

A NEW ALIGNMENT OF MOVEMENTS?

A Report on a Commons Strategies Group Workshop

Meissen, Germany
August 29 – September 1, 2014

By David Bollier and Pat Conaty

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Despite the deepening crisis of neoliberalism in Europe, no clear alternative critiques or philosophical approaches have emerged that could catalyze a united response or new convergence of movements. Indeed, the traditional left has not only *not* profited politically from the ongoing crisis, but, with a few exceptions, its popularity has actively declined. With the notable exception of Greece, recent European elections have shown a marked move to the radical right among major segments of the European electorate.

But if the classic political expressions of resistance may be wanting, that does not mean that there have not been positive developments. Amongst these are the “growth” of the degrowth movement and other ecological/sustainability oriented movements; the emergence of a commons orientation amongst political groups in countries like Italy; the creation of thousands of alternative solidarity mechanisms in Greece and Spain; a revival of co-operativism as an economic and social alternative; ongoing work by the Social and Solidarity Economy movement; and movements ranging from Transition Towns to “shareable cities” to local food.

Interesting political expressions include the massive mobilisations of youth around the 15M “real democracy” platform in Spain, the success of left parties with a transformative agenda such as Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain, the emergence of parties expressing digital culture such as the Pirate Parties (in more than two dozen nations), and platform parties calling for direct democracy like the Partido X in Spain. These efforts have been accompanied by many constructive efforts by precariously employed youth to create alternatives for their livelihoods, also expressed in the emergence of the “sharing economy.”

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Is it possible to imagine a convergence of movement practice and goals – blending constructive, social and political movements – in ways that advance the idea of “unity in diversity”? Is it possible to imagine the reconstruction of socially progressive majorities at the local, national and European level?

This Deep Dive workshop is an attempt to host intensive forms of exploratory dialogue and cooperation among social movements. Participants were associated with movements dedicated to co-operatives, a Degrowth economy, Social and Solidarity Economy, peer production, Transition Towns, ecological/ sustainability, and the commons. In sharing the more salient developments in their respective movements, participants reflected on the distinct strengths and weaknesses of their movements, the broader challenge of contributing to systemic change, and strategies for fostering a collaborative convergence.

A key question posed was whether the commons paradigm could function as a shared discourse, critique and ethic to help convene the various movements around a shared agenda for change? The argument could be that as the relative political clout of the industrial working class steadily diminishes in Europe, we are losing the political equilibrium of forces and compromises that sustained the welfare state models in the first place. If we look at the newly emergent work culture of the precarious knowledge workers, along with the other popular sectors, we may see the emergence of a potential sociological and political coalition around “commons-oriented political transformation” – a proposition that has been vividly affirmed in Greece.

This strategic question gave rise to a second goal of the workshop – to explore the specific potential of the commons paradigm for helping to align and coordinate cross-movement collaboration and action. Are there other commonalities that could foster a convergence of social and political movements around joint goals? To address this, a third goal of the gathering was to explore possible vehicles for exploring and harnessing cooperative action in the future. What specific sorts of vehicles, projects, social or economic issues, institutional partners, and so forth, might play a constructive role? Moreover, how might this work be organized and supported over time?

Finally, assuming there was agreement on the above questions, the workshop sought to arrive at some consensus regarding next steps for achieving movement convergence. Is there some way to re-create a political and social majority for sustainability-oriented social change? How might we expand the capacities of each of our movements, unleash new synergies and offer new, more integrative solutions to the ecological, climatic, social and economic crises facing humankind?

The workshop was organized by the Commons Strategies Group, which gratefully acknowledges the indispensable support of the Heinrich Böll Foundation (Germany) and the Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation (France and Switzerland).

I. THE GENERAL CHALLENGE

Although the political and policy circumstances in various European nations differ a great deal, there are some important commonalities. Neoliberal economic policies have extracted enormous sacrifices from the general population in terms of employment, the meeting of basic social needs, wealth and income inequality, and general prosperity. Valuable public assets have been privatised, often at shameful discounts over their actual value, and debt-driven coercion by both the market and state have limited democratic sovereignty. Margaret Thatcher's ringing declaration, "There are no alternatives," has been resurrected to preempt political consideration of more equitable and ecologically responsible possibilities.

Because Greece has arguably been the most victimized nation of austerity politics, the first presentation to set the scene was made by George Papanikolaou of the P2P Foundation in Greece, who described the process by which the government assumed crushing debt and colluded in extensive looting of public assets. Papanikolaou, a genetics professor, activist and advocate of open-access publishing, has been extensively involved in promoting commons-based peer production in Greece as an important form of mutual support in this time of crisis. He reported that he and others have hosted a CommonsFest in Heraklion for two years to showcase notable models and celebrate the culture of the commons; the next CommonsFest will be in Athens in May 2015.

The financial plight in Greece has taken a turn for the worse. Borrowing has increased and hospitals and universities have been obliged by the government to issue bonds. As the fiscal deficit rises, public debt levels are increasing while the economy remains stagnant. Government debt levels are at 174% of GDP -- twice the average of other EU countries. In addition to overwhelming public debt, household and business debt has soared, and so have non-performing loans. Since the 2008 financial crisis, there has been a clear correlation between the rise in unemployment to 27% and the rise of nonpayment of household and commercial loans to the banks to 29%.

Nationally, Greece has 72 billion euro in nonperforming loans, a level that exceeds the assets of the banks. The bailout and refinancing of public debt through the European Stability Fund terms do not any longer allow a debt relief haircut. The repayment of debt assumes that Greece will have a future economic and ongoing growth rate of 4%. This is an absurd assumption given that austerity measures have led to a 35% reduction in real wages between 2008 and 2013. The government's growth targets assume a major boost in exports even though the industrial sector has been the

hardest hit by unemployment – a situation that seems unlikely to change since financial investment has plummeted every year since 2008.

Austerity and falling living standards have led to population loss, with an exodus from the country of many professionals, including doctors, engineers and many of those with good pensions. Poverty amongst retired people stands at 23%, the highest in Europe. Self-employment is high and increasing: at 36% of employment it is three times the level in Germany and more than twice the average level of all EU countries. This micro-business sector accounts for 57% of jobs in Greece.

Over 400 new laws have been rushed through the Greek parliament over the past four years, including many drawn up by the Troika that have been badly translated. (The Troika consists of the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank.) It has now become virtually illegal for public sector workers to go on strike because it would threaten growth and risk military intervention. This was the threat used recently against teachers who threatened to go on strike. The political scene in Greece has become polarised as the centre has collapsed, enabling the rise of the fascist Golden Dawn party, with links to the military, the police and the security services. In the January 2015 elections, of course, Syriza prevailed with a strong commitment to a debt relief plan, making a head-on clash with the Troika inescapable.

George Papanikolaou ended his presentation with several questions for participants to consider:

1. What strategy should a new left Government pursue?
2. What should a new economic policy and programme look like?
3. How could this address the needs of the small business sector?
4. What would be the role of the Social Solidarity Economy?

Institutional reform that is root-and-branch in scope is clearly needed at the micro, meso and microeconomic levels. Benjamin Tincq asked: What should be the new narrative? Others asked: How might this unite people and civil society groups to resist and build?

John Restakis, former executive director of the BC Co-operative Association, of Vancouver, commented that there are parallels with the debt default by Argentina in 2001 and the collapse of the money system there. What followed was a broad range of social solidarity economy initiatives, including factory takeovers by worker co-operatives. In Greece, there is an urgent need for a similar programme of positive and practical actions even though the political economy is on a knife edge. Michel Bauwens, Founder of the P2P Foundation, stressed that whenever there is a crisis of these proportions, the investor class already has an action plan prepared, but other elements of society are too disorganized or shocked to mobilize serious action. A deeper economic failure holds high risks

with the fascist Golden Dawn Party waiting in the wings, he said. The situation has similarities to that of the Weimar republic in the late 1920s.

To deal with such a scenario, Bauwens proposed the creation of a high-level team of experts that could be mobilized quickly to intervene for the public interest in macro-economic and monetary crises. This would be a kind of “Anti-Shock Doctrine” team that could advocate policy measures reflecting the values of the commons, co-operatives, peer production and solidarity economy. It could also formulate a transition plan and programme links between micro, mezzo and macro policy and practice levels.

One template for such advocacy, said Bauwens, could be the Commons Transition Plan,² a document that is an outgrowth of a major policy report that Bauwens and his colleagues with the FLOK Society [Free Libre Open Knowledge] commissioned by three institutions of the Government of Ecuador and released in June 2014.³ The Commons Transition Plan eliminated specific references to Ecuador and provided a generic policy plan for the state to foster commons-based peer production.

The situation in Greece provides a glimpse into the kind of future that many nations may face if neoliberal economic policies continue to expand. It provides a kind of backdrop for considering both the lessons of Greece’s resistance movements as well as international social movements that seek convergence around Great Transition strategies and practical programmes. There are many movements proposing alternative economic arrangements that not only hold great promise themselves, but could unleash enormous social and political energies if they could find ways to coordinate and collaborative more closely.

To explore these possibilities, presentations were made for six key movements: Co-operatives, the Social and Solidarity Economy, Degrowth, Peer Production, the Sharing and Collaborative Economy and the Commons movement.

