

# A COMPANION TO IASC COMMONS CONFERENCES



JOHN POWELL  
CHRIS SHORT & KATE ASHBROOK  
EDITED BY NICK LEWIS



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## Authors

Dr. John Powell  
Chris Short  
Kate Ashbrook

## Editor

Nick Lewis

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# Foreword

*by Ruth Meinzen-Dick*

The International Association for the Study of the Commons (IASC) is my favourite and most important professional society, not only because of the importance of the topic, but because of the way it brings together top scholars and practitioners from all over the world to learn from each other. One of the best ways it does that is through its conferences.

For years I've been telling friends, colleagues, even casual acquaintances: "I go to a LOT of meetings, but these are my favourite." So far I've attended every global conference since 1992 (14 in all), plus regional meetings. This document helps to tell the story of why the IASC conferences are not only so enjoyable, but so important.

First, each meeting is grounded in the place where it is held. Unlike global or national conferences held in look-alike hotels, IASC conferences are each unique to the place where they are held. Conference participants get to know local commoners, why the commons are important to them, and what are the pressing issues regarding the commons in that country. This goes beyond the excellent conference dinners and receptions with local cultural performances. Field trips are not an optional add-on, but an integral part of the conference, where participants get to experience the commons and hear from the commoners themselves as well as government officials, researchers, and NGOs working on the commons. The field trips also allow people to interact with each other in different ways, and create stronger bonds than just exchanging business cards in a meeting. Sections of this publication provide a flavour of this.

Second, each conference is addressing important issues of that time and place. For example, the 2008 Cheltenham conference that the authors of this publication organized came shortly after the 2006 UK Commons Act, and allowed people from all over the world to learn about how that legislation protecting the commons came about, and the challenges and successes in its implementation.

Finally, the quality of the keynote speeches, paper and poster presentations, and preconference workshops are exceptionally high—no doubt related to the careful screening of the many submissions and the organisers' contacts with exceptional people for keynotes.

All of this requires a lot of hard work by the conference organisers. This publication is unique in that it tells the back story of that organizing, and gives a personal perspective of what both organisers and participants get out of these meetings. I hope it will inspire others to not only participate in IASC conferences, but also to organize meetings in ways that create real interaction and learning.

Ruth Meinzen-Dick  
Senior Research Fellow  
[International Food Policy Research Institute](#)  
Former President, [International Association for Study of the Commons](#) (2007-2011)



# About the authors

## **John Powell**

[John](#) is a Senior Research Fellow at [CCRI](#) and was part of the Defra Bill team that developed the Commons Act 2006, which applies to common land in England and Wales. He has worked on a range of commons resources and is the current president of the IASC.

## **Chris Short**

[Chris](#) is a Senior Research Fellow at [CCRI](#) and specialises in the relationship between land use and communities. He is a board member of Gloucestershire Local Nature Partnership, an evaluator of applicants to the Ostrom award and Chair of the Foundation for Common Land. [Chris can be found on Twitter.](#)

## **Kate Ashbrook**

[Kate](#) is the General Secretary for the [Open Spaces Society](#) - Britain's oldest conservation body. Kate is also vice-president of the Ramblers, a trustee of the Campaign for National Parks and the Dartmoor Preservation Association, patron of the Walkers Are Welcome Towns Network and a member of the Institute of Rights of Way and Access Management. She received the Elinor Ostrom award in 2013. [Kate can be found on Twitter.](#)

## **Nick Lewis**

[Nick](#) is a Research Assistant at [CCRI](#) and specialises in data management and analysis. He also manages the social media output for CCRI.

# About this book

Building upon the previous [‘Commons’ e-book](#) we recently published, it seemed to be a logical progression to collate the numerous blog posts that had been written by Kate, Chris, and myself when we attended the various international IASC Commons conferences over the last decade. As Chris and I have experienced IASC conferences as both delegates and organisers it has allowed us to present a dual perspective on running and attending the events. The intention of this publication is to provide a flavour of the IASC Commons conferences and hopefully to convey that perception to you. Whether you have attended an event before or it is your first time, or if you are part of an organising committee for a current or future conference. We have focused only on the IASC Biennial Global Conferences of the past ten years that we have attended in person. Although there have been many more IASC regional and thematic conferences in that time they tend to be smaller and more focused, without the huge cultural mix that one experiences at the global events.

The area of commons management and governance has become more topical over recent years, and some of the key concepts are clearly starting to influence the thinking of some world leaders (for example, the second encyclical published by Pope Francis in 2015, entitled ‘Laudato si’, regarding ‘care for the planet’). The Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI) has a long history of research in the commons arena: Chris Short for example, is currently Chairman of the Foundation for Common Land in England and has been involved in delivery of national ‘common land’ conferences for many years; while I have worked on groundwater, fisheries, and commons legislation. Other colleagues in CCRI have worked on marine fisheries, and are starting to look at urban spaces and food systems from a commons perspective, and the CCRI was the main organising body for the 2008 IASC global conference in the UK.

We invited Kate Ashbrook, General Secretary of the Open Spaces Society (founded in 1865 as the Commons Preservation Society), to contribute to this publication. She has attended and been involved in delivering activities at a number of the conferences, and regularly publishes on [her own blog](#). As we are all based in southern England we often find ourselves travelling together to the far-flung locations of the IASC global events. In 2013 Kate received the Elinor Ostrom award for her outstanding campaigning work with the 'Open Spaces Society' in defending and protecting commons resources.

This publication presents a set of very personal views on the IASC global conferences we have attended, often written while we were there. Everyone's perceptions and experiences of these events is slightly different so these are intended only to provide an indication of the ambience and character of each conference. The book is not intended to be read from cover-to-cover, it is more a document for perusing, for dipping into now and again to get an idea of what it is like to be involved in one of these events as a participant, or as an organiser. We have tried to capture and convey the spirit of the events we have attended, which are usually a mix of hard work, the enjoyment from meeting new people, and the excitement in gaining a little insight into how commons are managed in different parts of the world.

***John Powell, May 2017.***



# 2006 Bali

*Survival of the commons:  
Mixing challenges and new realities*



The 2006 International Commons conference ran from June 19th – 23rd in Ubud, Bali, Indonesia. It was hosted by the Centre for Agrarian Studies based at the Bogor Agricultural University and chaired by Ernan Rustiadi from the Centre for Regional Development Planning and Satyawan Sunito from the Centre for Agrarian Studies.

The theme for the conference was 'Survival of the Commons: Mounting Challenges and New Realities' and attracted 434 delegates from 57 countries. The conference addressed issues that were pertinent to Indonesia such as survival and adaptation of more traditional commons such as water forests and fisheries, but also newer areas that were more relevant at an international level, such as innovation and global commons. Around 250 papers were presented from an initial 669 abstracts that were submitted for review. These were categorised into nine sub-themes:

- Contemporary analytical tools and theoretical questions
- Conservation policy and the commons
- Culture, identity, and survival of the commons
- Local resource rights and management institutions

- New frontiers (the new global commons)
- Privatisation
- Resurgent commons within public and private property
- The commons and its role in revitalising agriculture, forestry and fisheries
- The state, legal reform, and decentralisation

Commons have a long history in Indonesia and their governance is typically encompassed within local traditions. The archipelago has an incredibly rich level of biodiversity and natural resources, which has been managed collectively by local communities for generations. As elsewhere in the world however, societal changes as a result of globalisation along with changes in demography and wealth are increasing pressures on these resources and the way they are perceived and utilised. In the lead up to the conference, changes in the country's legislation – in particular the national water resources law, further affected existing practices related to common property.

The conference was opened by president of the IASC, Dr. Narpat Jodha, who also gave an address. The keynote speech given, by Professor E Walter Coward titled 'Properties Landscaped in Motion', was particularly well received.



Map of Indonesia showing key provinces - © [d-maps.com](http://d-maps.com)

# First impressions of Bali

*The Bali conference was Chris Short's first encounter with an international IASC event*

You know that you are going to a good conference when there is a pick up for you at the airport! But then there is only one airport in Bali and a conference with 500 delegates is a big event for this small Indonesian island. The next think that struck was the combination of the heat and humidity, even coming from an English summer.

The conference was in the central town of Ubud in the uplands of Bali, well known as a centre for traditional crafts and dance. The conference was set in the magical surroundings of the Arma Museum and Resort. This was just on the edge of Ubud amongst rice fields and surrounded by many traditional villas and gardens. This meant there was a great deal to distract you during the presentations as the rooms tended to be open sided to make the most of whatever breeze there was.



