community groups, and government; to serve as a thorn in the side of hesitant administrators, politicians and businessmen in denial; and through our joint efforts, energy and personal choices, placing them and ourselves firmly on the path to a more sustainable and more just society.

The Commons was created to serve as a first-stop shop for concerned citizens, researchers, students, policy makers, entrepreneurs, investors or social activists interested in quickly getting a feel for world sustainability issues, views and developments from an unbiased critical perspective. We invite diversity of views, cognitive dissonance and complex thinking about these complex issues which are loaded with internal contradictions and major divergences of views and priorities.

The core of The Commons is the creation and support of a certain number of clusters of focused international issue and peer support programs, in a form which we call *self-organizing collaborative networks*. After a first decade of working in the old networking model (conferences, countless, research contracts for sponsors, plane trips, joint projects, print reports, exchanges of papers, fields trips, visits), by the early eighties we were already setting up our first email networks and newsgroups to support our peer group exchanges, which by the end of the decade really started taking form. with the appearance of the Web, our first programs started appearing there. You can see how it works if you go to the current website at <http://www.ecoplan.org> and from there branch out to examine the other focused programs and extensions.

The Commons has always been a early and we think rather effective user of leading edge low-cost IP technologies. In addition to being an early internet and web player, we started using videoconferencing in support of our work as early as 1993, and today work with a collection of voice, videoconferencing and group work tools which allow us not only to work far more effectively, but also to reduce our waste of resources and the negative environmental impacts that go with this profligacy..

Until now, the work of The Commons and all these programs have been entirely financed through the consulting and advisory work of a single person, its founder Eric Britton. This document has been prepared as the first step in a search for obtaining the financial support that will now be needed if all this is to continue and, hopefully, be improved.

Now on to some background on The Commons and our proposal for the future. .

The Commons – Financing the Future: 2006-2015

An independent platform for new thinking & world-wide collaborative problem solving

"The significant problems we face cannot be solved by the same level of thinking that created them."

-- Albert Einstein

What is The Commons

Collaboration and Networking: The Soul of The Commons

A common thread in all our work and investigations is the potential for using technology positively to break the sustainability impasse that is currently the state of play in most places. The emphasis throughout is in laying the groundwork for action in terms of concrete policies and practices that can advance the sustainability and social justice agenda in your company, city, country, region . . . or in your own life and that of your family. Which after all is where sustainability must start.

We set as our goal many years ago to create an independent interactive platform for new thinking and collaborative problem-solving to take on the arduous challenges of sustainable development and social justice -- a platform mediated by low cost IP technologies, made freely available to all, based on open networking and aggressive international outreach, supporting structured information exchanges and collaborative peer action programs on matters which are of main concern to us.

Two-four year action focus:

If any one thing distinguishes us from the rest, it is this: The Commons focuses on programs and measures that can obtain visible, measurable sustainability impacts within this very short term horizon. It is not that we neglect the importance of longer term thinking and overarching strategies for these longer term trends and goals - but that we think that the short term is too critical to be neglected. The search is thus on for short term measures that open the way for more ambitious and far reaching longer term strategies and structures.

What set's us a bit apart from the rest

Before I go on to introduce The Commons and how it works – something which you can check out for yourself with a visit to the main website at www.ecoplan.org, and from there exploring the programs and your areas of eventual interest – I would like to see if I can first quickly run down the list of some of the things that in my view perhaps distinguish all this from the huge number of programs and groups that currently populate the internet and beyond.

For starters, I would like to suggest that our work and contributions over these years demonstrates total independence of view, high relevance, quality, broad usefulness, and high commitment to the long term. (As one of our Indian colleagues said about his cooperation with the Kyoto World Cities Challenge “You and we are in this for the long slog”. And right he is)

Beyond this while the bottom line of all our work is to change policy and practice, we entirely reject the usual polarizing political view points and vocabulary. It is our firm believe that sustainable development and social justice should not be allowed to become political footballs in anyone's game. Likewise, we have and wish no financial or industrial affiliations or linkages that might even surreptitiously undermine our freedom of commitment.

We hew to a world perspective, which means that we are consistently cross-cultural, polyglot when possible, and try our best not to oversteer the discussions and projects – by which I mean that we are indeed really committed to the storing learning curves which lie at the heart the kind of self

organizing collaborative networks that in our view show the way to problem solving in the complex circumstances that we confront in this new century.

We utterly reject the old North-to-South model of social and economic organization that was the watchword of the 20th century and which in fact constitutes the soul of our present disorder. That kind of approach is totally dead in the water, and anyone who thinks not, will stay mired in the past. Punto!