A. The Co-operatives Movement

The global co-operative movement is a significant force for progressive change and yet one seriously challenged by the power of capital, globalized markets, new technological developments, managerialism and social disconnection from its base. Employment in the co-operative movement -- at 250 million people – is actually larger today than that of multinational companies. In many

² <http://www.commonstransition.org>

³ http://en.wiki.floksociety.org/w/Research_Plan

countries membership in co-operatives (one quarter of all adults in the UK) is double that of trade union membership (12.5%) and far higher than that of mainstream political parties (2% of adults). Based on such numbers, the co-operative sector could be a potentially influential source of countervailing political power.

John Restakis, in his presentation, argued that the co-operative movement in many countries is at a crossroads. There is a lack of a powerful common vision for the future, and in many countries this is held in check by a tension and even a polarisation between smaller social solidarity co-operatives and the large, well-established co-operatives in such areas as mainstream banking, insurance and engineering. A number of these co-operatives are themselves under threat by the growing demutualisation of larger co-operatives, a trend epitomized by the takeover of the Co-operative Bank in the UK by external investors, including hedge funds, and the privatisation of large agricultural co-ops like the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool.

On the other hand, there are many important, innovative developments in the co-operative world as well. The success of multistakeholder social co-operatives in Italy, especially for social care, has led to the successful international replication of this model. Similarly, solidarity co-operative startups for local services, cafes, sports clubs, local and organic food, fair-trade goods and the urban commons, are expanding in many countries.

There are several key turning point issues faced by the co-operative movement at all levels. Chief among them are how to expand the scale of co-operatives and respond to the corporatisation trend among many larger co-ops. For many co-operatives, this threat is more serious because of a loss of their cultural identities and disconnection from their memberships. Many co-op organisations also suffer from a decline in social trust with their members, aggravated by a managerial elitism and the gradual but deliberate shedding of any political identity. Ironically, the loss of member trust in the larger co-operatives is precisely the key asset of the new wave solidarity co-operatives, which are aggressively building, not marginalizing, economic democracy and the co-operative ethos and culture. Social and solidarity co-operatives have rediscovered mutual and co-operative systems from the past, are returning to the historic roots of the movement and regard a progressive and engaged social ethic as an affirmative way to attract a wide diversity of new members.

In a growing number of countries, these co-operatives are developing a plethora of new markets -- for community-supported farming, renewable energy, environmental stewardship services, community services, health clinics and pharmacies as well as small business succession strategies that use worker buy-outs and mutuals for the self-employed. All of these co-operative services clearly overlap with the goals and values of the commons movement. Other such initiatives include new digital commons (as discussed below) and urban commons co-ops, such as the co-

stewardship of public spaces in Siena and Bologna, Italy, and others nurtured by Labgov, a Naples-based policy laboratory for the governance of commons.⁴

Even with these encouraging developments, the new wave of social solidarity co-operatives face formidable barriers: a lack of access to development capital and training, a significant gap in entrepreneurial and management skills, sectoral and operational isolation in a number of sub-sectors, and a lack of public policy and institutional support from both the state and the larger co-operatives.

A key concern raised was the poor track record of many co-operatives towards the environment. The co-operative systems of Emilia Romagna, a densely populated region of northern Italy, are both impressive and economically successful, but many are engaged in building fuel-inefficient Ferraris for upscale customers. Many large agricultural co-operatives rely on intensive use of pesticides, offsetting the benefits of the organic agricultural sector. Restakis noted that during the 1990s there was a major struggle within the international co-operative movement to extend the movement's stated "concern for community" to include "and environmental sustainability" – but this proposed amendment was defeated by large agricultural co-operatives and their managerial elite as well as by allies in the labour movement.

Since this defeat in 1995, however, the co-operative movement has been a successful advocate of fair trade principles internationally and this in turn has enhanced interest in a wider set of ethical trade objectives. Some large credit unions in Canada like Van City Savings, a major credit union and co-operative bank in British Columbia, have elected progressive board directors, transforming the culture of their organisations and bring politics back into the movement. Elsewhere in Canada, the multistakeholder credit union movement has expanded since the mid-1990s and multistakeholder solidarity co-ops today account for 60% of the new co-operatives being set up.

All of these struggles and innovations clearly hold important lessons for activists in the commons and other movements. The common denominator is protecting basic needs and collective value-creation from predatory capitalism by creating legal structures and effective systems of governance, management and culture. Multistakeholder and solidarity co-operatives have already developed innovative, self-protective solutions for a diversity of service sectors and types of people. This prompts a natural question: What might a shared vision to unite alternative economic movements look like? As participants grappled with these issues, a number of key questions and concerns emerged as strategically important challenges:

⁴ <http://www.labgov.it>

- How can we secure a co-operative commons free from capitalist control?
- How can we re-invent economies that remain more locally embedded and distributed?
- How can we forge new working relationships and alliances with “adjacent movements”?
- What can we learn from the history of “co-operative commonwealth” models that deliberately seek to insulate land, people and money from market forces?
- What are the challenges to be addressed in blending open platforms with co-operativism?
- What new vision could unite the commons, the co-operative and other social movements based upon localism, self-determination, social equity and human-centered development?

From this list, what are some of the implications of these developmental opportunities for existing or emerging cooperative structures? First, cooperatives would do well to focus on production that is in line with the values and principles espoused by the sector, serving the common good and not focus exclusively on their own members. Second, while democratic governance is a fundamental principle for cooperatives, operating on a “one member, one vote” rather than the “one dollar, one-vote” model of investor-owned firms, not all participants in the economic value chain are enfranchised as members. Co-operatives tend to be customer-owned or producer-owned, but the democratic reach is extended where a wider variety of stakeholders is included. Cooperatives would do well to integrate the various stakeholders in the governance of their operations, as many “multistakeholder” co-operatives have done. Third, and most importantly, cooperatives may wish to explore new sorts of collaborations with commons, in which they actively co-produce the commons on which they are dependent.

One such proposal is the FairShares Model developed by Rory Ridley-Duff of Sheffield Business School, who proposes a “new co-operativism” that combines “member ownership with sustainable development goals and social impact measurement.”⁵ The FairShares approach attempts to overcome the limitations of traditional co-operativism, which privilege the interests of workers or consumers and consign others to act as “tacit philanthropists” in the enterprise. FairShares seeks to achieve this transformation by issuing classes of shares in an enterprise for the founder, labor, users/consumers and investors. This approach extends and integrates the “common bond” in the enterprise rather than concentrating it in the hands of co-op workers or consumers alone. In this sense, the FairShares Model strives to broaden the circle of mutual aid in the style of multistakeholder ownership and, in so doing, create alternatives to neoliberalism.

Co-operatives may wish to explore other sorts of commons-oriented collaborations in order to actively protect co-produced shared wealth. It is not entirely clear what might this mean in practice, but some promising ideas were surfaced at a workshop held only days before this Deep

⁵ Rory Ridley-Duff, “New Co-operativism and the FairShares Model,” STIR magazine, Winter 2014, pp. 12-14. A version of this article is available at <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/8556>.

Dive, as described in the report, “Towards an Open Co-operativism: A New Social Economy Based on Open Platforms, Co-operative Models and the Commons.”⁶

The commons movement is also at a difficult crossroads and indeed under assault from many quarters. Public sector assets – forests, water, minerals, highways and other civil infrastructure – are being sold off as tax revenues decline and austerity cuts deepen. In Asia, Africa and Latin America, an unprecedented land grab by hedge funds and sovereign investment funds is appropriating lands that have been managed as commons by indigenous peoples and traditional communities for generations. There is a burgeoning peer-to-peer co-production sector, but this universe of innovation must generally work within financial and technological systems managed by corporate capital. This means that commons-based peer production has trouble asserting its sovereignty and independence from capital markets (which explains why car sharing and accommodation sharing is dominated by companies that own the digital platform). The proprietary, capitalist models of collaborative consumption are structured to favour the capital accumulation interests of investors, not the social or equitable interests of users.

Cooperativa Integral Catalana and Common Futures

The recurrent question posed by these and other examples is: Can we create commons-based livelihoods to meet a wide diversity of local needs, free from market enclosures? The Cooperativa Integral Catalana (CIC) in Spain suggests that there are indeed many promising possibilities. CIC embodies a convergence model emerging in southern Europe that more explicitly seeks to blend the commons and co-operative sectors. Sofia Cardona of CIC explained that CIC is an open co-operative network that promotes transitional economic thinking and transformative practices. Begun in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis, CIC extends co-operative principles through solidarity economy practices, a participatory culture of self-organising, extensive mutual aid networks, and self-management systems that are based on democratic deliberation and decisionmaking.

All of this has boosted CIC’s impact and influence in Spain. It has attracted growing support from the victims of austerity cuts, and the circulation of its irregularly published newspaper promoting a wide array of social, economic and political alternatives grew from 200,000 to 500,000 copies between 2008 and 2012. It also hosts a website, Radi.ms.⁷

Decisionmaking by CIC members is managed through a permanent assembly that is supported by a federated and co-operative network of decentralised and distributed member

⁶ <http://bollier.org/open-co-operativism-report>

⁷ <https://radi.ms>

organisations that hold these and is open to the public. In Catalonia CIC has established seven local self-management hubs. With bi-monthly meetings of the assemblies in CIC's sub-regional networks, democratic debate and consensual decisionmaking are routine. CIC bodies even host educational seminars on development and basic needs to help make deliberations at assembly meetings more informed. When CIC commissions investigate new areas of development and ways to improve the co-operative federation, any new projects and plans are developed democratically. Current commissions are exploring ways to improve information, communication and diffusion, legal structures, economic administration of communal services, and methods for meeting basic needs. An ongoing action area for CIC is the housing crisis, which it is trying to tackle by challenging the eviction of debt-ridden homeowners and renters, and by organising financial rescue solutions and starting new housing co-operatives.