*Some of the villas and gardens surrounding the conference venue*

The local people in Bali could not have been more welcoming, even when language was a barrier they wanted to please. As the conference was held during the 2006 World Cup they even had a special notice board in the middle of Ubud where all the results were shown - much to my delight being a keen football fan! The conference also had a large stall where local produce could be purchased by delegates. Most of the items were actually being sold by the people who produced them, so it was a real pleasure to meet local crafts people and for them to show the methods of creating wonderful jewellery, paintings and artefacts. Much of this was Fairtrade and they took great pleasure in discussing the way that the developed and developing world can interact for mutual benefit.



*Workers in the paddy fields surrounding the conference venue*

In Indonesia, common property has a long history. The rich biological and cultural diversity of the archipelagic nation is mirrored by the variety of social institutions associated with natural resource ownership and management. Much of the country's forest, river, coastal and marine territories and resources have been collectively managed by local

communities for many generations. Like elsewhere in the world, globalisation and modernisation have led to fundamental changes in the way common property is understood and practiced in Indonesia. The legal framework inherited from the colonial period, and reinforced by global market forces, provides almost no space for common or communal property. Imbalanced distribution of wealth and power, demographic pressures and internecine strife weaken and undermine existing institutions and practices. Recent political and economic changes present new challenges and opportunities for communities and individuals on issues such as water, food and conservation.



*An Indonesian woman weaving on a traditional loom*

# Opening ceremony

Opening ceremonies at IASC international conferences are always an opportunity for the host nation to showcase an array of traditional activities cultures and heritage. At the Bali conference this was certainly the case with the event being held in a substantial and impressive temple that was within the grounds of the Arma museum and resort.



*Dancing during the opening ceremony*

Some of the dancing that was performed was spectacular and included the Kecak Rina Dance, which is originally based on a ritual Balinese trance dance in traditional costumes. Food was a mixture traditional Balinese and Indonesian which were very fresh and delicious. It was served from a range of stalls each offering a tempting variety of dishes consisting of rice with a range of meat, fish or vegetarian options. The food is always something delegates remember, and a feature John and I were keen to deliver when our time came at the Cheltenham conference.

The current President, Dr. Narpat Jodha welcomed all delegates to Bali and was joined by the Conference Chair Ernan Rustiadi from the Centre for Regional Development Planning and Satyawan Sunito from the Centre for Agrarian Studies. Dr. Jodha has worked in over 15 countries of Asia and Africa as an employee of different CGIAR Centres as well as the other agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation, World Bank and the United Nations Environment Programme. He is currently with the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development where he has worked for nearly two decades, most recently in the Himalayan Document Centre.



*Two of the dancers from the opening ceremony*

After opening the event Dr. Jodha gave a short address entitled 'Revisiting the Role and Responsibilities of IASCP in the Changing Common Property Rights Contexts' which was very well received.

Walter Coward's keynote address on 'Property Landscapes in Motion' centred around the phrase 'society makes property' but Coward showed that over time there has been a continuing flow of human activities intended to make, unmake and remake property. The studies of common property and work around the world to assist common property owners is really an act of understanding that property remains in a state of flux because property is a human construction.



*One of the many stall holders at the conference*

# Panel sessions, workshops and meeting key IASC personnel

*Chris delivered a paper at the Bali conference and also met a number of distinguished IASC members*

As this was my first time attending an international IASC conference one of the most notable events was the opportunity to meet Lin Ostrom, who would later win a Nobel Prize for Economics in 2009, and others on the IASC team, in particular Ruth Meinzen-Dick who has kindly written the forward to this book. I also met Tine De Moor, who is currently organising the 2017 conference in Utrecht. I first met her in Brescia at a European IASC meeting earlier in the year. In Bali we ended up on the same field trip and she kindly took a picture of me struggling in the heat! I also had the pleasure of meeting Michelle Curtain, (Executive Director IASC) and Charlotte Hess, an expert in new commons of knowledge and intellectual property rights.



*A temple close to the conference venue*

My own paper was titled 'Multifunctional Approaches to Commons Management in England and Wales: linking two literatures to meet new challenges'. It built on work that I had completed in 2000 and was related to the UK Commons Act 2006 that also came out that year. This Act hinged on updating traditional management of existing commons to include new values such as nature, heritage and landscape conservation, whilst accepting that commons also provide a crucial link between nature and society. The evidence from England and Wales suggests that far from attempting to privatise the commons, national governments and agencies now support legislation that will sustain and renew the collective approaches into the twenty-first century. What was particularly memorable (aside from the heat) was that the audience was genuinely surprised that there were, and still are active Commons in England and Wales.



*One of the presentation rooms*

There were a number of NGO organised panel sessions and workshops. One particularly enjoyable session was conducted by the World Resources Institute run by Jesse Ribot and his colleagues: Bradley L. Kinder, Nathaniel Gerhart, and Anjali Bhat. It was titled 'Institutional Choice and Recognition: Effects on the Formation and Consolidation of Local Democracy.'

# Field trip to a Badan Perwalilan Desa

*Chris had the opportunity to visit forest commons whilst in Bali and learn about how they are governed*

There were a wide range of excellent sounding field trips and I had the opportunity to visit the native forests where there was a well organised system of governance amongst the local people. There were different rights associated with different products from the forest such as fruit, timber or foliage.



*Location of the BDP*

The Badan Perwalilan Desa (BPD) is perhaps best translated as the 'Village Consultative Board' and is the administration of village government. BPD can be regarded as the "parliament" of the village and a new institution in the village in the era of regional autonomy in Indonesia. Members of the BPD represent all villager's concerns that have been gathered throughout the numerous village territories. Members of the BDP consist of the regional village Chair, stakeholders, professional groups, religious leaders and other community representatives.

Typical issues that were considered by the BPD include:

- Discussion of draft village regulations with the Village Head
- Supervision on the implementation of Village Regulation and Village Head Regulation
- Collecting, gathering, formulating and channelling people's aspirations

This was all governed by a local gathering where the specific detail of the village and the shared management prescriptions of the forest are decided. It should also be noted that the use of the BPD name does not have to be uniform in all villages in Indonesia, and it can be called by another name.

In the afternoon we went further into the hills where we saw attempts to add value to a local spiny fruit, [Salak](#). This odd-looking fruit deserves its alternative moniker, 'snake fruit' as its skin resembles tiny scales up close. It grows in clusters on very spiny palm-like trees – not a pleasant or inviting sight. Farming them is difficult as a result. One experiment was to develop one type of Bali's Salak into wine by farming cooperatives in Karangasem, East Bali. Of course this was sampled. The food here was particularly interesting as we were given distinct local cuisine from the area.



*Food on the field trip with Salek in the centre*

There was a delicious curried chicken and egg with a boiled spinach-type vegetable and of course Salak for dessert. The fruit are reddish to dark brown and egg-shaped. The trick is to squeeze the top and peel by hand. This should reveal three pale yellow lobes, once the thin layer of silky membrane is rubbed off it is a moist and crunchy treat, avoiding the hard black seed in the largest lobe. It has a sweet taste and slightly starchy consistency, and a flavour that is somewhere between pineapple and apple.



*Chris struggles with the heat during the field trip*

# Reflections on the Bali conference

The main reason for attending the conference in Bali was to discuss the opportunity for hosting the IASC conference in Cheltenham in 2008. One of the main attractions was bring people to the UK at a time when new commons legislation had just been adopted. The decision that we would host the event was made during the Bali conference, meaning that I had to do a quick adjustment of my presentation in order to be part of the closing ceremony. As with the opening ceremony there was traditional dancing and this time I was required to join in, along with others who had been involved in the conference organisation.

Speaking to the organisers afterwards they indicated that the organisation had been a challenge. It was the first time IASC had held a conference in Asia and as a result there were some challenges as different cultures had different ideas – but I thoroughly enjoyed the conference.



*Dancing during the closing ceremony*

My lasting impression is the international IASC conferences are very friendly and welcoming affairs. There was a great deal of interaction between academics, NGOs and practitioners. There were some really engaging and thought provoking sessions, but sadly some which were less so. However everyone was very supportive despite this. Eating out in Bali was also pleasure, and provided a very positive memory. The other particularly positive memory was that of the friendliness of those hosting the event. These were two things that John and I felt would be crucial to making our event a success.

Bali is place to which I promised to return, something I have not managed yet but still plan to do.



