Notes for translators on my intervention at the International Commons Conference

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November 1, 2010

1 November 2010 afternoon session

[Slide 1 / graphics only]

I am very grateful for the invitation to the *Heinrich Böll Stiftung* and *Fondation pour le progrès de l'homme*.

For many years, the defenders of the commons have been focused on preventing their being turned into private property or merchandized. More recently, a less defensive approach has centered on building autonomous narratives for the commons: explaining how they function, how they can be successfully governed by user and contributor communities. I am inviting you to go one step further: consider what type of relation we want to exist between the monetary economy and the commons. How can we organize their relations in order to guarantee the conditions of existence of extended commons? How can we ensure that individuals and independent groups have means to invest in the maintenance and the enrichment of the commons?

I am going to rush through the presentation of a tool kit. Forget about one magical solution, consider all the tools available, their benefits and possible flaws. Here you have 9 mechanisms for articulating the economy with the commons.

[Following with laser pointer]

1. The first one is when investors have an interest in the existence of some components of a commons. They invest in it, and possibly some of that investment travels to support other components, but not to the whole set of components that deserve to exist.

2. The second scheme is when contributors and users of a commons gain internalize competence, skills and gain reputation because of their activity. This competence is valuable, and they can market it for instance to get jobs or work for hire including in classical market activities.

3. The 2 next scheme are things you are probably less familiar with: they are proposals, in particular from Patrick Viveret, to deal with the insane inequality of income and wealth that the recent functioning of the economy has brought to the world societies. This first one is a scheme to recycle excessive income or wealth, not by confiscating it, but by imposing that it should be invested or spent on valuable social, environmental or knowledge activities, that is in commons and social public goods.

4. A complementary scheme is a specific use of alternative currencies that are introduced in some commons. People accumulate "credits" in these currencies. Up to some income, these credits can be converted into "normal" consumption[1] currency.

5. The fifth scheme is an extremely important one: voluntary resource pooling to fund projects. Information technology has enabled such resource pooling to develop at larger scale, beyond local communities, thanks to participative intermediaries that act as brokers between proponents of projects and potential donours. But is this larger scale large enough?

6. The sixth scheme aims at creating society-wide resource pooling by statutory (compulsory) contribution such the Kulturflatrate or my own proposals for digital culture. This contribution is distributed among projects (according to direct user choices) and for rewards to existing contributions (for instance cultural works) according to their use in the commons.

7. The seventh scheme is public trusts. There are set up by governments or international organizations, who fund them but also effort at getting corporations and individuals to invest in them. The trust is also a multi-stakeholder organization that plays an essential role in managing the corresponding commons (coastal land, natural reserves, the climate).

8. The eight scheme is tax-financed public subsidies. Project subsidies are often peer-managed, for instance in science. In other cases, public money supports statutes, activities. Public subsidies play an essential role in the existence of commons, even those whose members do not want to have much to do with governments.

9. Finally, the last scheme is basic income. It is an appealing idea, as it is the one scheme that leaves individuals entirely free of allocating their time to projects and activities of their taste and ability. There is with strong uncertainty on how to put it in place. Using probably a mix of tax and currency creation, each (adult) individual is endowed with a level of <u>unconditional</u> income that enables her or him to decide to freely allocate time to contributing to various commons or earn more money in market activities.

[1] Consumption is the sense that it can not be in invested in speculative ventures, it has to be spent on goods and services. This can be ensured by example by making it fungible: when you store it, it loses value every year.

[Slide 2 / Titles with background graphics]

I am going to fly you over a few of these schemes as time permits. For the others, refer to the slides that are now on-line. This is supposed to be tool kit for the further discussion.

[Slide 3 / Private or administrative investment]

For each scheme, I have listed a few examples, and the presently known benefits and limits of the scheme. In this first scheme, the limits are the biased priorities for the commons in comparison to self-centred priorities and the incomplete coverage.

[Slide 4 / Indirect return for commoners]

The indirect returns for commoners scheme has strange effects: it imports some commons culture into firms and administrations. But it also imports market and firm constraints in commoners' lives. They install an alternance of getting paid and depressed in proprietary projects and happy and broke in the commons.

Indirect returns also exist in a more harmonious form when musicians gain reputation in file sharing and use this reputation for concerts, or teaching. This is however limited by concentration in the concert tour scenes.

[Slide 7 / Voluntary resource pooling]

Voluntary resource pooling has always worked for some individual projects, but it gained real attention through the birth of intermediaries such as Kickstarter, Flattr, Touscoprod, etc. The wonderful thing about it is that it is the scheme you can use today, without any change to law or policy. It has in my opinion a long-lasting value for collecting resources for mid-size projects where there is a strongly interested limited-size dispersed community of people who want some projects to exist. How much it can reach large scale, and what are the governance issues if it does are open questions.

[Slide 8 / Statutory resource pooling]

This is my own field of work, so I will let you discover what are its benefits and you probably know what are the challenges: giving users a strong and voluntary control on how the collected sums are used and installing a good governance for the collected sums, even in face of possible regulatory capture by large interests.

[Slide 9 / Public Trusts]

I do not dare to elaborate on public trusts in front of Alberto Acosta who has made an important and original proposal for one of them. But I would like to mention that in France, the Conservatoire du Littoral (coastal land trust) is an interesting example, unfortunately insufficiently endowed by the government these last years.

[Slide 10 / Public subsidies]

Never underestimate the importance of tax-financed public subsidies. They are eroded by tax evasion and anti-tax opinions fueled in some cases by misuse of public money. But much of the modern commons have an enormous debt to publicly funded statutes, activities and projects. The true challenge is the installation of a decentralized democratic governance for the use of centralized money.

[Slide 11 / Basic income]

Believe it or not, but basic income is already there. About a third of income in European countries comes from redistribution mechanisms. But these mechanisms lack the good properties one expects from basic income as a tool for the commons. Existing social income is conditional and insufficient, and its conditions, in particular the assignment to employability, to the search for missing jobs, prevent benefitters from engaging in empowering activities. Can we do better? It is clearly a great challenge. But who said we should stick to easy things?

[Slide 12 / Refs]

Thanks for your attention.