In one of its most ambitious initiatives, CIC is developing a multi-currency model for economic exchange and trade that seeks to incorporate barter, gifts and donations, social currencies and the Euro in one system. The exchange and distribution system includes 19 nodes for food supplied by 21 producers and 133 food products. Other social economy systems are under development for health services, education and shared transport. CIC has also established recently a zero-interest investment system for co-operative projects called CASX, which seeks to attract funds from solidarity economy-minded investors.

CIC's involvement in so many areas of social reconstruction suggests that there are many points of convergence with related social movements. As Sofia Cardona put it, "We all have something in commons – basic social needs." She urged citizen groups to develop their own independent funding and management systems, noting, "NGOs won't work because governments no longer have money to fund them. Self-management of projects is what we need to do to find the ways and means. We need to be open and flexible to what people are actually doing."

Annemarie Naylor, Director of Common Futures in the U.K., is involved in many projects that attempt to give local communities direct control over important assets, ranging from castles and car parks to hospitals and former military sites. In a presentation, she described some of her efforts to transfer publicly owned land and buildings to communities, which would then convert the assets to important social uses and revenue-generation. She cited attempts by the community of Dover, England, to buy the local port facility for community benefit; the Community Land Trust for affordable housing, managed workspace and to save the local pub in the village of Lyvennet; and the effort by the coastal community of Hastings to restore and maintain a notable but aging pier (redubbed "the People's Pier") through a community shareholding scheme.

A new frontier for community development of shared assets lies in digital infrastructure, said Naylor. She cited community wifi systems like Guifi.net, a free and open wireless system with more

than 30,000 nodes in Catalonia; the proliferation of specialized FabLabs throughout the city of Barcelona; and the role that libraries might play as centers for open hardware, telecommunications services and open data.⁸ Digital systems may also be used to enable the “commonification of public services,” as cities like Bologna and Mantua, Italy, are doing.

B. Social and Solidarity Economy

Europe is a vastly diverse continent embracing a plethora of cultures, languages and regions. Arguably one thing that unites Europe is its rich tradition of social movements, all rooted in diverse but common struggles for social justice and today, among many groups, for environmental justice. The social economy is described as the third sector and includes co-operatives, civil society associations, mutuals and foundations. The mission they have in common is a shared pursuit of social goals where money is one of the means, not the end. Some see the social economy as a third element of capitalism since many NGOs rely on support from private donors and transfer payments from the state. However this is not the case for co-operatives and mutuals that are businesses operating in the market.

Gaining strength in Latin America during the 1970s and liberation theology, the solidarity economy is distinctively different from many parts of the broader social economy – although there is a considerable overlap. Jason Nardi, an ethical finance and solidarity economy activist with Solidarius and RIPESS in Italy, noted that the solidarity economy seeks to change the entire social and economic system and advocates a post-capitalist transformation that puts people and planet first. The solidarity economy differs from most other social change movements in three ways: 1) It is pluralist in its approach and rejects rigid blueprints and a single path; 2) It focuses on concrete strategies and practices ranging from those used by the co-operative and trade union movements to more recent innovations of the green economy and the commons; and 3) The solidarity economy seeks transformative change in all three sectors of the economy, private, public and “third sectors.”

Across Europe and other continents internationally the Solidarity Economy since the 1990s has been gaining strength and increasing its capacity as a diversified collection of economic actors and working alternatives that include:

- Fair trade – now both south, north and local
- Solidarity consumer groups and community-supported agriculture
- Ethical and social banks, community development finance and local currencies
- Worker co-operatives, reclaimed factories, co-working and social enterprises

⁸ See, e.g., the websites OurData.coop, Commonlibraries.cc and Ourdigitalcommunity.org

- Co-housing, home exchanges, and Right to the City initiatives
- Degrowth projects, zero-waste citizen organisations and Transition Towns
- Reclaiming water services and other utilities for municipalities and common ownership
- Renewable energy, organic farming, slow food and local production chains
- Shared means of transport and “smarter cities”

The Solidarity Economy works to unite and integrate these alternatives, many of which were universal providers of service in the past; in many countries they are still operating as municipal or co-operative utilities, public transport systems, public banks and mutual insurance providers.

Because the distinctions between the Solidarity Economy and the social economy and the “third sector” are not entirely clear, said Nardi, it is difficult to clearly measure the size of the solidarity economy. Moreover, because Solidarity Economy is not a single sector but cuts across all three sectors, it is more a way of working than a specific legal or organizational form. That said, some research estimates suggest that between 9% and 11.5% of economically active citizens in Sweden, Belgium, France, Holland and Italy work in Social and Solidarity Economy enterprises.⁹ Across the EU, an estimated 6.5% of the working population are employed by SSE enterprises.

The vitality of the Solidarity Economy is reflected in its robust expansion into a number of new fields. These include fair trade and local fair trade enterprises, solidarity responsible tourism, reuse and repair businesses linked to solidarity enterprises, social care co-operatives, worker takeovers of factories, social clinics and pharmacies, trade unions for the self-employed, community land ownership projects, FabLabs and the Maker movement. In many countries this diversity is celebrated through Social and Solidarity Economy festivals.

Solidarity finance has been developing for a few decades and includes social banks like Banca Etica Popolare, in Italy, La Nef in France, JAK bank in Sweden as well as non-bank social investment providers like the MAG in Italy and Club Cigales in France. These institutions are augmented by new social currencies and local money systems that have proliferated across Europe as another part of a new architecture for money and capital.

The strategic challenge for the solidarity economy is to build horizontal alliances and to advance co-production and co-financing. The growth of national organisations and regional networks for SSE in Europe is building momentum, especially since 2008.

⁹ Jason Nardi (2014) “Solidarity Economy in Europe: An Emerging Movement with a Common Vision,” unpublished paper.

RIPeSS, the Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of Social Solidarity Economy,¹⁰ works in five languages to promote globally both the solidarity economy and the radical part of the social economy. Set up in 1997 in Latin America, work to build RIPeSS in Europe has been progressing since 2009. The founding congress for RIPeSS Europe was held in Barcelona in 2011 and a second congress held in Lille in 2013. There are now 26 official network members (both thematic and territorial bodies) that cover twelve countries. Each of the members is either a national or regional network, and most are either in northern or western Europe. Work to recruit eastern European members is progressing. RIPeSS has established good links with the formal co-operative sector and internationally with the ILO and the International Co-operative Alliance.

Within EU countries, there are a variety of legal definitions and frameworks recognizing the social economy. This process, which started in France with the Charter of Social Economy issued in 1980, is now underway in several countries. In Italy there are a series of regional norms whereby ten regions have adopted different laws for the promotion of the social and sustainable economy. Some of these laws are not adequate and could be regressive, but debates in Italy are considering harmonisation and the development of a national law. This collaborative process itself has been good for bringing regional networks together and to strengthen understanding about a strategic and transformation agenda.

The importance of such laws is a subject of considerable debate within RIPeSS. Some efforts at lawmaking simply fail to recognise that the Solidarity Economy operates right across the three sectors. At present this is a problem and an issue for the European Union that focuses on the social economy even when it refers to SSE. As Nardi clarified, “Solidarity Economy is not limited to just a better and fairer way of dealing with economic (and financial) matters: it’s about changing the whole way we think and practice producing and consuming – and in this sense it is a profoundly political act. The Solidarity Economy is about re-creating the production chains on a local, democratic, fair and sustainable basis, with an “economic intelligence” created by the high-trust relationships among the players who network together rather than compete, and with direct involvement of consumers.”

Ongoing work with UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) has led to international recognition of SSE as a new economy. UNRISD’s 2014 report consisting of 70 separate papers describes the importance of this growing movement for employment, social justice and environmental sustainability.¹¹

C. The Degrowth Movement

¹⁰ RIPeSS is a Spanish acronym for “Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of Social Solidarity Economy.”

¹¹ Peter Utting, Nadine van Dijk and Marie Adelaide Mathei (2014). “Social Solidarity Economy: Is there a new economy in the making?” UNRISD.

Daniela Del Bene gave a brief overview of the Degrowth movement, its activities and aspirations. (Del Bene works in Barcelona with the EJOLT project – Environmental Justice Organizations, Liabilities and Trade – and the EJAtlas project, an associated mapping project, at the Autonomous University in Barcelona.) The essence of degrowth is an attempt to change the terms of discourse in talking about “the economy” and “the environment” by setting forth a new language for approaching these topics. Del Bene conceded that there is no unified theory of degrowth and that its critiques come from many diverse sources.

The term “degrowth” is in part a deliberate provocation to get people to think more deeply about the very premises of standard economic thought and political action. It is about abolishing economic growth as a social objective and moving toward societies that will use fewer natural resources and organize everyday life in different ways. A central theme is, “What is the economy for?” The themes of degrowth are probed more deeply in a recently published anthology of essays, *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era*, edited by Giacomo D’Alisa, Federico Demaria and Giorgos Kallis (Routledge). As the editors write:

When the language in use is inadequate to articulate what begs to be articulated, then it is time for a new vocabulary. A movement of activists and intellectuals, first starting in France and then spreading to the rest of the world, has called for the decolonization of public debate from the idiom of economism and the abolishment of economic growth as a social objective. “Degrowth” (“décroissance”) has come to signify for them the desired direction of societies that will use fewer natural resources and will organize themselves to live radically differently. “Simplicity,” “conviviality,” “autonomy,” “care,” “commons” and “dépense” are some of the words that express what a degrowth society might look like.