*The food stalls that offered a cornucopia of food options*

# 2008 Cheltenham

*Governing shared resources: Connecting local experience to global challenges*



The 2008 International Commons conference ran from July 14th – 18th in Cheltenham, England. The event was sponsored by the University of Gloucestershire, and it was organised and chaired by John Powell and Chris Short from the Countryside and Community Research Institute. Over 400 papers were selected and presented at the conference, with topics including 'property rights', 'theory and method', 'global commons' and 'complex commons', and organised in such a way that maximum interaction was possible for the attending delegates. Approximately 860 papers were submitted for consideration by the selection committee. Attended by over 500 delegates from 70 countries, the conference theme was 'Governing Shared Resources: Connecting Local Experience to Global Challenges', and encompassed six sub-themes:

- Understanding the benefits of commons
- Property rights: recognition, protection and creation
- Community and governance: exploring new approaches

- Analysing the multi-functional nature of complex commons
- Evolution and enclosure of commons
- Social movements, networks and collective action

The countries which make up Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales), have a long history of Commons, each with subtle unique characteristics. In the years prior to the conference, John Powell was seconded to Defra as it developed the Commons Act 2006. The Act aimed to achieve wider benefits from improved management of common land and better protection for common land and town and village greens, both in terms of their use and also through securing greater certainty of common rights, which until 1965 were largely unrecorded. Improvements to the registration and recording of rights of common required repeal of previous legislation which had resulted in loss of commons and led to inaccuracies over commonland boundaries and allocation of rights. The 2006 Act was the culmination of a 50-year process to implement the recommendations of the 1958 Report of the Royal Commission on Common Land. The Commons Act 2006 provided for common rights holders and other interested parties to form 'commons councils' with statutory powers to manage the land. The legislation required careful tailoring to ensure all those with rights in a common were represented on councils, and for the first time enabled majority voting on commons management. More information on the characteristics and designations of common land can be found on the [Foundation for Common Land](#) website.

The location of the conference in the centre of England enabled around 300 of the delegates to be taken on field-trips to explore a range of common resource and management issues. Topics included fisheries, uplands, forestry and community ownership, whilst destinations ranged from the Forest of Dean, Cotswold Hills, Gower Peninsula, Somerset Levels and The Bodleian Library, Oxford.

In addition to Ruth Meinzen-Dick's presidential address entitled 'A Strategy for the Commons', three keynote speeches were given at the conference:

- Bakary Kante - 'The difficulty of managing global commons';
- Lord Carey of Clifton (former Archbishop of Canterbury) - 'From global commons to global community';
- Judy Ling Wong from the Black Environment Network - 'Ethnic origins to the commons'.

Elinor Ostrom also gave a presentation entitled 'A Dynamic Diagnostic Approach' which was particularly well received, and regarded as one of the highlights of the event.



Map of England showing key cities - © [d-maps.com](http://d-maps.com)

# How it came to be...

## *The organising of the 12th Biennial Conference of the IASC*

### *Reflections on hosting the 2008 conference, along with issues, experiences and solutions associated with a large-scale event*

#### *An idea germinates – and begins to grow*

In early 2006, Chris Short and I attended a conference in Brescia – the first IASC European Regional Conference. Michelle Curtain, the Executive Director of the IASC was there, and one of her tasks was scouting locations for future conferences. At the members meeting she indicated the Association was looking for venues for the next biennial international conference in 2008. Chris and I glanced at each other across the room, both having the same thought – ‘what about England?’ A country where around 4% of the land area was still managed as commons, yet had never featured in any of the Ostrom studies, and where new legislation on commons (the first for 40 years) was currently being developed.

On the way home we were brimming with ideas and started putting together a proposal to bid for running a conference. That was the easy bit. The Director of our research institute was initially indifferent but with some persuasion gradually came round to the idea, enough to invest funds in sending Chris to the IASC biennial conference in Bali later that year to learn how an international conference was delivered, and to make our formal pitch to the IASC Executive Council.

The most difficult part was to convince our institution, the University of Gloucestershire, that such an event would be of value. That was no easy task as the largest previous conference delivered on campus

was only 250 people. Our initial discussions with senior management were met with barriers and concerns over lack of capacity and resources, over health and safety issues, and more significantly over financial risk. It took six months of dedicated effort on the part of Chris and myself to overcome all the objections from across the university, with some of the strongest objections coming from middle-managers who did not want to deal with something outside their 'comfort zone'

The wheels of academia move slowly and by the time we received official support from the university (but no funding, of course) there were only 17 months to the start date. Those first six months were not wasted, however, as we had used the time to develop our ideas on the thematic and programme focus for the conference. The key to getting the green light from the university was to get the Vice-Chancellor on our side and demonstrate the value of delivering an international conference to the university. To do this we had to put together a coherent strategy, which essentially sketched out the following:

- Benefits to the CCRI and University of Gloucestershire
- A programme theme
- The concept of commons and why the topic was important
- National, regional and local relevance
- Target number of delegates
- Costs, income, risk, and financial implications
- Tangible and intangible benefits to the university and academic staff
- Outline of the programme for each day
- Resources required

This final item required some innovative thinking as neither the university nor the town in which it was located had a venue large enough for a plenary session for our target number of delegates. Our solution was to suggest

hiring a large marquee with its own power supply, lighting, and flooring, which could be erected in the grounds of the main campus, and would be solid enough to withstand the vagaries of the English summer weather. We also had to decide on how large the conference was going to be, eventually setting a cap of 600 delegates as the maximum number we could accommodate in parallel sessions. This was determined through balancing the likely number of participants, financial costs in hiring rooms, and the number of rooms available on the main campus in Cheltenham during the conference period. Thus, by the time we got the green light from the university, we knew the conference theme, and had decided on field-trips and workshops. We had a good idea of how we were going to accommodate everyone. We also had a target for the number of delegates (the 'conference size') which was an essential early decision, in-order to start negotiations on accommodation and catering.

So, with only 17 months to go until delivery, Chris and I divided up the tasks so that one of us took over all the academic issues (calls for papers, submission and review of papers, finding keynote speakers, organising the programme) while the other addressed the practical delivery aspects such as accommodation, food, transport, and liaising with university managers. In addition, we both looked for sponsorship and funding for the relevant activities we were managing.

We also ran a competition among local high schools to design a logo for the conference. Securing a small amount of money to offer as a prize we contacted heads of art departments in several schools around the town and county, visiting some of them to explain the nature of commons and the overall themes for this conference. Not all schools were interested but we had sufficient entries, one of which was good enough to use as the conference logo (see page 24). We also commissioned a local artist to design a series of images which we could use to brand different elements of the conference.

The key to the whole process was to establish an effective 'local organising committee' – made up of ourselves and representatives from across different service departments of the University. We persuaded a senior executive of the university to chair the committee, which was probably one of the best moves we made regarding conference management. Someone at the top of the university overseeing the process meant that our concerns were heard at the highest levels. This support was critical as there were numerous problems encountered during the initial organisational phase.

In terms of management systems, the other key organisational procedure regular meetings of the core delivery team (Chris, myself, conference administrator, business administrator and other support staff within our research unit). The group established a detailed timetable of activities with specific deliverables identified, and a week-by-week overview of progress with monthly reports to the senior executive chairing the local organising committee. This form of detailed management is essential to ensure all the numerous and detailed actions are considered and carried out on time and to the required standard.

### *Turning up the heat – six months to go!*

"Chris, should we panic now, or wait until tomorrow?" A fairly standard question for a Monday morning in the final few months leading up to the conference, when crises seemed to emerge on a weekly basis, and problem solving became a standard part of the day's activities. Chris's answer never varied, "Let's have a cup of tea and think about it a bit more". A wise (and typically English) approach as we never failed to find a solution.

No conference is ever straightforward, each one has its problems that appear at any time in the process, and difficulties that must be managed in order to deliver a high-quality experience. Ours was no different and by the time we got to the point where we had only six months to go things started to get a

little frantic. Chris and I were spending almost all of our time on conference matters. The steady stream of emails and phone calls had grown into a torrent, taking much of the administrator's time. Potential delegates wanted information on visas, sponsorship, conference programme and accommodation. Practitioners were concerned about their planned activities, and academics were proposing additional panel sessions, policy forums and workshops. We were being inundated with questions and queries and keeping on top of everything was a real challenge.

Part of our difficulty was a time-lag in getting updates on registration and payment from the on-line payment system based in the USA. The IASC secretariat needed time to accumulate all the information and send it to us, but it often did not match up with what people were telling us directly via phone and email. There were additional technical issues that were eventually resolved when we recruited a full time administrative assistant who helped develop a customised database that allowed us to track each delegate individually. If we had to do a conference now it would be much easier due to the conference registration and payment systems developed by the IASC for the 2017 biennial conference in Utrecht.

The core team were meeting weekly ensuring the myriad tasks were being dealt with and targets met. The local organising committee was meeting monthly and the academic programme committee were meeting in the virtual environment. Rooms were booked, brochures and posters printed, arrangements made to ensure university personnel would be available for housekeeping and catering. Registration was ongoing, accommodation was being booked and catering arranged. Conference materials started to arrive, including hundreds of memory sticks with the conference programme and abstracts pre-loaded. At this point we also recruited a large number of student helpers who would act in variety of support roles. One of the main rewards for student helpers, apart from being paid, was the option

to attend a series of Master classes delivered by senior IASC academics, all organised by Chris with some sponsorship from an external organisation.