Moreover, we feel that the old century made a huge mistake in failing to bring in the points of view of women in all aspects of social and economic policy, and that strong female leadership and participation is the vital keystone for a better world. Likewise, we are strongly committed to involving young people in our projects and discussions, and not just as passive observers.

We reserve the right to be prickly and to laugh at both bad and good ideas, including not least our own. If we approach our challenges like somber silver-haired politicians, we have nothing to add. Likewise, we think it important to be peripatetic, personal, and perhaps above all demonstrate a capacity to listen, learn and change our orientation and ideas when better ones come up on the screen. By the same token, however we think it important to stay on focus. Which if you look further here you will see that we do.

- Do not seek to create warm consensus – comfort zones – get frankly uncomfortable
- Process oriented
- Post modern (Okay, but do I have to explain what I mean by modern?)
- Capable of staying on focus
- Has demonstrated what it can do (no pig in a poke)
- Peer support – for outstanding projects
- Last minute help for ...
- Media
- Eclectic
- Personal
- Fair
- Balance
- Instinctual
- Collaborative
- Able to learn
- Youth – and preparing the next generations of leadership (to do better than our sad mess)
- Better understanding and management of technological (and organizational) change as it impacts on people in their day to day lives
- Cognitive dissonance
- Learning systems
- Targeted results (within political period)
- Accomplishments and short-comings
- Future models
- Easy targets?
- Support – different forms

Programs, Projects

Here you will find short introductory descriptions to some of the programs, projects and actions which are getting the bulk of our current attention. With of course the support of the extensive international peer networks that we have meticulously built up and maintained over the last several decades of continuing presence and collaborative work on these issues. For more detail in each case, you are invited to click to the indicated URL.

? **The New Mobility Agenda** - <http://www.newmobility.org>

Unconstrained by bureaucracy, economic interests or schedules, the New Mobility Agenda was launched in 1988 as an open international platform for critical discussion, exchanges of materials and views, and diverse forms of cross-border collaboration on the challenging, necessarily conflicted topic of "sustainable transportation and social justice". The Agenda is organized into a steadily evolving constellation of semi-self-contained, informal international partnership projects, each of which can be usefully consulted either on its own or in parallel with the more general flow of information and materials that are being developed within this Agenda site itself. For some context on this, check it out in the Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Mobility_Agenda

? **The Gender, Equity and Transport Forum** – <http://www.gatnet.net/>

This is an enormously rich area of enquiry for anyone who cares deeply about sustainable development and social justice. This first set of projects are looking into it from the perspective of transportation decisions and practices on the one hand, and ICT on the other. And if you understand that there are significant daily life differences between men and women, and that it is important to recognize them and take them into account in our policy and investment decisions, then this is an exercise that you may not wish to miss. Prepare to be surprised about what you see and learn from this.

? **The Kyoto 20/20 Emergency Program** - www.kyotocities.org

On the day the treaty entered international law, we set out to create an international expert platform in an attempt to encourage cities around the world to start to look at new mobility ideas and new solutions at a time when the old ones are no longer doing the job. More than one hundred of the world's leading sustainability thinkers and practitioners are participating in this collaborative effort. This is a pretty impressive list, which you can click to here if you wish to have a clear idea of the kinds of people who believe we are on the right track and are ready to put their names and reputations to the cause. - <http://www.ecoplan.org/kyoto/challenge/panel.htm>

? **The Land/Value Capture Initiative** – www.landcafe.org

When our public servants invest our hard earned taxpayer dollars in investments that improve our communities and increase the value of real estate in the impacted areas, some or all of this increment should be recouped in order to fund much needed public services. This is easy to say but hard to do. This is the focus of the lively informed discussion underway here at the Land Café, where more than one hundred of the leasing thinkers and authorities on these matters get together daily to swap information and views..

? **xWork: New Ways to Work in an Information Society** <http://www.xwork.org>

A 21st century group work platform, mediated by a steadily expanding series of electronic and communications tools, and specifically targeted to encourage and support alternative thinking and hands-on experimentation in the fast-changing, often troubled and seriously under-explored new world of work. Attention to ways in which work/technology interface. (Program under review.)