The *Degrowth* book features chapters that explore bioeconomics as a new way of conceptualizing economics, new critiques of environmentalism and “development,” and the ideas of “steady-state economics” developed by Herman Daly. Important concepts in the discourse of the degrowth movement include voluntary simplicity, sharing, social justice, conviviality, happiness, alternative indicators to GDP and appropriate scale technology. The economics of happiness research highlights that as GDP has grown since the 1970s, happiness in developed economies has decreased. This trend has aided work on well-being measurements and indicators. Degrowth is also concerned about the challenges posed by Peak Oil and climate change and the role of fiat currencies and debt in causing our economic and ecological crises.

While the degrowth movement does not have a unified policy or political agenda, general interest in their diversified critique of neoliberalism has soared in recent years. Attendance at the

Fourth International Degrowth Conference in Leipzig, Germany, in early September attracted some 3,000 people from around the world. The five-day event featured more than a dozen plenary sessions with notable activists and academics, hundreds of workshops, and an exhibition of countless initiatives, organizations, books and reports.

The means for advancing degrowth take many forms, from small local projects to larger policy proposals. Among the more salient efforts are urban gardening, work sharing, co-operatives, new forms of public money, and various commons. Degrowth strategies also include alliances with related movements such as the Latin American proponents of *Buen Vivir* (good living), the Social and Solidarity Economy, feminists concerned with care work, and commoners of all stripes.

There are some friendly critics of the degrowth discourse who worry that the very term can never be accepted by mainstream political culture – “degrowth as a branding issue.” Some supporters have puckishly suggested using the term “Happy Degrowth” to clarify that the idea of degrowth is not a return to premodern toil and hardship, but rather a move toward a stable, equitable and environmentally friendly economic system. As D’Alisa et al. put it, “The objective is not to make an elephant leaner, but to turn an elephant into a snail. In a degrowth society everything will be different: different activities, different forms and uses of energy, different relations, different gender roles, different allocations of time between paid and non-paid work, different relations with the non-human world.”

D. Peer Production

Michel Bauwens of the P2P Foundation gave an overview of the importance of peer production and the key priorities of his global network. He noted that the P2P Foundation has three basic priorities: 1) to create an alternative ecosystem of production and governance; 2) to make peer production independent of capitalism; and 3) to insert reciprocity into systems so that externalities are internalized and integrated into production.

The fundamental challenge in achieving this vision, he said, is to invent new ways to enable this proto-mode of production to break the logic of capitalism and enable its self-reproduction over time. Bauwens believes that access to shared knowledge is one vital requirement, which means overcoming the artificial scarcities of knowledge that conventional culture and knowledge industries impose through copyrights and patents. But he also believes that peer production must consciously align with struggles for social justice and contribute to degrowth solutions.

Commons-based peer production takes many forms. Its most familiar, fundamental form may be free, libre and open source software, which functions as an infrastructure for many other types of social collaboration in digital spaces. These include such varied genres as collaborative

wikis; open access scholarly publishing; music remixes and video mashups; open design and manufacturing for everything from cars to furniture to farm equipment; citizen-science projects that monitor environmental quality and map the sightings of birds and butterflies; a wide range of alternative currencies; open source biology; data commons; among many other peer-based endeavours.

For Bauwens, peer-to-peer relations represents a new form of political organizing and subjectivity, and an alternative for the political/economic order. Although it does not necessarily offer solutions per se, he said, “it does point the way to a variety of dialogical and self-organizing forms for arriving at solutions. It also ushers in a era of ‘non-representational democracy,’ in which an increasing number of people are able to manage their social and productive life through the use of a variety of autonomous and interdependent networks and peer circles.” As a general aspiration, the P2P Foundation seeks to scale the small-group dynamics of peer production to much larger, even global scales, and to move this mode of production and culture from the periphery of society to its core.

Bauwens on netarchical capitalism vs. global commons

To clarify how commons-based peer production differs from seemingly related forms of online sharing, Bauwens presented a useful chart (Figure 1 below) illustrating different “value regimes” that new networking technologies have introduced to the knowledge economy, radically changing the terms by which value is created and extracted. Under traditional capitalism, which Bauwens calls “Cognitive Capitalism,” surplus value is extracted from intellectual property that is controlled by big companies and sold for big markups. Only one-fifth of the capitalization of large companies consists of identifiable material assets, and the rest is a matter of some speculation. This means that there is a lot of “missing value” that has intangible dimensions. And a lot of this clearly stems from the social cooperation that is involved value-creation, said Bauwens.

Open network platforms on the Internet have spawned new ways of generating value, but one of the most powerful is what Bauwens calls “netarchical capitalism,” said Bauwens. (See the top-left quadrant in Figure 1.) Facebook is a prime example. Its massive stock values stem from the user community whose self-organization and sharing create “attention capital,” which Facebook then sells to the advertising market. “We see an exponential growth of use-value produced by users themselves,” said Bauwens, “but the monetization is only through large, proprietary platforms like Facebook.” This amounts to another form of exploitation of commons. The value of crowdsourcing, for example, has been estimated at \$2 per hour, which is far below the minimum wage for conventional work. “People are free to contribute,” said Bauwens, “but there is no democratization of the means of monetization.”

There is also another sector that Bauwens calls “distributed capitalism” (bottom-left quadrant), which actively promote the autonomy and participation of many players on the “back-

end” of a network platform, but otherwise remains committed to capital accumulation. This regime is typified by the Airbnb and TaskRabbit, which enable small players to monetize assets or services (renting their apartments, selling their services) and by Bitcoin, the digital currency, and Kickstarter, the crowdfunding website. This is a more inclusive, distributed and participatory form of capitalism (unlike netarchical capitalism), because it is premised on the idea that everybody can trade and exchange as an “independent capitalist” – hence its appeal to libertarians. Bauwens explained that “netarchical and distributed capitalism differ in the control of the productive infrastructure, but both are oriented towards capital accumulation and thus are parts of the wider value mode of cognitive capitalism. They actually form the mixed model of neo-feudal cognitive capitalism.”

Figure 1:



The commons-based alternatives occupy the right side of the chart – Global Commons and Resilience Communities. Resilience communities (bottom-right quadrant) are mostly focused on relocalizing production and nourishing local community, as embodied in the Transition Towns, Degrowth movements and others who see this strategy as ways to deal with the likely disruptions of climate change and Peak Oil. The focus is emphatically on generating community value, and not on political and social mobilizations at larger scales. “A generic critique of this model,” said Bauwens, “is that it does not generate counter-power or a counter-hegemony, as the globalization of capital is not matched or kept in check by a counterforce of the same scale.”

Bauwens believes that the top-right quadrant, the Global Commons approach, offers the best hope for challenging the pathologies of capitalism (in whatever guise) on a transnational global scale. In Global Commons, production is distributed and therefore facilitated at the local level, but the micro-production is networked through global cooperation in the design and improvement of the production apparatus. Even though production may be local, the social, political and economic organisation is global and oriented toward creating a sustainable abundance for all.

The production alternatives being developed in the Global Commons sector represent “a civic P2P economy where value returns to the value creators,” said Bauwens. We urgently need to develop new sorts of ethical market entities that can produce “cooperative accumulation” of this sort instead of “capital accumulation,” he said. A commons-based economy is one in which there would be open supply platforms and value-chains for production – yet this social value creation would be protectable from the familiar predations of capital and markets seeking to appropriate the “free resources” of the commons (“the tragedy of the market”).

This general theme is consistent with an argument that André Gorz, the social philosopher and journalist, laid out in a prescient 2007 essay, “The Exit from Capitalism Has Already Begun.”¹² Gorz describes how some core premises of capitalism – such as its monopoly over the means of production, the dependence of people on proprietary systems, and the inability of people to define and meet their own needs autonomously – are being radically subverted by the spread of the computerization and networked information. Knowledge, know-how and self-determined means of production are becoming freely available to anyone, notwithstanding the existence of copyrights, patents and the market. Such developments are allowing us to “free ourselves from the grip capital has exerted on consumption and from its monopoly on the means of production,” writes Gotz. “It means re-establishing the unity between the subject of production and the subject of consumption, and hence recovering autonomy in the definition of our needs and their mode of

¹² The essay first appeared in the journal *EcoRev* in Autumn 2007 and is reprinted (with a translation by Chris Turnewr) in Gorz’s posthumous book *Ecologica* (2008). The essay can also be found online here: <http://www.perspectives-gorziennes.fr/index.php?post/2011/12/15/The-Exit-from-Capitalism-has-Already-Begun/748>

satisfaction....High-tech self-providing equipment is rendering the industrial megamachine virtually obsolete.”

An exit from capitalism is not inevitable, however. So long as netarchical and distributed capitalism have the upper hand, said Bauwens, they will steadily co-opt what might otherwise evolve into commons-based peer production. A relatively small amount of capital will continue to leverage a vast universe of value generated by co-operators on open platforms. One potential consequence of this development – which is already apparent – is a generalized crisis of precarity among large segments of the population. Contributors to open platforms are generally not socially or economically autonomous, nor can they create livelihoods from their contributions; they must remain dependent on wage labour and its attendant exploitations. At the same time, the new open business models are even more hyper-competitive than the more classic forms of proprietary capitalism; they naturally tend to eclipse the possibility of self-sovereign co-operatives or commons.