On the academic side the major task was putting together the detailed conference programme, assigning papers to specific sessions, and identifying delegates to chair each session. There was additional pressure from UK based organisations who had only recently learned about the conference through their networks and wanted to get involved. Putting together the programme was an interesting activity constrained as it was by uncertainties over visa applications for some delegates, changes to panel sessions as some presenters dropped out or were replaced, and accommodation constraints. We realised that we could not fit all of the submitted papers into the limited time frame and accommodation space so altered the delivery style of each afternoon session. These were turned into 'aqua vitae' (water of life) sessions which limited each presenter to only seven minutes (instead of the 15 – 20 minutes allocated in regular sessions). We were concerned about delegates attitudes to being told they had less than half the time expected, therefore a letter was sent to all affected presenters allocated to the aqua vitae sessions, explaining the rationale for the change. Some concerns were expressed but there were no demands to be moved, and delegates later informed us they had very much enjoyed these sessions. The constraint certainly focused the minds of presenters who had to 'distil' the essence of their paper into a very short time-frame.

The programme was constantly changing, right up until the conference start, but a full conference booklet needed to be printed and we had to agree a final programme ten days before the start. In the event, only a small number of changes were required to the final programme after printing, as a result of presenters not appearing (mostly due to visa problems). This was one of the most challenging activities. Dealing with continual change and uncertainty was the norm, up to and during the conference itself.

Field trip organisation also absorbed a significant amount of time: liaising with those who would lead trips, ensuring activities were supported by external organisations, booking transport and catering arrangements. In many cases financial support had to be offered and negotiated with voluntary organisations who were providing personnel to talk to visiting groups.

Conference registration proceeded smoothly although almost one quarter of delegates did not register until the final four weeks before the conference, creating problems for catering as we had to deal with more than a 20% increase in requirements after arrangements had been made with caterers.

The final month leading up to the start of the conference was hectic requiring constant management as the marquee was erected, registration issues were dealt with throughout each day, in response to requests for assistance with visas and travel support. The final few days saw the arrival of student helpers from different parts of the UK and Europe as well as local students, to undertake training sessions and to establish the welcome point and registration desk. Finally, by the Friday before the start, we sat in the pub and realised it was now far too late for any more panic. The words of 'The Doors' echoed loudly in the background as we supped our beer "*the future's uncertain and the end is always near*" but we finally felt we were ready...or at least...as ready as we could be...!

### *Meeting the first conference delegates*

It was Sunday night at about 10pm, the day before the conference, when the phone rang at home and a distant voice asked for the conference chairman. It was difficult to hear what the problem was due to the poor connection and background noise. It turned out it was a small group of commoners from Kyrgyzstan stuck at Paddington station in London. They had been booked on a train but their flight was delayed so they missed it. Taking advice from information desk at the station they gone to Victoria bus station but the

the buses were all booked – so they had gone back to Paddington only to find there were no more trains until the following morning. They had very little money and could not afford a London hotel.

I made some quick calculations and decided that driving to get them was out of the question as it was at least seven hours to get into central London and back to Cheltenham, and we had a conference to deliver the next day. Putting them in a hotel would be expensive; the least worst option was a taxi - so I gave them instructions to get a taxi, and to tell the driver he would be paid on arrival in Cheltenham.

There was a long wait until around 1.30 am when the phone rang - it was the hotel calling - to say they had arrived. I quickly drove to the hotel, where I paid the taxi driver, remembering to get a receipt. I did not dare think what the finance people were going to say: 'was it worth spending all that money?' 'Why not let them sort it out themselves'?

These were the first delegates to the Cheltenham conference that I got to meet and only one of them spoke English. Standing in the street outside the hotel, in the middle of the night, we had introductions and exchanged names, and they described their journey and where they had come from. Forty-eight hours previously, two of these delegates had been tending their sheep and horses in Central Asia. They had travelled here as commoners and practitioners of the activities we were studying and talking about, because they wanted to tell us about their lives and the problems they faced in managing their commons. It was a humbling experience.

Was it worth it? My answer to the finance people would be: '*Of course it was worth it!!*', we were honoured to have these commoners attend our conference!

## *The first day - an overly popular workshop*

The first day of the conference started with a set of four workshops, which proved popular with over 200 participants attending. Workshops focused on four areas:

- Introduction to the commons
- Research design - focusing on qualitative methods
- New commons
- UK historic commons - included input from Natural England, Defra and the Open Spaces Society.

We arrived early and found our room was quiet so we were able to rearrange furniture into groups and lay out paper and materials for use. People started to drift in, some looking decidedly jet-lagged but it was good to finally meet and put faces to names that for months had only been names flashing across computer screens. By the 9:30am start time the room was fairly full, so we started by taking the group through basic concepts and principles related to commons. During the first hour additional people kept arriving but as we were in the middle of teaching we did not want to stop and register someone every two or three minutes. This first morning we were a bit short staffed so there were no extra helpers to deal with registration. As more people came we had to grab a few extra chairs from the room next door, find places for people to sit, squeeze a couple more onto a table here, expand a group over there. It was a bit like Bilbo's party at the beginning of *The Hobbit* where the dwarves all turn up in ones and twos, and the host is so busy catering to the guests he does not realise how many have actually arrived. By the time the last few are arriving it's too late to change anything and you have the attitude that a few more will not make any difference anyway.

By mid-morning the room was really buzzing, we had almost 80 people – twice the number expected – people were standing around the edges of the room so we brought in both tables and chairs from the room next door – and even had one group sitting out in the corridor. Despite the crush and group sizes being double what was expected everyone was enthusiastic and getting involved. However, the Campus Manager appeared at the door while the session was in full flow, demanding to know what was going on, why we had moved tables and chairs around, and pointing out that we were violating health and safety guidelines.

We had to stop what we were doing and explain to the manager, that we were running a conference workshop, and more people than expected had shown up. The manager insisted we send some people away to reduce number to those allowed in allocated space. A deathly hush fell on the group, even if they did not understand the detail they knew something serious was happening. Voices were raised and a blazing row ensued, with the manager identifying how many rules we were breaking and threatening to bring in security to clear the area, and us insisting we had done nothing wrong, we were running a conference, and that we be allowed to finish. The whole event was played out in front of a rapt live audience. It gradually became clear that we were not going to move, and along with promises to discuss the issue later in the day the manager left, and we got on with delivering the workshop.

The workshop was one of those occasions where we had an enthusiastic group of participants that entered into the spirit of group work, everything worked perfectly, there were lots of questions and the level of delivery matched the needs and expectations of the participants. In short we all had a great time talking about examples of commons management from Europe to Africa and from Latin America to South-East Asia, listening and learning from each other. It was one of those times where as a workshop coordinator you learn as much as you teach. At the end of it all we could hear

the discussions continuing down the corridor as people drifted off seeking lunch. We put all the tables and chairs back the way they had been then I had to go and make a grovelling apology to the Campus Manager, who was only doing their duty; after all - we still had four and a half days of conference activities to go - what else could could happen!?



*The scene in the main marquee*

# Opening ceremony

It all commenced in the big marquee we had erected in the grounds of the University's Park campus in Cheltenham, a beautiful setting among the trees and exotic plants of an old Victorian zoological garden. It was a perfect English summer afternoon, not too hot and with a fresh breeze blowing through the big tent, which was brightly decorated with fresh flowers.

University of Gloucestershire 14 - 18 July 2008

## GOVERNING SHARED RESOURCES: CONNECTING LOCAL EXPERIENCE TO GLOBAL CHALLENGES



THE 12<sup>TH</sup> BIENNIAL CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL  
ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF COMMONS

CHELTENHAM, ENGLAND

UNIVERSITY OF  
GLOUCESTERSHIRE  
at CHELTENHAM and GLOUCESTER



ccri  
countryside and community  
research institute

*One of three posters designed for the conference*

It was strange to be finally standing on the stage at the opening ceremony, after the months of emails, phone calls, meetings and hundreds of tiny details, all of which had to be considered and decided upon. Just standing with nothing to do but wait...waiting for the chairs to fill up with delegates who came slowly drifting in as if they had all the time in the world. In the end we started five minutes late, as even though people were still arriving I could see the band members getting restless, we could not delay...so I launched into the opening speech.

With the speakers turned up high to drown out the chatter and sounds of shifting furniture, we started with references to John Clare's poetry from the early 19th century opposing enclosure of commons and Robert Frost's poem 'Mending wall' written a century later about the role of fencing in making good neighbours. Clare was a rural poet and Frost lived in nearby Dymock, Gloucestershire, for three years before returning to fame and fortune in the USA.