? **World Carshare Consortium** – <http://worldcarshare.com>

Carsharing - a new way to own and use a car . Why are we supporting a concept that may to some appear to be so off-beat and marginal as carsharing? Simple! We think it's a great, sustainable, practical mobility concept whose time has come: the missing link in the world's new sustainable transport system. 2005 is the first year of the new carsharing era. Consider it for your city today! Start here with the world's best source of information, insight and contacts

? **World CarFree Days Collaborative** – <http://worldcarfreeday.com>

The basic idea is very simple: citizens and local government get together and decide to take most of the cars off the roads of their city or neighborhood for a day, and invite everybody to look, learn and talk publicly about it, with each other, their elected officials, the planners and the media. Cities around the world are beginning to work with this ice-breaking sustainability approach. It's not research or theory; it is policy and practice. But proper preparations and follow-up are critical for success. WC/FD offers information, discussion space and an open forum for ideas, exchange and collaboration for people who care about sustainable transport and aren't afraid to work at it.

? **Children on the Move!**

An open program intending to provide anyone anywhere in the world who cares about these things a convenient place to come together to share and develop ideas, materials and collaborative actions on matters involving children and the ways in which they can and could move around in our communities in their daily lives. And how we can perhaps work with them to help them better understand and link their personal mobility practices to the broader challenges of sustainable development and full lives. (Program under review.)

? **The Journal of World Transport Policy and Practice**

The only practically-oriented journal dealing with the major issues in a field of international concern, the *Journal of World Transport Policy and Practice* was founded in 1995 in an attempt to provide scholars, researchers, policy makers and ordinary smart people concerned with the marked unsustainability of our current transport arrangements with a high-quality, independent medium for the presentation of original and creative ideas in world transport.

Actions

? **“Message to Europe”** – www.eurocarshare.org

This is we think a rather interesting project, because it shows how the high energy, networking style and focus group expertise can be put to work in a way and within a time frame that defies the manner in which most programs and groups would need to get results. Briefly: The story opens with the success of a meeting here at the French Senate in which we had a roll, aimed at creating a legal framework for carsharing in France. And with it one more spin-off program from The Commons, the French language Forum International de l'Autopartage.

? **Sustainability Prize Nominations** – www.ecoplan.org

This year once again we have nominated two unusual innovators who are leading the way to a better world for this year's World Technology Prize for the Environment. Both are working - one starting in the Netherlands and the other in Seoul Korea - with an approach that we are calling Regenerative Technology. If you go to The Commons site, you will see the link and there see that case for Hans Monderman and the Mayor of Seoul.

? **The Stockholm Partnerships for Sustainable Cities** –

http://www.partnerships.stockholm.se/jury_index.html

The vision of *the Stockholm Partnerships for Sustainable Cities* is to gather comprehensive knowledge and information on the most innovative and inspiring sustainability projects from all over the world in a grand exposure of urban solutions and to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and technology from these initiatives. The *Stockholm Partnerships* has as its mission to facilitate for those who represent national or local governments, industry, non-governmental organizations, academia, media, finance institutions, international organizations, etc. to share knowledge and experience in the field of applied technology and management.

? **The Commons World-Wide Sustainability Resource Inventory** –

The inventory identifies more than six hundred international groups and programs taking a variety of different angles in addressing the challenges at hand: sustainable development and social justice, climate change, environmental activism, public health, city planning and land use, pricing and economic instruments, coalition building, governance, citizen and user groups, behavioral psychology, IT innovations, finance and taxation, legal aspects, politics, media (new and "old") and public awareness programs (think tobacco and AIDS), and yes!, transportation, mobility, and access in a wide variety of forms. It is, you have to admit, a very impressive group, and certainly if we can find ways of engaging and supporting them in the drive to more sustainable cities, real progress can be envisaged.

? **Working with the Wikipedia** – <http://ecoplan.org/wtpp/general/wikipedia.htm>

A major new information resource for journalists, scholars, students and policy advisors. This is the latest wrinkle in our continuing long term action here at The Commons to find ways to build up an informal international expert consortium to "put our brains" together on our self-selected sustainability targets, for the benefit of all in a world in which old ideas and old and bad practices

die hard. It's called a "Wikipedia" -- a free-content, collaborative, internet-based encyclopedia, made up of individual (but interconnected) entries

“Benchmark definitions” for who . . .

Because even though the concept has been around for more than a decade, it is still not very well known nor understood. We would thus like to invite you to help provide a clear public statement of what it is and how it works. The instrument: the current listing in the Wikipedia. A major information resource for journalists, scholars, students and policy advisors.

Coop blogs – examples??

-
- Prizes – ours
- Rewarding initiative
- One hundred people who think this is a great idea
- EuroCarshare
- WB review

Other program? List?