Thus we have the spectacle of open platforms re-energizing forms of cooperation, social solidarity and self-provisioning – but on centralized corporate platforms owned by shareholders seeking their own profit. Inevitably, any concern for the common good is subsumed to private interests. Similarly, many cooperatives have adapted to the norms of their competitors in the capitalist economy, seeking profit for their own members and managerial elite, and exploiting the same managerial, financial and economic techniques as their for-profit counterparts. A number of cooperatives have even de-mutualised, in effect aligning themselves with the neoliberal paradigm. Open platforms may well produce the same outcomes over time as for-profit models become the default hosting environments for social co-operation.

E. The Sharing and Collaborative Economy

To learn more about the “sharing economy” (also known as the “collaborative economy”) as an expanding movement, the Deep Dive heard from Benjamin Tincq, who cofounded Ouishare in 2011. The organization describes itself as a “global community, think-tank and do-tank with the mission to build and nurture a collaborative society by connecting people, organizations and ideas around fairness, openness and trust.” In May 2014, Ouishare hosted a massive conference in Paris that brought together the highly diverse factions that are often grouped under the wide banner, the sharing economy. In describing this radically diverse landscape, Tincq cited several distinct fields of innovation based on sharing in one fashion or another. These include:

Consumption: Sharing economy companies such as Airbnb (apartment rentals), Blablacar (connecting drivers with travellers) and peersby (sharing of things within a neighborhood).

Fabrication: open design and manufacturing such as Arduino (the open source printed circuit board project), FabLabs (fabrication laboratories for makers), open source hardware projects (shareable design with local production) and the Maker movement.

Knowledge: Open knowledge projects such as Wikipedia, Creative Commons (copyright-based licenses to enable legal sharing), Linux (the computer operating system), and Open Science (the movement to make research and data available to anyone).

Funding: Crowdfunding websites such as Kickstarter, Hello Merci (a peer-to-peer lending platform) and Anaxago (a French crowdfunding site).

Governance: Open government and flat organizations such as Parlement & Citoyens (a site to promote deliberative democracy), co-operative and LiquidO.

Exchange systems: Currencies and timebanks such as Bristol Pound (a municipal currency); the *Accorderie* system in Quebec and how in France (exchange of services and skills based on time units); Bitcoin (the digital currency); Qoin (supports community currencies); and OpenBadges (an online standard to recognize and verify learning).

Tincq explained that the sharing economy is often associated with “collaborative consumption,” which can be defined as “an economic model fostering access over ownership and reducing waste in which people leverage technology to share, swap, trade, rent or give products and services [to each other] on a new scale.” Tincq distinguished between the “strict” and the “extended” sharing economy. The strict sharing economy is focused on the exchange of tangible resources (apartments, cars, tools), access rights instead of ownership, and optimizing excess capacity. By contrast, the “extended” sharing economy is focused on the exchange of services and intangibles (wifi, temporary help, food, loans, insurance), and blurs the personal and professional identities of people.

Some of the leading organizations devoted to the sharing economy include Peers, ShareNL, Ouishare, Shareable, the P2P Foundation, Crowd Companies, and Bay Share. Leading books on collaborative consumption include Lisa Gansky’s *The Mesh* and Rachel Botsman and Roo Rogers’ *What’s Mine is Yours*.

There is some controversy about certain self-styled participants in the sharing economy, especially those with venture capital funding seeking to monetize people’s interest in sharing. For example, Uber’s aggressive tactics in securing market dominance for its on-call taxi service, its

challenging of local laws and “surge pricing” during periods of high demand, have provoked many criticisms. Others argue that highly capitalized enterprises that style themselves as “sharing economy” are preying upon a desperate precariat whose members have little choice but to sell their time piecemeal and to leverage the few assets they may have, such as their cars and apartments.

There are, however, experiments to host sharing without falling into the community-distorting influences of capital investors and even market payments. The online organization Sensorica is a self-styled “open value network” that designs and sells open sensor devices and “sensemaking” applications. Legally a for-benefit, not-for-profit enterprise that is partially a market-based economy and partially a gift economy, Sensorica’s open production model is attempting to offer “the right balance between passion and duty, and between freedom and constraint.” It encourages passion-driven initiatives without extrinsic rewards, financial or otherwise, by using a system of “karma points” for non-commodified use-value labor; while outputs can later be sold on markets as commodified value, the goal is to protect the use-value ethic.

Another burgeoning segment of the sharing economy is the world of FabLabs, hackerspaces, 3D printing and the Maker movement. While much of it is decidedly amateur, nonprofit and passion-driven, this world also includes many “incubators” and “accelerators” that are explicitly devoted to scaling new tech ideas and building for-profit businesses out of them.) There is now a global network of several dozen FabLabs that are centers for considerable DIY tech-driven innovation. The city of Barcelona, Spain, now has more than a dozen FabLabs, each of which specializes in a certain types of design and production, such as green/efficient machinery, textiles, art, water and energy, mobility and cycling, furniture, 3D printing, citizen innovation, etc. Taken together, this infrastructure of FabLabs may well give rise to powerful new modes of design and production that could credibly relocalize production and create the “self-sufficient city.”

The rich potential of the Maker world is evident in its multiple communities with special interests. For example, there is *Open Desk*, an open source “furniture showroom” of shareable designs and “an experiment” in distributed manufacturing; *Wikihouse*, a mass-collaborative design project for houses that can be downloaded; the *Wikispeed car*, a highly fuel-efficient car designed with open source principles; and the *Global Village Construction Set*, a collection of open source designed equipment that is useful on farms and in villages; *Thingiverse*, a design community focused on 3D printing; and *IFixit* (a global community of people helping each other repair things). There is even an *Open Source Hardware Association*, a kind of trade association for companies and collectives making physical products using shareable designs. More about this world can be found in the books *Open Design Now* by four Dutch groups devoted to free culture and design, and *Makers*, by Chris Anderson.

What unites these various initiatives is the rise of shareable global knowledge that is applied in decentralized production using local infrastructures. Although still rudimentary in scale, the sophistication of these various projects, the numbers of people involved, and their growing interconnections, suggests that André Gorz's prophecy in 2007 is coming to pass. In *The Exit of Capitalism Has Already Begun*, Gorz wrote:

“Existing tools or tools currently in development, which are generally comparable to computer peripherals, point towards a future in which it will be possible to produce practically all that is necessary and desirable in cooperative or communal workshops, in which it will be possible to combine productive activities with learning and teaching, with experimentation and research, with the creation of new tastes, flavors and materials, and with the invention of new forms and techniques of agriculture, building and medicine, etc. Communal self-providing workshops will be globally interconnected, will be able to exchange or share their experiences, inventions, ideas and discoveries.”

Benjamin Tincq reported that Ouishare and Open State plan a five-week accelerator for open source projects in August/September 2015 in an effort to advance technologies that can help build a more sustainable society and tackle climate change.

Tincq's presentation elicited reactions (some of which are dealt with in Part II below) that raised questions about the sustainability of certain sharing economy models. Jason Nardi, coordinator for the Social Watch Italian Coalition and a member of the RIPESS Europe (social and solidarity economy) coordination committee, noted that the FabLab/Maker world doesn't really address the ecological and political issues posed by extraction of raw materials for production. In a similar vein, Pat Conaty, a Fellow at the New Economics Foundation, noted that the ownership and finance models for DIY projects and decentralized tech networks has never been figured out. The failure to develop a sustainable co-operative or commons model means that the enterprises are likely to fall under the sway of capitalist appropriation and the marketization of community norms. This prompted Mike Lewis, Founder and Director of the Canadian Centre for Community Renewal, to suggest schemes that could capture any marketable value for reinvestment in the community itself. For example, a 3% transaction fee on any work that emanates from a FabLab or a Maker community could be earmarked for community reinvestment.

F. The Commons Movement

David Bollier, a Cofounder of the Commons Strategies Group and blogger at Bollier.org, gave a brief presentation describing the commons as a new/old paradigm, framing language and activist movement. Like other movements described here, the commons world puts forward a

discourse that tries to imagine alternative economic models and social relationships that go beyond the boundaries set by neoliberalism.

Bollier explained how the familiar story of the “tragedy of the commons,” made famous by biologist Garrett Hardin in a 1968 article in the journal *Science*, misrepresents what a commons is. Hardin was describing an open-access regime, a free-for-all in which there is no community, no rules, no monitoring of the resource and no penalties for those who violate community rules. This parable, nonetheless, was embraced by conservative ideologues and property-rights advocates, as a useful way to discredit collective action by government or commoners to protect shared wealth. As a result, for nearly two generations, the commons has been largely invisible; the presumption is that the state and market are the only serious systems of governance and production. The commons paradigm challenges this assumption by demonstrating that self-organized groups of people can and do create systems of governance and management for their shared wealth, often outperforming bureaucratic systems and predatory markets.

The commons is not just an intellectual construct however; it is equally a constellation of highly practical projects that meet human needs by fostering participation, fairness, transparency and ecological responsibility. As a system of provisioning and governance, the commons lets people make their own rules for managing the resources on which they depend. It gives them a significant degree of sovereignty and control in the spheres of everyday life that matter to them.