Patricia Broadfoot, the Vice-Chancellor gave a welcoming speech on behalf of the University of Gloucestershire, and Professor Nigel Curry, Director of the CCRI summarised the place of commons in England and put the event into a large context of global commons issues. In-between, the Brookfield Jazz Band (a local youth jazz orchestra organised and managed by volunteers) played a series of lively numbers. After the final welcoming speech Elinor Ostrom and a few other brave souls got up to dance as the band belted out a rousing finale. Then it was down to the more enjoyable activities of afternoon tea and cakes, mingling with all the guests, meeting old acquaintances, and making new friends.

# Opening speech

by John Powell

"*Good fences make good neighbours*". That's a line from a poem called 'Mending Wall' by Robert Frost, one of America's finest poets. "*Good fences make good neighbours*" refers to the conventional wisdom handed down through the generations from one landowner to another. A mantra for ensuring one's property is visible, protected and under your control, a means of keeping others out, and of protecting your investment.

Robert Frost spent three years in England during the early part of the 20th century, and for part of that time he lived in Gloucestershire – at a place called Dymock which is very near where we are sitting today. His first two books of poems were published in England, poems that made him famous.

One hundred years earlier, at the height of the enclosure movement, another poet was active – John Clare. An English poet, he documented the impact of enclosure on the countryside and on the people who depended on access to commons for their livelihood. And he had a very different opinion about walls and enclosure of property compared to Frost:

*"Inclosure came and trampled on the grave  
Of labour's rights and left the poor a slave"  
"Fence now meets fence in owners' little bounds  
Of field and meadow, large as garden grounds  
In little parcels little minds to please  
With men and flocks imprisoned, ill at ease"*

*John Clare, The Mores*

Robert Frost, the apparent champion of 'good fences' and private property went back to the USA to fame and fortune. John Clare, who opposed the loss of commons, was sent to an asylum for the mentally insane, where he died and was forgotten.

Despite the best efforts of poets the driving forces enclosing commons are still operating, here and in many other parts of the world. The idea that 'good fences' or private ownership is always the most efficient way to manage any resource, even ones we share in common, is more entrenched than ever. But read Frost's poem about 'good fences' more carefully and you will find that it is much more ambiguous and he begins to question the value of fences, or walls, between neighbours. Further on in the poem he says:

*"Before I built a wall I'd ask to know  
What I was walling in or walling out,  
And to whom I was like to give offence."*

'*Good fences make good neighbours*' is one of the most oft quoted lines of the poem, but history, and current events, have shown that good fences do not '**make**' good neighbours. Good neighbours would not need fences to separate them. Fences, or walls, are a final solution, and only appear when you cannot resolve differences with your neighbours. Walls are for keeping something to yourself, and for keeping others out, and this raises questions of when should we have walls in order to protect our resources from over-use, and when should we look for alternative solutions, based on trust and recognised mutual obligations.

We started to organise this conference two years ago with some of these thoughts in mind. We wanted a conference that would examine the governance of shared resources, in particular globally shared resources. We wanted to tap into that huge reservoir of knowledge and experience that

exists today in this room – and we wanted to explore how that could be applied to large-scale commons problems.

But then we started to have some doubts....we thought perhaps academics are not the best people to be organising conferences about commons... perhaps they shouldn't be allowed to organise conferences on commons. This is not because academics do not have the required expertise – of course they do. Nor is it because they can be disorganised - many academics are extremely efficient, although the 'absent-minded professor' is very much alive and well, as our Business Manager here at the research institute often points out.

The reason academics should not organise conferences is because many academics are what I would call '*closet enclosers*'. You only have to look at the way academics organise knowledge - into discrete little bundles called disciplines – which instantly result in the creation of artificial 'boundaries' and 'walls' between areas of knowledge. Disciplines soon spawn their own jargon, their own journals, and their own reward systems. The boundaries of disciplines are strongly defended, knowledge becomes enclosed, and disciplinary walls difficult to break down. And that becomes a major constraint when you are dealing with shared resources, or commons. In particular it is a problem in dealing with the complex, large-scale and global commons problems we face today which require multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary activity to find solutions.

Solutions to commons problems also require those with different types of knowledge and different skills to work together. It requires those with deep practical knowledge and experience in managing a resource to work with people who have deep subject expertise; it requires academics to work with practitioners, with policy makers and with each other. We need to remove the barriers that separate one type of knowledge from another, and find

ways to share experience and understanding. This is where an organisation like the IASC plays such a valuable role, it brings people together: practitioners, resource managers, policy makers; and it brings together different academic disciplines. Most importantly it brings together people looking for alternative solutions. The launch of a new journal, the International Journal for the Commons, which is happening today at this event, will help that process.

We feel privileged to have had the opportunity to organise this conference on behalf of the IASC. We are glad to welcome you all: commoners, resource managers, policy makers, and academics. We have designed this conference to encourage discussion and the exchange of ideas:

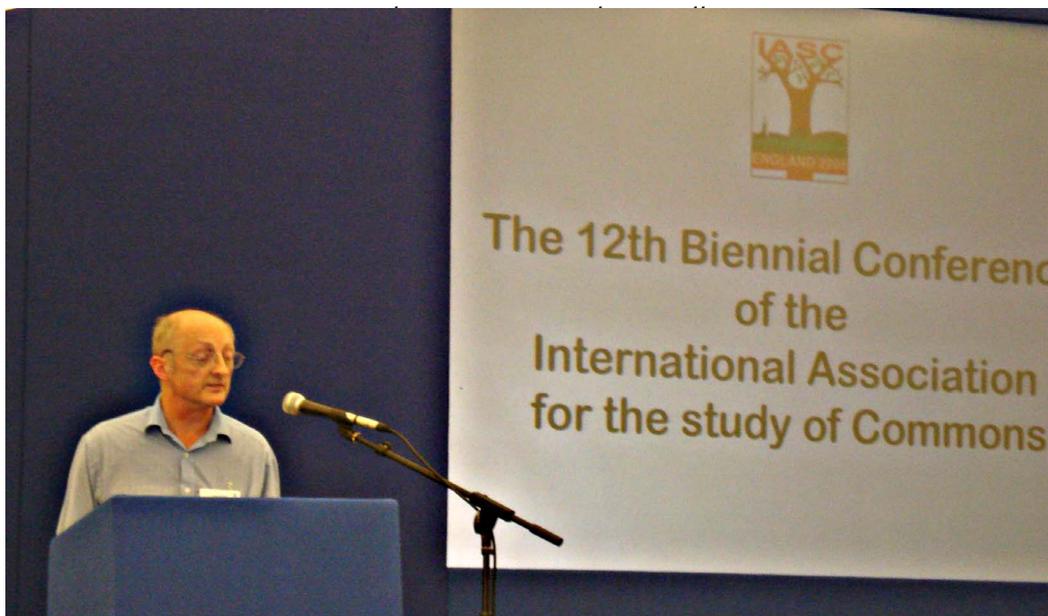
- *There are policy forums that focus on specific issues such as creating a political voice for the commons*
- *There are round table discussions*
- *There are field trips*
- *There are paper presentations to encourage cross-fertilisation of ideas.*
- *And, there are 'aqua vitae' sessions to encourage discussion.*

Those of you who have a paper in an aqua vitae session have the hardest task - you are at the cutting edge of what we are trying to do here – which is to find innovative ways for presenting and exploring *your* ideas.

In our view innovative approaches don't include walls. Walls don't solve commons problems, at best they put them on hold, at worst they create barriers that prevent people from seeing problems outside of their enclosed little spaces. Walls do not withstand the test of time. They don't last because they are inflexible, they isolate people, and when walls come down - new opportunities appear.

The answers to the complex commons problems of the 21st century start here with us - pulling down a few walls; whether they are cultural, academic, political, or institutional, and then exploring the opportunities that arise. Robert Frost, even though he was hailed as a lover of walls, recognised that ultimately the natural world abhors walls...so I will leave you with the most significant line from his poem...

*"Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
that wants it down..."*



*John Powell opening the 12th Biennial Conference*

# My introduction to the IASC

*As General Secretary of Britain's oldest conservation body, Kate Ashbrook has spent much of her career working in the area of 'Commons'. The 2008 IASC conference was the first time she had attended such an international event.*

Although I had been working on commons for the Open Spaces Society for 24 years, my knowledge of commons as a global concept, extending beyond land and water, was woefully inadequate in the year 2008. That all changed when I received an invitation from Graham Bathe of Natural England, who was hosting a pre-conference workshop. I was to join speakers from Natural England, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and the Federation of Cumbrian Commoners, the theme being 'Connecting the UK's Ancient and Contemporary Commons'.