Eb 'advisory and support work

And you can never tell where the next good idea is going to come from!

Some needs:

- financial assistance
- thoughtful guidance??
- Critical feedback on . . .
- Assistance and guidance to improve, deepen and extend IP interface

Stuff we need to do (better)

- sustainability resource inventory
- eb want to help guide, lead other similar groups, programs (but only where he can make a difference)

Media

Tony Hiss (Orton Foundations)

An example of how it works (Carsharing)

One of possibly the more interesting wrinkles of the programs under The Commons is the way in which they link, cluster and overlap to provide what we believe to be necessary context and perspective for policy and decision purposes. Let's take one example, the concept and practice of carsharing, which in a nutshell boils down to arrangements whereby people instead of owning their cars belong to a group program which provides them with a vehicle when they need it. Now carsharing is obviously not going to work for everybody in all circumstances, but if you live in a city and travel less than say ten thousand kilometers a year, well it could work for you. There are, incidentally, more than six hundred cities where you can carshare today, with new systems now coming on line every week. Even in the United States.

Now carsharing is clearly not a tool which is all by itself going to deal with all our problems of unsustainability or even the worst of our prevailing transportation arrangements. It is but one of a large number of innovations and new practices that are going to be required. We call it a "two percent solution" which of course suggests that there is 98% of the problem that we still need to deal with in some way.

And thus many years ago when we set up the World Carshare Consortium – which you can see at <http://worldcarshare.com> – we needed to put it into its broader context. In fact if we take this up to date we will see that World Carshare is in fact in the middle of a cluster of programs, of which our contributions include:

1. The Commons: Open Society Sustainability Initiative at [Www.ecoplan.org](http://www.ecoplan.org)
2. New Mobility Agenda at <http://www.newmobility.org>
3. World Carshare Consortium at <http://worldcarshare.com>
4. EuroCarshare at www.eurocarshare.org
5. Forum International de l'Autopartage at <http://www.ecoplan.org/autopartage>

The World Carshare site provides, as you can see for yourself, a considerable cluster of both historical, planning tools, and up to date information, and in addition includes its own eForum, which we call the Idea Factory. The Factory currently has close to four hundred registered users and is regularly visited by more than a thousand others. Our coverage of leading edge expertise in this sector is virtually universal.

And as you can see, in the case of carsharing, not only do we continuously work to ensure that it is kept in its full policy context, via the New Mobility Agenda, but also that when as needed and no one else picks up on the challenge, we take it down to more narrow geographic focused: in the case EuroCarshare and the new program to support carsharing in France.

Bottom line: From a broader sustainability perspective carsharing is an innovation that can do a small but important job. But even more, as it succeeds in place after place, it shows the way for other pattern-breaking innovations that are needed. Nothing helps more than success. No matter how small.

And the “Message to Europe” – www.eurocarshare.org

This is we think a rather interesting and in many ways typical Commons project, because it shows very specifically how the high energy, networking style and focus group expertise can be put to work in a way and within a time frame that defies the manner in which most programs and groups would need to get results.

What you have here is a collaborative project that has spun off almost by itself (Self-Organizing Collaborative Network again) from the long cycle of activity that got started under the New Mobility Agenda years ago when we decided to concentrate as well on the carsharing concept as a “nose of the camel under the tent” practical, implementable action which can serve as an example of a successful sustainable mobility initiative (at a time when most of the world is entirely oblivious to anything that might actually make a difference. . . in this icy and/or on this planet.)

Briefly: The immediate story opens with the success of a meeting here at the French Senate in which we had a significant organizing role, aimed at bringing together in one place for a half day session in order to review, discuss and eventually create a legal framework for carsharing in France. And with it one more spin-off program from The Commons, the French language Forum International de l'Autopartage, which is now under development at <http://www.ecoplan.org/autopartage> and from which full information on both the Senat meeting and the proposed new Law are now available.

DRAFT

2. Financing the Future

There are basically three rough levels of funding which we should now like to explore to see how we might best work through this: The first and least dear looks to provide for a continuation of what we already have here; then a significantly expanded version which would in my view permit this concept to make a more powerful set of contributions; and finally a major activist program that would permit us to use our privileged international oversight position and networks to provide timely support for small scale sustainability initiatives and projects in various part of the world.

A. Continue Core Program:

- The objectives of this level of funding would be to permit me to continue to maintain the most important and active programs and networks at more or less the existing level. For this, we will need on the order to \$10k/month.