Commons-based examples span a wide range of social, geographic and resource-based contexts. The classic commons as studied by academics such as the late Professor Elinor Ostrom and a large network of international scholars, are small-scale, natural resource commons that manage forests, fisheries, farmland, pastures, water, wild game and the like. Even though an estimated two billion people depend on such commons for everyday needs, these commons are largely invisible to mainstream policymakers and economists because these governance regimes take place outside of the market system and conventional private property rights.

There is a diverse array of digital commons, as described in Sections D and E above on Peer Production and the Sharing Economy, but also many commons that revolve around urban land and buildings, neighborhoods, co-operatives, education, arts and culture, finance, and infrastructure, among many other contexts. For example, there are many food initiatives such as permaculture, agroecology, Slow Food and community-supported agriculture, all of which are attempting to develop more ecologically benign, locally based models for farming. In many cities, there are active efforts to foster sharing of resources in cities; community land trusts, municipal/commons partnerships, especially as promoted by Labgov, a think tank in Italy; participatory budgeting that lets ordinary citizens set budget priorities; and citizen-based urban planning and architectural design (Peer to Peer Urbanism). There is a burgeoning alternative currency movement that is developing

new complementary, community-based and digital currencies to help distinct communities retain more of the value that they generate.

In one sign of the increasing sophistication of the commons movement, there is now a crowdfunding website, Goteo, that is exclusively devoted to raising money for and recruiting volunteers for commons-based projects. María Perulero of Goteo gave a brief overview of the project, noting that it has funded more than 400 projects to date, with a 60-70% success rate in meeting fundraising goals. This exceeds the rate for conventional crowdfunding of 40%. Goteo's average contribution is also higher – 50 euros vs. 35 euros. Goteo has more than 50,000 users and has raised more than 2 million euros since its founding in 2011.

Goteo is not just concerned with raising funds for worthy commons projects; it also wants to create a robust community of committed commoners. Enric Senabre Hidalgo, director of Goteo, recently described the project as “hactivism + crowdfunding + wide social collaboration = the building of new commons. “Each of these activities has always existed separately, of course, but it is the vision of Goteo to integrate them into a single open network that is helping commoners build a new Commons Sector in society. Goteo does this by acting as a focal point for distributed collaboration among people who may have physical resources, expertise, infrastructure tools or personal time to contribute to a particular project.

Meeting this ambitious standard requires a lot more work: Goteo must work to ensure that proposed projects comply with basic criteria of openness and commons principles, and that projects are actually produced as promised. They must also ensure that collective rewards are delivered and that final projects are made accessible. In the future, said Perulero, Goteo plans to create specific programs to define European standards and models for funding commons-related programs using public resources. The idea is to convert public resources into participatory commons. Goteo would also like to create e-commerce channels for open products and to make social entrepreneurship more open.

While each commons has different impacts, one can generalize that commons help build new sorts of social connection and collaboration while reconnecting people to the earth. As a provisioning system, commons help people set limits on resource exploitation, something that neither markets nor the regulatory state have done well. Commons also help internalize the “negative externalities (ecological damage, community disruption, shifting of risks to consumers and future generations) associated with normal market behavior.

There are many efforts underway to try to go beyond canonical small-scale commons to image new forms of larger-scale commons institutions. These include stakeholder trusts like the Alaska Permanent Fund, collaborative wikis and other network-based systems, and “state trustee

commons.” This is an area in great need of innovation – something that Michel Bauwens is exploring with his idea of the “Partner State” (examined below).

The question posed at the outset of this report was whether the commons paradigm might function as a shared discourse for many movements that share a desire to move beyond the bigger-better-faster norms of neoliberal economics and policy. Could its general framing and language help align and coordinate cross-movement collaboration and action?

It is clear that there are many “transnational tribes” of commoners who resonate to the basic elements of the commons discourse, said Bollier. These include the many digital tribes committed to open access and collaboration (FLOSS, free culture, Wikipedians, open access publishing, open educational resources, open data, etc.); the Transition Towns movement; the Social and Solidarity Economy movement; major elements of the co-operative movement; Occupy and related citizen-democracy movements; various relocalization movements; participants in the World Social Forum; La Via Campesina; indigenous peoples; and others. In Part II, below, we explore the potential convergence of movements through a new and unifying politics of the commons.

II. STRATEGIES FOR A CONVERGENCE OF MOVEMENTS

It was immediately clear, following the presentations about the various social movements, that there is enormous potential for greater co-ordination and collaboration. To be sure, each movement has its own distinctive history, geographic clusters, political critiques, strategic approaches, and so on. Yet it appears that the common orientation and language could serve as a strong basis for broad political and social collaboration – a unifying general theme and sensibility for highly disparate movements.

But how might such a convergence happen? What specific sorts of projects, campaigns and policy agendas could help forge closer, more meaningful collaborations? This was the focus of the concluding session of the workshop.

A key challenge facing all of the movements, noted Kate Swade of Shared Assets, is whether to pursue solutions through pragmatic politics and elections, or whether to try to change the general political discourse and institutional structures over the long term. It seems difficult to pursue both options at the same time. This apparent choice may be especially vexing for the Degrowth movement, whose very name is often seen as unappealing to the political mainstream. (“At least the term can’t be easily co-opted,” quipped one leader at the Fourth International Degrowth Conference in Leipzig, Germany, held days after this workshop.) Is this a cautionary lesson for other movements seeking to change the discourse?

How Do These Movements Overlap – or Not?

While a shared strategy could potentially unite the movements, it may be worth exploring what general approaches the respective movements may share – and then to build on any overlapping approaches. To help identify the commonalities among movements, Silke Helfrich asked workshop participants to rank their movement’s commitment to the following eight missions and methodological priorities:

- a. Focus on inner dimensions
- b. Seek to change individual behaviour
- c. Be an example and inspiration

- d. Construct new structures
- e. Reform existing organisations
- f. Change legal structures
- g. Reform economic structures
- h. Focus on theory and the paradigm shift

By aggregating and then averaging these rankings (on a scale of zero to three), this exercise sought to identify key areas overlapping concern among the movements. The rough conclusion was that the movements have the greatest shared interest in items d, e, f, g and h – constructing new structures, reforming existing organisations, changing legal structures and reforming economic structures -- with the final one, a shift in theoretical frameworks and a paradigm shift – emerging out of the other four.

Kate Swade argued that one practical way to explore a convergence agenda would be to co-sponsor a joint research to assess which movements are making most progress on these different objectives. Such research could initiate a deeper dialogue among movements on how to co-ordinate further action, and what deserves more emphasis. Jules Peck agreed in general, but pointed out that many of the movements do not directly address ecological concerns, which need additional emphasis.

Peck also described the “mindmapping” that his project, the Real Economy Lab, is undertaking to help identify and categorise the many new initiatives on the future of economics and capitalism. Through desk research and wide consultation, the Lab is developing an information database and taxonomy to act as the basis of a mind-mapping of a wide variety of international projects aimed at developing a new economy ecosystem. The map seeks to understand what various tribes are doing and planning, and why and how. The database will map the priorities of various “tribes” on such things as new economy principles,¹³ organization type (NGO, sector-focused, grassroots, etc.), outcomes sought (policy, watchdog, advocacy, grassroots change, etc.), and mode of change (incremental, transformative, stepping stone, etc.). The database will also assess a tribe’s relation to power, profit or not for profit or hybrid, geography, links to others in new economy ecosystem, position on growth, capitalism and alternative economic models (such as market or nonmarket socialism, economic democracy etc.). The Real Economy Lab intends to develop a use tagging, qualitative research and a highly interactive online platform to help the tribes formulate their strategies and collaborations. By demonstrating what is already happening and highlighting gaps in our collective understanding, the

¹³ These include such factors as environmental sustainability, scale and urgency of change needed, well-being maximization rather than growth and wealth, equality, justice, participation and solidarity, economic democracy, sharing, resilience, common cause intrinsic values, sufficiency over efficiency, appropriate scale and subsidiarity.

Real Economy Lab also hopes to clarify points of convergence and divergence among various movements, and to stimulate consensus- and coalition-building.¹⁴

It became apparent from the ranking exercise that some movements, including the co-operative sector and Sharing Economy, focus primarily on practical projects and tool-building. Other movements like the Social Solidarity Economy and Degrowth movements concentrate on developing alternative visions and a larger paradigm shift in culture and discourse. The two sets of movements (co-operatives and sharing economy on the one hand, and Solidarity Economy and Degrowth on the other) could clearly complement each other's respective work. David Bollier noted that there are also potential bridges to be built between the practical and the theoretical by developing richer feedback loops from on-the-ground projects to theorizing about alternative economic structures. Kevin Flanagan of the P2P Foundation noted that there are a number of software platforms that could help host this dialogue; he recommended the recently released Loomio software "because it is a democratic tool for digitally connected communities."

Frédéric Sultan, a social worker and French activist who works closely with Remix the Commons and the Francophone network of commoners, noted that "each movement seems to want to change the relationships between the state, market and civil society. Can we identify the 'general interest' among them and align their separate, specific goals to what they have in common?" But perhaps transformation does not necessarily require a paradigm shift, suggested Thomas Doennebrink of Ouishare in Germany. Consolidation of existing projects might catalyze a transformation, he said, while constructing new institutional structures could amount to mere reform of the existing system. Fernando Cesa Batista, an independent researcher/consultant on the Social and Solidarity Economy and P2P Economy, based in Brazil, wondered if each movement could adopt its own transformational paradigm, or whether they should strive to adopt a common paradigm. This raises a more elemental question, he suggested – What exactly do we mean by a new paradigm?