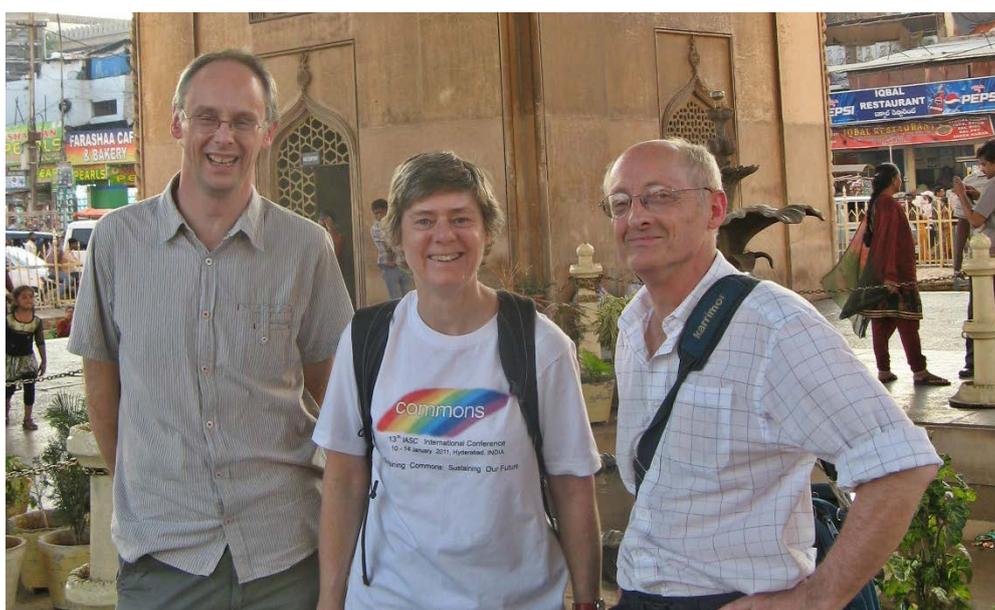


*Kate Ashbrook opens the ['Wych Way'](#) footpath in 2015*

I was not familiar with addressing an international audience, but it was extremely rewarding, there was an immense level of interest and I was surprised and pleased to learn that many delegates were familiar with Lord Eversley's book of 1910: *Commons, Forests and Footpaths*—for some it was bedtime reading!

But even more interesting for me was the opportunity to take part in the policy forum in the big marquee on the following day. It was about '*creating a political voice for the commons*' and enabled me to talk about campaigning, which is dear to my heart. It was organised by Ruth Meinzen-Dick and Stephan Dorhn from CAPRI, and there were speakers from The United Nations, Africa and India. It was then that I began to appreciate that commons have different meanings in different nations, and that they are under threat worldwide. In England and Wales commons are probably safer when they are owned or managed by public bodies, but I learnt that elsewhere it is the opposite: governments are stealing commons from the people.

The Cheltenham conference opened my eyes to the world of commons and shortly afterwards I joined the IASC and have attended every biennial conference since.



*After meeting at the 2008 conference, Chris, Kate and John travelled together to the Hyderabad conference*

# Exploring the Severn Estuary on field-trip day

Day four of the conference consisted of eight different field trips, a chance to get out of Cheltenham and explore some of the commons issues which we are currently facing. The trips proved popular with over 300 participants visiting the following locations:

- Gower Peninsular,
- Severn Estuary,
- New Forest,
- Forest of Dean,
- Shropshire Hills,
- Somerset Levels,
- Cotswold Hills and
- The Bodleian Library, Oxford

The trips looked at range of resources being managed in common including upland pasture, fisheries, woodland and the management of multi-functional shared resources as well as the management of new commons through copyright and assignment of intellectual property rights.

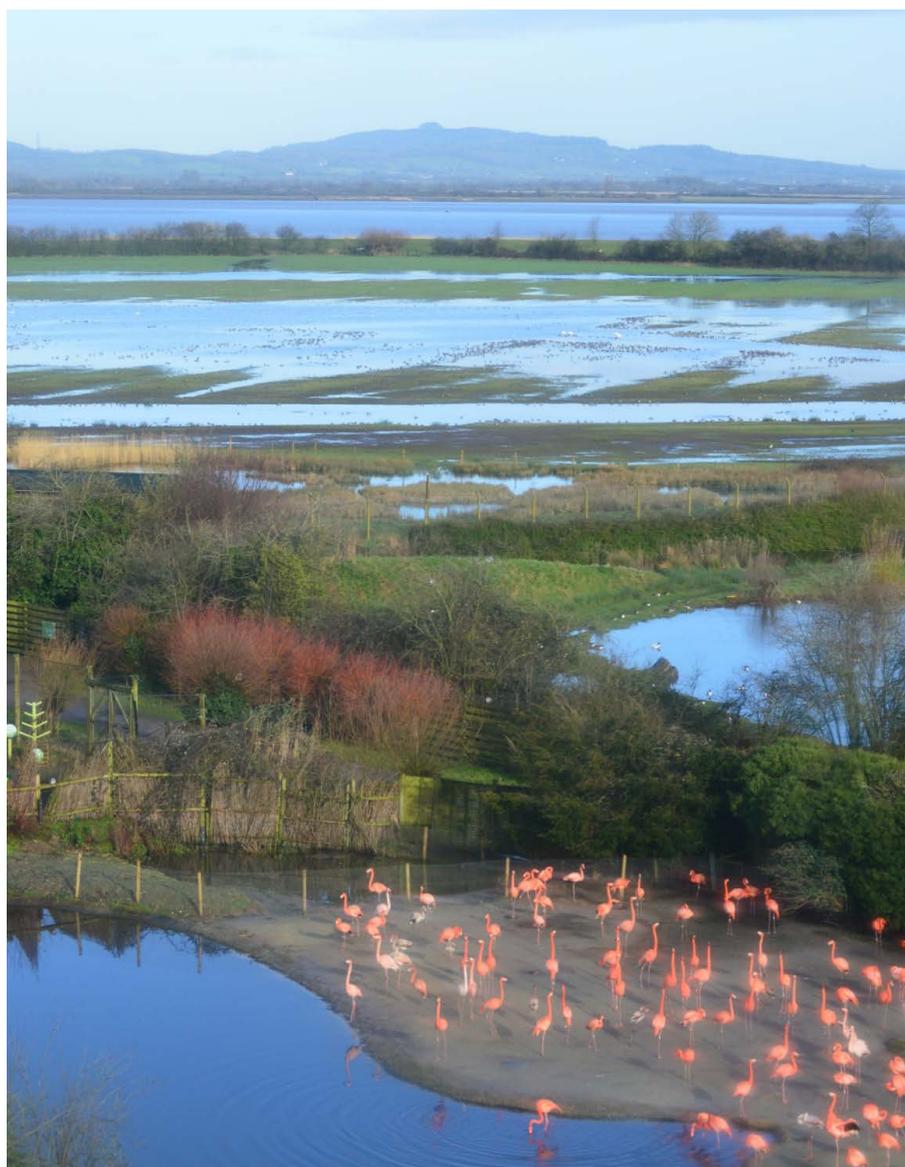
The buses departed early so it was encouraging to see a line of coaches on the edge of the campus in the early morning sunshine with people milling around looking for their transport. Each trip had two members of academic staff and one or two student helpers to manage the group. I had organised an exploration of the Severn estuary to examine the notion of an estuary as a commons so I arrived early to greet the participants.

The aim of our trip was to look at management of a complex commons over time where multi-functional management was required, in particular to deal with the conflict between energy generation and nature conservation. The Severn estuary is an area where environmental and habitat change was currently happening, and had occurred in the past, impacting on the landscape, and on local fishing rights. The estuary has huge ecological importance for migratory birds, and at one time was an extremely valuable fishery (species included Shad, Salmon, and Eels). Today there is little fishing activity, although a small number of those with common rights still practice traditional fishing methods. The current interest is in energy generation, particularly from a proposed tidal barrage in the lower part of the estuary to capture power from the second highest tidal range in the world (16 metres). The barrage could potentially generate 5% of all UK electricity consumption, but would cause significant ecological damage, and stop the Severn Bore, a tidal wave that sweeps upstream almost as far as Gloucester on every incoming tide.

On the bus we handed out some information packs with maps to enable the participants to orient themselves and get a feel for what they were going to see and the people we would meet. The first stop was Hock Cliff near Fretherne to meet Stuart Ballard and get an introduction to the estuary, the Severn Bore and an overview of current issues. Stuart is a wave rider – someone who regularly surfs the tidal bore as it gains height where the estuary funnels into the narrower river channel. He explained how conditions varied each day, how experienced surfers could travel several miles on the Bore, and just what a loss this would be if tidal barrages were to be constructed stopping this rare natural event. We walked across a couple of fields to the edge of the estuary and looked across the wide expanses of water, with mud-flats appearing as the tide receded. Stuart also pointed out the embankment and system of dykes and ditches protecting the farmland from the tides, noting that it was the government subsidised land

improvement measures that had led to the blocking of many small channels and the destruction of breeding habitat for eels and various fish species.