B. Expanded Program:

- This program will do the above job, and beyond that permit us to finance significant improvements and extensions on the technical and communications end. This gets us into a complete overhaul of the software that underlines all our websites, and much clearer and user friendly integration of the various communications tools that will facilitate efficient interactions within the various focus groups.
- In addition, it will allow us to seek (and pay for) more critical and more detailed appreciations of what we are doing and how we are doing them. This additional perspective is needed, and I think it should be fairly paid for.
- It also will permit me to do more direct advisory and support work without asking too much money from the mainly (local) public sector and volunteer groups with whom we work. It is important that they pay something, but at the same time I can hardly ask them to pay at the usual commercial consulting given their budgets.
- It finally will give me a bit of flex when we want to help train or involve either some young people or a field worker from the developing countries in one of what I think to be important and useful projects. (The Gatnet program at <http://www.gatnet.net/> comes to mind for an example for both.)

C. A Major Open Society Sustainability Initiative:

- In addition to all the above, this level of funding – say a million dollars a year – would permit us to become a significant source of finance and support for small project initiatives around the world. It is my belief that our years of work and contacts, together with our proven ability to work with our international networks to ferret out and to an extent oversee such smaller projects, will permit us to do this wisely and well. (Our work with the Stockholm Partnerships for Sustainable Cities may provide some insights here. - http://www.partnerships.stockholm.se/jury_index.html)

3. How to Finance? Options?

As you might well bet, my personal preference would be to solve this in a single stroke of the pen with a wealthy individual or family who understand what we are trying to do here and just wants us to get on with the job. Do I dream? The advantage of this approach is above all that it would permit me to keep moving on the substantive end without having to change my basic way of working, which has always been fully independent and without accounts to be rendered.

But that is not to say that there may not be a better way. What I would like to do at this early stage would be to play with and explore a certain number of alternative concepts, of which I place a quick first draft here before you for your thoughts and comments in turn.

Foundations:

Other than one personal grant from the Ford Foundation I have not even tried to secure foundation support for any of our work. As with getting money from government agencies and observing experience of many colleagues, I have always found that unless someone is already holding the door just a bit ajar for you from the inside, the whole elaborate panoply, applications and scrutiny – plus the very small odds of actually getting the grant – signaled to me that this was not a good use of our time and effort. Again and as we look to the future however, it may be this “slightly open door” which could make all the difference. If indeed the foundation in question has a strong interest in exactly the sort of things that we do, and our ways of getting the job done, then I am afraid we would end up knocking on locked doors.

Government Agencies:

What we have found in working with them is basically two things. First that they have fixed agenda and their own vision of how things are best done. And more often than not our own approach is too wide open and process oriented (they want products that are precisely defined in advance. Which is not what we do best.) Beyond this, the entire process is almost always glacially slow and subject to innumerable internal reviews, which simply do not correspond with our most dynamic way of working. Pity!

Industrial/Financial sponsorship:

I see direct finance from industry or banking institutions as entirely out of the question for us, despite the fact that we would of course be posting all specific support publicly so that there are no mysteries as to any eventual allegiances beyond those which our sustainability concerns impose on us. That said, if this support came from an arms-length Foundation source and without any qualification or attempts to influence on their part – other than good solid counsel to which I am always open – with proper public announcement I cannot think of any major problems that might pose. (In the past we have in fact had support for specific actions from both the Shell Foundation and Volvo, but both were aimed at specific project support, including in support of the Stockholm Partnerships for Sustainable Cities. And were made immediately and fully known.)

The Commons – Financing the Future: 2006-2015

An independent platform for new thinking & world-wide collaborative problem solving

Creation of a “Friends of The Commons” Club:

This is a priori an attractive idea because we do indeed have many friends, but the greater part of them are either in www.ecoplan.org low income countries or themselves have modest incomes. So if any such club were to be organized, it would seem to me that the minimum annual payment in the interest of efficiency and focus would be at least \$1k.

Sell working papers and site access via credit cards/ subscriptions:

I have at least two objections to this approach. From the beginning on of our goals with The Commons has been to keep it “off the economy”. I like the wide open quality that this provides in a world in which you need money for simply too many things. You don't pay your friends for help. And The Commons is meant to be a friend.

Specific Program Finance:

The baseline cost of running one of our programs runs on the order of \$1/2k per month each. Thus if anyone wished to get behind any one of them, this would be a real option. And all the more so if that person or group would have interests and activities in that particular focus area, which we might possibly build on and extend mutually.