While it may be impossible to answer these questions now, it seems clear that the lack of an agreed-upon theoretical framework based on shared values leaves practice-based projects somewhat isolated and adrift; some sort of consensus or clarity is needed about what larger structures could bring about the kinds of transformative, root-and-branch change that most of the movements seek. Pat Conaty suggested that starting a dialogue among the movements about first principles could help identify missing connections between system-changing tools and practices on the one hand, and new economic theories and paradigms on the other.

¹⁴ <http://flourishingenterprise.org/jules-peck>

So what are the values shared among these movements? Can we identify them? Mike Lewis, Mark Randazzo and Benjamin Tincq called for one overarching goal, and agreed that a focus on *Buen Vivir* [the concept of “good living popularized in Bolivia and Ecuador] and the common good could provide a source of mission unity. As John Restakis summed this up: “*Buen vivir* is inspirational to everyone. It’s also important to give global context to the vision.”

Pat Conaty elaborated on this idea by suggesting a strategic focus on protecting and reproducing the “living economy” – the idea that “real wealth is life, not dead coins, and so we should concentrate on livelihoods and the problem of wealth-sharing and abundance... .What is the prize? *The living economy*. The problematique, he argued, is the same as in earlier generations – How to share the equity? That’s what the vernacular idea of ‘co-operative commonwealth’ is all about.”

The idea of the economy as a living system, and not a set of mechanical, impersonal forces, lies at the center of an important 2012 essay by ecophilosopher and theoretical biologist Andreas Weber, “Enlivenment.”¹⁵ Drawing upon recent findings and theorizing in evolutionary sciences, Weber argues that free-market economics is based on misleading scientific theories about human nature and rely upon reductionist Enlightenment categories that ignore the creative agency of life itself. Weber argues that we should conceptualize “the economy” as a commons – a complex living system in which humans that have broad capacities to co-operate, negotiate with each other, and show creative agency.

A strategy that sets its sights on such a paradigm shift would find it very appealing to protect, enrich and extend the commons; the economy could be seen not as an extractive machine oblivious to the natural world, but as a living system that must sustain all species. David Bollier suggested that this would provide solid ground for a “movement of movements” to come together. Focusing on “real wealth as life itself” provides a powerful rationale for identifying:

1. Ways and means to internalise market externalities (which are harming the environment, communities and future generations);
2. Solutions for reducing inequality and social insecurity;
3. Pathways to reconnect people with nature and with each other; and
4. A new vision of development that goes beyond conventional markets and GDP.

¹⁵ <http://www.boell.de/en/2013/02/01/enlivenment-towards-fundamental-shift-concepts-nature-culture-and-politics>.

Adopting the commons perspective, Bollier argued, could help movements highlight the connections between “the economy,” the biophysical environment and social communities. All can be seen as integrated into a living system that commoners themselves must co-create and co-manage: a new vision for re-imagining governance, resource management and culture. In developing a discourse of the commons, movements would be able to reclaim a rich legal history and focus on viable practical models. It would also be possible to emphasise our common humanity as transnational tribes of commoners increasingly work together. Jason Nardi agreed and felt that the Social Solidarity Economy activists could find the idea of “solidarity for the commons” as a resonant and rallying vision.

Some steps toward convergence are already underway, as seen in the rising interest in the commons among traditional Social Economy companies. The international conference of such enterprises, *Les Rencontres du Mont-Blanc (RMB)*, which meets in Chamonix, France, every two years, has invited David Bollier (2011) and Michel Bauwens (2013) as scientific advisers, and this outreach has been followed up with engagement with *OuiShare* (Benjamin Tincq), the French Commoners Network (Frédéric Sultan) and *RMB and Crédit Coopératif* (Nicole Alix).

Silke Helfrich argued that commoners share an attitude that could be a source of cultural affiliation. While some commoners are conscious of this and self-reflective about their activities and identities, others are not. She conceded that it is possible to have unself-conscious commoners, who perhaps do not use the commons discourse; the key thing, however, is to move beyond market-based relationships and to see the difference between commons logic and market logic. David Bollier added that we must strive to re-embed markets in community, but this requires a shift beyond capitalist markets.

While people may at first act as commoners in non-political ways, managing resources that are important to their everyday identities and needs, they soon encounter the realities of enclosure and the difficulties of protecting commons from the predations of capital. It is for this reason, Michel Bauwens emphasised, that once you begin commons work, you ultimately cannot avoid politics. People who share files, re-use content or use land or water as commons are often accused of violating the rights of property owners (i.e., theft or trespassing) because commoning itself is often criminalised.

Notable Exploratory Projects

Participants identified a range of existing and possible projects by which greater convergence among movements could be advanced.

John Restakis and Pat Conaty presented their work on Synergia, a Canada and UK collaborative initiative to develop a Massive Online Open Course (MOOC) for co-operative and commons education that could operate internationally. First-stage design work has been carried out and a pilot of the MOOC will be launched in 2015. Synergia's mission is to promote a convergence of commons, co-operative, social solidarity economy and ecological economy thinking and practices. The design work has involved educators, co-operative practitioners and activists from both countries and is supported by a partnership that includes BALTA (the social solidarity economy and universities alliance in western Canada) and U.K. bodies such as New Economics Foundation, Co-operatives UK and Schumacher College.

Silke Helfrich agreed that there is great strategic importance in starting a network of commons educators who are connected to real practice. She cited her involvement with a German graduate program that is developing a commons university model and a newly formed Commons Institute of German commoners. The basic need, she argued, is for "continuous coordination in open spaces with wide bandwidth."

Another useful tool for commons education is film, noted Mark Decena of Kontent Films, which has produced films for the Edge Funders Alliance in the US. He cited a film that his production company produced on the Climate Justice Alliance, which is trying to build a new economy by uniting those who are fighting "extractive economies" that exploit natural resources, people and cultures. "Our aim is to get funders to see a new economy emerging and relate positively to the change agents," he said.

Immediately following this workshop, the Fourth International Degrowth Conference in Leipzig, Germany, filled this function quite well. It attracted 3,000 people from around the world, but especially Europe, and served as a kind of open movement congress for many alt-economic movements. At the conference there were two panels on convergence – one that brought together representatives of the sharing economy, peer production and Transition Towns movements, and a second one featuring the perspectives of the commons, the Solidarity Economy and the "Economy of the Common Good" (Austria).

A recurrent question is what the role of the state should be with respect to the commons. Pat Conaty pointed to the possibilities of public/social partnerships of the sort now being developed in many Italian cities. He also cited successful models of the past, such as Letchworth Garden City, in which all the land in a new town or city is put under co-operative ownership and stewardship. In Letchworth, all commercial properties, the energy system, the water services and farmland

surrounding the city of 33,000 were all held in common and economic rent captured for local residents and for the common good. Community Land Trusts in the U.S. and the U.K. have used the same ideas to provide affordable housing and workspaces. Now, in Cleveland, Ohio, the Evergreen Co-operatives are demonstrating how these land reform models can work for urban agriculture and for renewable energy. These models can enable town and cities to become resilient and economically autonomous.

The same transformative principles could be applied to money and finance, opening the way for new types of co-operative capital mechanisms for co-investment. For example, public banking in Germany through KfW is funding energy conservation and renewable energy to reduce carbon emissions. Most of the lending in Germany is advanced through public/social partnerships with regional co-operative banks and municipal savings banks.

Based on his work in Ecuador and the examples of Italian public/social partnerships, Bauwens envisions a “partner state” in which governments actively work with social commons in managing shared resources. Through such alternatives, one can imagine the “commonification of public services,” moving beyond many of the problems of centralized, hierarchical state bureaucracies. Christophe Aguiton, a French activist and researcher, agreed with this general approach: “We need a vision, and this is missing. Socialism had a practical vision in the twentieth century. Can we envisage a state rooted in the commons?”

This discussion provoked the question: What is role for regulation? It is widely recognized that industry self-regulation doesn’t work, and many progressives and liberals continue to advocate for centralized regulation as the best way to deal with marketplace and environmental abuses. But the capture and corruption of regulation are pervasive, and the limits of bureaucratic mandates and oversight are also clear. Bauwens said that since use-value communities are not a sufficient answer to market abuses, either, what is really needed are new forms of distributed regulation.

David Bollier noted that some people have proposed the idea of “open API regulation,” in which governments could use open APIs – the Application Protocol Interfaces used by software systems such as the iPhone and Amazon’s platforms – could be used to oversee corporate behavior via real-time data supplied over the Internet. Advocacy groups, citizen-science volunteers and municipalities could also use the APIs to monitor what’s going on in a field (water quality, pollution emissions, etc.) and to supply their own timely, relevant data.

Certainly the question of commons/state relations are becoming timely, relevant issues in many countries such as Spain, Greece and Italy. Podemos and Partido X are actively exploring alternative, commons-friendly policies in Spain, and in Greece the left coalition Syriza is doing the same. George Papanikolaou noted that protests in Greece against the EU and the Troika involved

an early period of direct democracy efforts that brought to mind the Occupy movement, but these efforts failed because the question of ownership -- a fundamental and transformative question -- was not properly addressed and acted upon. More recently the language of the commons has become a unifying discourse among many Greek groups as a practical framework for pointing out where power lies and for seeking democratic change. Cicero's observation that "Freedom is participation in power" is a crucial insight. Papanikolaou said Greeks now realise that they must build new institutions and develop practical, well-articulated strategies, and that a failure to do so could prove catastrophic. One inclusive way to develop a strategy is open free spaces to debate and discuss social economic and political activities. Festivals are proving to be a good way to do this, as shown by commons festivals held in Greece, Spain and Sweden. The thinking emerging in Greece now is close to that of the Social Solidarity Economy, said Papanikolaou.