From Hock Cliff we went to the [Wildfowl and Wetland Trust \(WWT\)](#) reserve at Slimbridge, where Dave Painter, the Reserve Manager talked to us about the ecological value of the estuary and the land management issues.



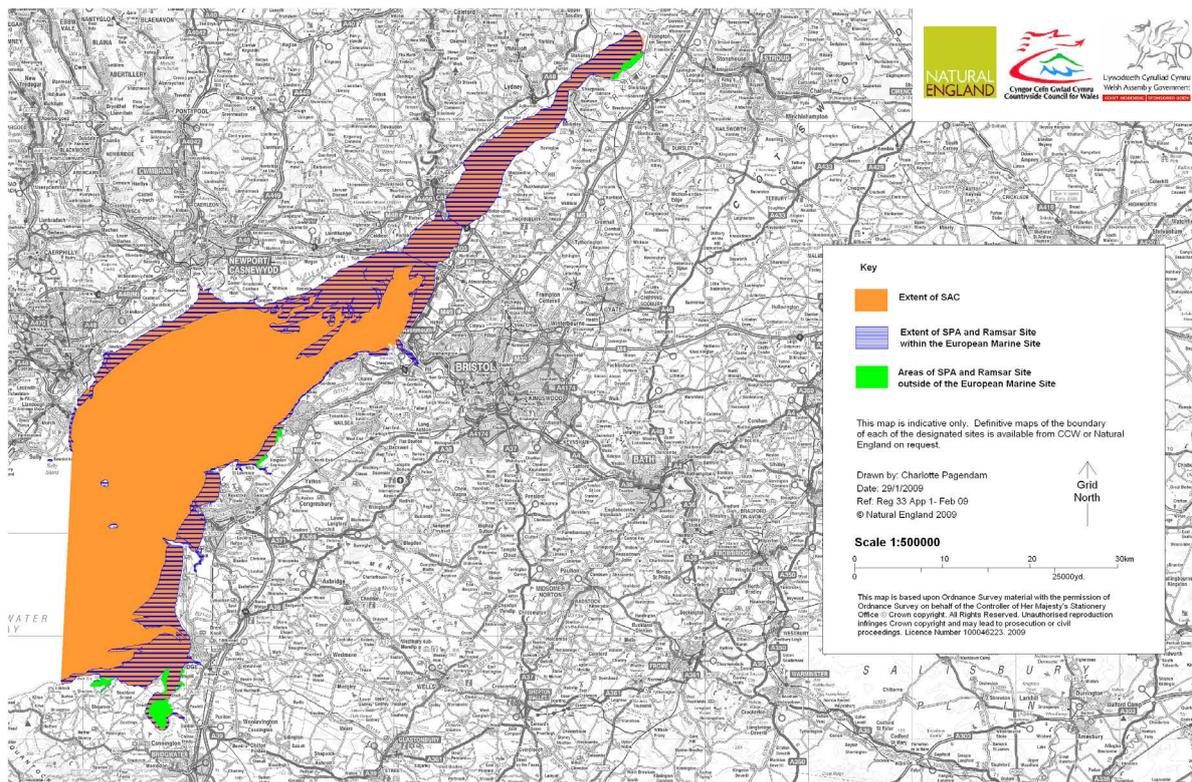
*View across Severn estuary from a tower at WWT Slimbridge*

The reserve also has a good café where we managed to have a cup of coffee and enjoy the stunning view across the estuary and down to the first suspension bridge. Dave explained that although the large areas of mudflats looked sterile they were actually teeming with invertebrate life forming a major food source attracting

migratory and overwintering birds. The huge tidal flows result in daily movement of thousands of tons of sediment, mixed in with nutrients supplying the primary food source for a rich ecological system. As a result large parts of the are estuary are protected for migrating and overwintering birds. Designations include:

- Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI – the strongest form of national protection for ecological systems).
- Special Area of conservation (SAC) under the EU Habitats Directive
- Special Protection Area (SPA) under the EU Birds directive
- Ramsar site (international designation to protect wetlands for migratory species)

Appendix 1 Map showing the extent and relationship of the Severn Estuary SAC, SPA and Ramsar Site



Map showing estuary designations © [Natural England](#)

From Slimbridge, under some pressure now as we had to get to the other side before the tide turned, we drove quickly down to the old suspension bridge and across to Chepstow, with views both up and downstream as we crossed the bridge giving some idea of the scale of estuary, and the power

of the tide, which we could see in the rapid currents of water moving below. We could also clearly see the old Magnox nuclear power station at Oldbury on the edge of the estuary with its tidal pool for holding reactor cooling water, and beyond it the wind turbine at Sharpness docks. Once on the 'Welsh' side we drove past Chepstow Castle and found our way back down to the river's edge at Black Rock, close to the bridge we had just crossed. Here we met up with Martin Morgan of the [Black Rock Lave Net Fishermen's Association](#).



*The two bridges over the Severn*

Lave net fishing is an ancient technique for catching salmon as they swim upstream during the period of low tide. The bed of the estuary at Black Rock is riddled with channels. The fish are forced into the channels by the falling tide and thus concentrated into more smaller areas where they can be more easily seen and caught. The fishermen walk or stand in the channels looking for signs of moving fish, which they then trap in the large net on the end of a pole. The pole also helps them balance in the moving water. It is an intricate art going back hundreds of years that requires detailed knowledge of the topography of the river bed (which cannot be seen) and variations in direction and movement of water to inform the fishermen where to go. It takes years to acquire the knowledge and discipline to know when to stop fishing and get out before being caught by the incoming tide. The fishermen are exercising ancient rights of common to take salmon from the river, though in recent years the length of fishing season, and number of fish they are allowed to take have both been reduced by the Environment Agency due to concerns about low fish numbers (caused by a wide range of factors and not the Lave net fishing).

Martin explained the process then waded out into the estuary, carefully following a path that only he could see, until he reached a suitable channel large enough for salmon to utilise. He moved a long way out from the shore but had no luck in catching anything. While he was out there we started on our picnic lunch and enjoyed the scenery. On returning Martin explained the process in more detail, the dangers posed by wind and changing currents, and the need to read the signs that tell the fishermen when to stop and get back to shore.

The Lave net fishing is one of several traditional techniques used to capture the migratory fish in the river as they moved both up and downstream on the tides. Fishing was a major part of the local economy of the area up until the late 19th century, with many of the fish being sent to markets in London. Over time with increasing industrial pollution and as more weirs were built to control the river flow, and agricultural improvements drained the land removing or blocking off many small channels, the fish numbers declined.



*Oldbury nuclear power station on the banks of the Severn estuary*

We then stopped by the Newnham Salmon Heritage Centre perched on the edge of the river to look at some of the history of salmon fishing. Another traditional method (dating back at least to the 5th century) for catching salmon, unique to the estuary is known as the 'fish weir' or 'fixed engine', which is essentially a row or wall of woven baskets ([called 'putchers' and](#)

['kypes'](#)) set in the bed of the river at right angles to the tidal flow. Traps were made from locally pollarded willow and hazel rods and staves and the fish weirs consisted of rows of putchers set in frames. The fish were caught on the ebbing tide; facing upstream they would flow into the funnel of the traps and then not be able to turn around to get out. Again this is a tradition that has virtually died out as the numbers of salmon returning to the river have declined.

While at the heritage centre we met Charles Crundwell, Senior Technical Fisheries Advisor for the Environment Agency. Charles explained the current situation with attempts being made to restore the salmon along the whole length of the river by removing weirs and other obstacles, and through recreation of spawning habitat. Water quality has improved sufficiently over the past 40 years to once more support a wide range of freshwater fish, largely due to reductions in industrial pollution and EU legislation to reduce untreated sewage discharge into the river. [The aim is to enable salmon and other species to once again reach the upper reaches of the Severn and its tributaries to spawn](#). Other species benefitting from improved water quality and habitat include elvers (small eels that have come from the Sargasso Sea, and caught at night during early spring), Dace, Grayling, and two species of Shad ([twaite and allis](#)).

Field trip participants were keen to discuss fishing rights, both ancient and modern, but it was clear that this is one area where traditional rights have been subsumed by government controls, even though the reason for the decline in the fish stocks was not caused by overfishing but by pollution, building of weirs for water power, and land drainage for farming.

Many customary rights that have been lost over time are unlikely to be restored. Questions remain, however, as fish stocks once more increase, as to who should have the rights to take, and profit from, the resource.

If the fish no longer belong to people living alongside the estuary, who could make a living and contribute to a sustainable local economy, then who should have the rights to catch the fish? Currently this is a question answered by government agencies who determine duration of the fishing season, the number of licences sold, and the number of fish that can be caught. If the fish numbers increase, the delegates wanted to know, would there be a case once more for assigning rights to local people?