DRAFT

4. Next Steps

As you might imagine it can at times get rather lonely as one tries to keep all of this together and moving at least approximately in the right direction. Within each of our various fora there are individuals who have shown themselves ready to chip in with ideas, criticism and occasionally to lend a hand for a specific bit of a program or project. But beyond the focused discussions in the various Idea Factories, the overall challenge of leadership and execution has proven a pretty solitary activity. This has advantages (fast decisions) but also drawbacks (sometime insufficient reflection).

Thus one of the things that I would like of have come out of this push would be to see if we can use what is going to be after all a bit of a paradigm shift, to bring in some more oversight and guiding thoughts and encouragement. There have been real advantages to having this as a make-it-up as you go along, process oriented, results oriented, oft-times surprising show. But this is probably not going to be enough to ensure the future in the longer run.

Also we will need over the next few years to start to arrange to hand off projects and sites – one by one – to groups that are going to be capable of improving and extending them in the future, all hopefully within the cooperative, open and above all fully independent and energetic spirit within which they have been carried out over all these years. We think there is plenty of rooms for programs like this. But also how to do?

Tasks that need doing:

This is a simple short-list of a number of specific tasks, many of which rather small and requiring only days or at most a few weeks of labor each, which it would be good to get in hand. The programming work that is needed on the other hand is going to require a couple of months to get fully lined up for all the sites. All of this is in addition to the work that is needed to improve, update and extend the individual website and the programs behind them.

1. Reprogramming of all web sites to a 2005 SOA standard: common, proper programming language (Open Source, Mambo, PHP), get rid of JavaScript, frames, modularity to facilitate updating and extension of individual sites, etc.
2. Ditto for all e-fora/Idea Factories – including fuller, seamless integration into main site (presently far too awkward, insufficient control, etc.)
3. Improve Search/Retrieval functions both within each focus program and over the entire site as a whole.
4. One-click integration of current videoconferencing, voice conferencing, group work tool set into each working site.
5. Update, extension and above all proper programming of World Sustainability Resource Database
6. Ditto for the World Carshare databases.
7. A major overhaul of the Kyoto World Cities Challenge program and its extensions is certainly the most important single task at hand.
8. Persistence with both the European Commission and the key national and local agencies involved in matters of transport, environment and public space will be needed – both via the Message to Europe and other programs within the New Mobility Agenda.

A short history of my personal path to The Commons:

What we today call The Commons grew out of my personal experience in problem-setting and problem-and specifically through my extended educational experience both in my PhD program in development economics at Columbia and La Sapienza (the University of Rome), but even more in the first decade of my field work out through the mid-seventies which took me to quite a range of assignments on development projects in East Africa, Latin America and South East Asia.

It had originally been my intention – not least as a result of a long family connection with the founding of the UN which has fascinated and in many ways driven me through my entire and rather long educational process – to work with and for the UN in its various development agencies. However when it came down to my hands-on experience working with actual projects and programs in the more than a dozen countries, as well as in the headquarters of several agencies, I was struck by the huge divide separating the challenges on the one hand, and the quality, focus and even the integrity of most of what I was seeing in practice. What I found was that the so-called developing countries – and indeed the entire process that we call economic and social development – was for the most part being grossly misunderstood by all but a very small exception of programs in the development community.

Among the handful that seemed to be getting it right early on was the German GTZ program, Denmark's Danida, Sweden's SIDA -- and almost no others beyond projects which were the result of the energies and devotion of specific individuals and groups who somehow managed to find a way to do something useful through the veil of incompetence and indifference that were the flavor of the day. The USAID program, with whom I also worked in Vietnam in cooperation with WHO in 1967/68 was to my way of thinking a huge missed opportunity which despite the occasional real success in the main pointed up much of the worst of the prevailing thinking and attitudes about development of the time. (And unfortunately in most cases still to this day.)

Thus by the late sixties, I felt that I could probably do more in terms of a contribution to society if I spent most of my time working with leading groups in the private sector, where at least a certain minimum level of competence and real world impacts could be found. In parallel however I continued to work with several development groups, both in the areas of sustainability in industrial development and better adapted transportation arrangements for developing countries.

It was out of this last that The Commons actually started to emerge, specifically in the context of a program which I organized in 1973 under the sponsorship of the OECD Development Centre, who gave me the chance of bringing together on two occasions several dozen leading international figures who were working on the challenges of better adapted transport in the developing world. And which in turn led to the formation of what one colleague, Mikoto Usui, a well known Japanese development economist, called at the time: 'an Invisible College'. Which slowly and in small steps by the late eighties evolved into The Commons, as it is known today.