Strategies for Alliance Building

So if the commons could provide the glue to link up the movements within what RIPESS has called for as a "movement of movements," what other problems are holding convergence back? In particular:

- What are the constraints to building a united movement?
- Where are the common ground areas and potential for joint action?
- What needs to be negotiated and where are the blockages?

Nicolas Krausz stressed that "existing organizations don't have time to be part of collective discussions. We need to fill this gap...We need to work together. Krausz cited the example of *Collectif pour une transition citoyenne* (Coalition for a citizen transition) in France, which has organized fourteen national organizations (the ethical bank NEF, Attac, renewable energy cooperatives, AMAP, organic food shops, Friends of the Earth France, the new climate justice movement with Alternatiba) to focus on two main goals: spreading their social and ecological transition tools to the largest possible public, and pressing mainstream political parties and local governments to secure and scale up their alternative niches. These kind of intersectional synergies, which embody a more systemic and comprehensive strategy of change, need greater support, he said.

John Restakis argued that "the quality of coordination is fundamental, and it needs to become continuous and permanent to create a common hub for the movements. To ensure success, we need a resource base for continuity and to advance discussion and to sustain joint strategising over years. We need an alliance of organizations and funders to provide 'seed corn' investment for knowledge-sharing and institution-building." Restakis added: "Some key first steps

are already underway. The New Economics Foundation in the U.K. has reached out to European groups to discuss systemic change in a programme of activity from fall 2014 to 2016. They are convening scholars and a diversity of organisations interested in alternative paradigms.”

In thinking about ways to move forward, the Deep Dive dialogue and small group conversations came up with alliance-building strategies aimed at nine main areas of collaborative inter-movement work:

1. *Knowledge sharing.* Each movement should regularly share information, plans, news and key policy, strategy and project development documents. Such cross-movement dialogue could begin by sharing reports from the Open Co-operativism and Deep Dive events.
2. *Collaborative mapping of the emerging new economy.* There has already been substantive mapping work of economic alternatives by the Social Solidarity Economy, but this could be augmented by mapping work from the Degrowth movement, commoners, the P2P Foundation, the Post-Growth Alliance and others, including a German/Austrian project, “TransforMap,” with which Silke Helfrich is deeply involved.¹⁶ The Real Economy Lab, directed by Jules Peck of the New Economics Foundation, plans to explore the linkages among a wide variety of new economic movements (see pp. 26-27).
3. *New means of communication among movements.* One proposal is to co-develop a common media magazine that would be published in several languages online. Other ideas include co-developing videos, films, stories, and arts and culture projects, and recruiting diverse writers and celebrities to promote a shared movement vision.
4. *A common manifesto.* Each of various movements could appoint a group of representatives to begin a dialogue and try to develop a manifesto that enumerates shared values, principles and strategies.
5. *Commons/convergence forum.* A steering group should be set up to build trust amongst movements by planning and pursuing shared projects and practices, and celebrating successes through common festivals. (The Real Economy Lab hopes that its interactive hub might serve as a convergence forum for alliance-building.)

¹⁶ TransforMap is an initiative of more than 20 organisations within varying fields of commoning and the collaborative economy that are mapping “alternative social and economic innovation.” Its online map is expected to launch in March 2015. More at <http://blog.14mmm.org/transfor-map-explained>.

6. *Educational venues* should be co-developed that enable movement members and newcomers to see the world differently, share resources, and work on developing practical solutions.
7. *A politics of the commons* should be allowed to evolve through a practical focus on building participatory and civic democracy. Engaging and collaborating with local government, trade unions, new economy, climate justice and other forms of active democracy should become the modus operandi in ways that build decentralised and distributed assemblies of commons.
8. *Social-public partnerships* should be co-developed with local governments and national governments, where feasible, along with participatory policy development systems and participatory budgeting solutions. A democratic assembly of commoners could co-design policy alternatives if serious engagement with the state is not possible.
9. *Co-operative accumulation infrastructure* should be co-developed with co-operative and mutual finance institutions, social economy investors, public banks where they exist and other co-operative crowd funders. Reliance on compound interest and debt-based finance should be replaced with new forms of convivial money and co-operative, debt-free capital.

Suggested Action Points for Moving Forward

The participants focused thinking in their small group discussions on a “Now, Soon and Later” sifting process to identify first steps in moving forward. Among the key Action Points suggested:

- It must be considered tactically if early efforts toward convergence should seek to build an alliance of organisations or if such work should be led by committed individuals. In either case, the leadership cadre should aim to be catalytic.
- We need to identify the sound directional steps that can build the links between and across the movements (Mike Lewis).
- Action circles should be formed to address four key areas – knowledge & know-how sharing; collaborative practice; co-operative capital and money; and communications.
- If property rights and ownership has been taboo as Pat Conaty pointed out, then collaborative practical work on land and capital/money reform could serve to unite the movements in finding convivial, commons-based solutions.

- Work should commence on “ready-made policies” (or policy templates) for advancing the Great Transition and the commons. This should be a collaborative international project to help build and advance “democracy as verb” and displace the unrepresentative state of politics and command-and-control policymaking so pervasive today. This work could develop the legal/policy foundation for social-public partnerships and for a new “partner state” that is designed to foster commons.
- The collaborative development of a international educational movement focused on co-operative commonwealth building is crucially important, as embodied in the Synergia MOOC and a potential commons university-without-walls. It was proposed that this be further investigated through a Deep Dive bringing together diverse movements.
- Work should commence on a mini-roadmap of strategies to evolve and expand through a convergence dialogue among the movements.
- The commons and convergence dialogue could be advanced during 2015 at any number of conferences and other gatherings, as identified in Appendix B. The work being led by RIPESS to host a major Solidarity Economy Europe conference in Berlin in September 2015 will provide a significant opportunity to bring the movement tribes together. We should aim to launch an alliance of movements by then and begin addressing the mini-road map and “movement of movement” question.
- Finally, work needs to get underway on a website that could serve as a shared space for sharing information and coordination work.. It was collectively agreed that the motto of a new commons/convergence effort could be “From TINA to TAPAS [From “There Is No Alternative” to “There Are Plenty of Alternatives.”]

Conclusion

The Deep Dive confirmed many people’s sense that important synergies could flow from a closer alignment of various economic and social movements, most notably the co-operative, social solidarity economy, peer production, sharing economy and commons movements. There are other movements, too, such as Transition Towns, relocalisation and community economic development, La Via Campesina, and others that could contribute to building a new “movement of movements.”

The final session of the workshop surfaced many practical ideas for exploring how to move forward, ranging from better communications, inter-movement dialogues about first principles, mapping projects, joint strategising at upcoming conferences, new educational platforms and

networks, the rediscovery and extension of co-operative commonwealth models, new public/social partnerships, among many others.

Ultimately, further progress will depend upon leadership from individuals within different movements in opening up new dialogues, finding new resources and institutional support, and launching new strategic gambits and projects. Fortunately, there are already many promising convergence initiatives underway. The challenge is to take this goodwill, imagination and momentum to new levels.

APPENDIX A

Workshop Participants

Christophe Aguiton	France	Orange [telecom co.]; Sorbonne; Marne-la-Vallée
Michel Bauwens	Thailand	Commons Strategies Group
David Bollier	US	Commons Strategies Group
Sofia Cardona	Spain	Cooperativa Integral, Catalunya
Fernando Cesa Batista	Brazil	Independent researcher/consultant on Social & Solidarity Economy and P2P Economy
Pat Conaty	UK	Co-operatives UK / New Economics Foundation
Mark Decena	US	Kontent Films
Daniela Del Bene	Spain	EJOLT (Env'tl Justice Organisations, Liabilities, Trade)
Thomas Dönnebrink	Germany	Ouishare
Kevin Flanagan	Ireland	P2P Foundation
Silke Helfrich	Germany	Commons Strategies Group
Nicolas Krausz	Switzerland	Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation
Mike Lewis	Canada	Canadian Centre for Community Renewal
Heike Löschmann	Germany	Heinrich Böll Foundation
Margie Mendell	Canada	Karl Polanyi Institute, Quebec
Jason Nardi	Italy	Solidarius, RIPESS
Annemarie Naylor	UK	Common Futures
George Papanikolaou	Greece	P2P Foundation, Greece
Jules Peck	UK	New Economics Foundation
María G. Perulero	Spain	Goteo
Mark Randazzo	US	Edge Funders Alliance
John Restakis	Canada	British Columbia Co-operative Association/FLOK project
Frédéric Sultan	France	Remix the Commons; Francophone commons network
Kate Swade	UK	Shared Assets
Benjamin Tincq	France	Ouishare

Appendix B:
Roadmap – 2015 Events That Offer Opportunities for Convergence

March 24-28	World Social Forum/Tunis
April 8-10	Edge Funders Alliance conference, Baltimore
May	Meeting of all Integral Co-operatives
May 20-22	Ouishare Fest/Paris
May	International meeting of Solidarity Economy/Quebec
May	Eco-Networks meeting
August	Chaos Computer Club Camp, Germany
August 3-7	Fab11 / Boston [open source electronics projects]
September 7-13	Solidarity Economy & Transformap / Berlin
December 15	COP 21 [UN climate change conference] / Paris