*A leaping Salmon at Shrewsbury Weir - River Severn*

While discussion continued we moved along the river a short way to the Severn Bore pub in Minsterworth. Looking out across the river we enjoyed a classic English afternoon tea, with scones, cream and jam, making a fitting end to the day.

***Other sources:***

- <https://museum.wales/articles/2007-09-25/Traditional-fishing-practices-on-the-Severn-Estuary/>
- <http://www.visitmonmouthshire.com/thedms.aspx?dms=3&venue=0865854>
- <http://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2012-06-28/new-regulations-threaten-only-salmon-fisherman-on-the-severn/>
- <http://www.salmonboats.co.uk/4695.html>

# Closing ceremony & conference dinner

*Awards, speeches and a dinner in the town hall were the culmination of the 2008 conference in Cheltenham*

The closing ceremony on the Friday afternoon, entitled '*Forgetting the words, grasping the ideas*', took place in the big marquee where it had all begun five days earlier. Closing ceremonies are always a little strange as some delegates have already drifted off and everyone has a sense of the event winding down. Our aim for this event was to emphasise the value of the IASC conferences as not so much coming from the millions of words that were pronounced and would soon be forgotten, but to focus on the ideas and concepts that were presented and considered, and of course the relationships that had been developed over the week. The event included short presentations from six delegates who provided their own personal perceptions of what they had gained from the conference. Presenters included one of the student helpers that had benefited from the Master classes, young researchers, and older, more experienced members of the IASC. This provided a unique insight into how the conference had influenced the thinking of a range of participants from different countries and backgrounds.

Nigel Curry, Director of the CCRI gave a summary speech based on his perceptions of the conference and gave out prizes for best papers and presentations. The prizes were funded by the Countryside and Community Trust, which is based in Cheltenham.



*Nigel Curry, John Powell and the seven award winners*

The following delegates (above) won awards for the high quality of their presentations:

- Lamin Jammeh from the Department of Forestry, Gambia
- Doris Marinez-Melgar from the Environmental Studies Centre, Guatemala
- Hemant Gupta of the Forest Survey of India
- Dhruvad Choudhury of the Centre for Integrated Mountain Development in Nepal

We were thrilled to see Lamin Jammeh get an award. He was one of the 124 sponsored delegates from the global south who had arrived six days earlier, never having given a conference presentation. He undertook the presentation training programme, delivered by Phil Gravestock from the University of Gloucestershire, and through some concentrated hard work delivered a brilliant performance.

The awards for best papers went to:

- Helen Markelova and Brent Swallow for their work on the critical role of by-laws in resource management in Africa.
- Joseph Bahati, Abwoli Banana, William Gombya-Ssembajjwe for their paper on Multi-Stakeholder Governance in Land and Forestry in Uganda.
- Justyna Hofmokl for her work on developing theories in relation to the Internet Commons.

At a time like this a conference organiser inevitably reflects on what went well and what could have been done better, and on the army of people who worked together to make the event happen. Overall we felt we had done a reasonable job of delivering the conference, and participant evaluations and emails arriving in the days and weeks after the conference seemed to support this. A few key things that seemed to be vital in running a large and successful international conference are summarised below.

- Develop from the start a clear vision of what you want to achieve, captured in the conference title and strapline.
- Build a core team, assign people with defined responsibilities, and create a clear decision making structure. It's all about working with people. Conference management is not an egalitarian process – compromise is required and hard decisions must be made all the time.
- Create a strong project management process underpinned by clear strategic objectives, monthly targets, and detailed monitoring to ensure actions are completed. Be very open and aware of potential risks and have back-up plans in place. Some things will definitely go wrong at some point in the delivery process.

- Be open to external advice and critique – it's too easy to get wrapped up in the day-to-day activities and miss the big picture. Use the resources and experience of IASC members.
- Every conference has its own unique 'flavour' arising from the local context and cultural influences of where it takes place. Build on local resources, strengths, and characteristics. A global conference takes place in a particular setting, which the delegates want to experience.
- Have a plenty of helpers available to welcome delegates. First impressions set the tone for the whole event.
- Make sure the food and refreshments are high quality – don't cut costs in this area. The quality of the catering is probably more important than anything else. Delegates will forget all about the papers they heard, they will forget who the keynote speakers were, which field trip they went on, but a decade later they will still be able to tell you about the food. A well-fed participant is a happy participant, and happiness creates a good atmosphere. People will put up with a lot and forgive many mistakes if they are well fed.
- Develop relationships with local organisations and try to get them involved as early as possible.
- Be innovative, don't feel constrained by what has been done before, don't be afraid to try new approaches or activities.
- Don't 'overload' the programme – make sure there is plenty of time for people to socialise and network in both formal and informal settings.
- Make sure ***you have some fun*** – it's a long process - but very rewarding!

## *Conference Dinner - Cheltenham Town Hall*

The conference dinner, attended by 350 delegates, was held in the town hall. It is a large Victorian building that looks rather utilitarian from the outside but is richly decorated inside. We were fortunate to have this as our venue, provided free of charge by Cheltenham Borough Council. We gathered in the bar initially for pre-dinner drinks, and then moved en masse into the main assembly room, although that proved a little tricky when we all got jammed in a corridor because they were not quite ready for us. Nobody seemed to mind and just continued their conversations at closer quarters, before flooding through the double doors into the hall.



*John Powell with Devashi Bose*

Elinor Ostrom (Indiana University) and Ruth Meinzen-Dick (President of the IASC) gave presentations between courses. Elinor talked about both her work, giving a fascinating account of both early and more recent research and revealing the threads that she had followed throughout her career. Little did we know the following year she would be in more salubrious surroundings as she collected a Nobel Prize. Ruth talked about the development and role of the IASC, putting the role of Association into the wider context of global issues, and strengthening our understanding of the significance of the work we as individuals were undertaking. The food was all sourced from the Cotswold area and we were entertained musically by a local band called SwingFromParis. As the evening drew to a close delegates started to drift back to their hotels, the last to leave were our student helpers, thoroughly enjoying the plentiful supply of good wine.

# Reflections on organising an international conference

*This was the first time such a large event had been organised by John and Chris ~ many lessons were learned*

It takes at least two years to prepare an international conference of this scale and we learned a lot along the way. Inevitably we made some mistakes, and unexpected events meant things did not always go quite as planned. What was invaluable was being able to build on the experience and expertise of IASC members who had organised previous conferences. The previous events gave us a broad frame of reference in which to operate and a detailed timetable for completion of key activities such as announcements for papers and panel sessions, abstract reviews and acceptance processes.

We were probably late in putting together a Conference Secretariat as it required hiring a new full-time member of staff. We also added two more junior personnel in the final 6 months leading up to the conference. At the conference itself we had a small army of paid student helpers – absolutely essential to make the process run smoothly. We also paid them above minimum wage making for a happy crew of willing workers.



*John Powell wearing a traditional Kyrgistan hat*

Perhaps the most important thing was to develop a core team to drive the process forward. We met weekly review progress against deadlines and discuss the numerous other issues.

What we learned is that running a conference is all about people. It is about working with a large team to deliver the practical side of things – the food, refreshments, accommodation and space for delivery. It is about working across borders and cultures to put together and deliver an academic programme, and it is about developing relationships with the participants as they arrive, live and work with us for five days, and doing as much as possible within local constraints to meet their expectations.



*Chris Short with Kate Ashbrook and Leticia Merino on Cleeve Common*

# 2011 Hyderabad

*Sustaining commons: Sustaining our future*



commons

13<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference of the  
International Association for the Study of the Commons

10 - 14 January 2011, Hyderabad, INDIA

The 2011 International Commons conference ran from January 10th – 14th in Hyderabad, India. It was the first time the IASC had hosted a global conference in India, which has a long history of less formalised commons throughout its expansive and populous country. Chaired by Nitin Desai and Jagdeesh Puppala the event was sponsored and organised by the Foundation for Ecological Security.

The theme for the event was 'Sustaining Commons: Sustaining our Future' and attracted over 800 delegates from 69 countries. A total of 250 papers were selected and presented at the event from over 1000 abstracts submitted. They covered topics related to physical commons such as fisheries, forests and grazing, but also increasingly covered the 'new' emerging commons such as genetic resources, patents and intellectual property.

The conference had seven sub-themes:

- The Commons, Poverty and Social Exclusion
- Governance of the Commons: Decentralisation, Property Rights, Legal Framework, Structure and Organization
- The Commons: Theory, Analytics and Data

- Globalisation, Commercialisation and the Commons
- Managing the Global Commons: Climate Change and other Challenges
- Managing Complex Commons (Lagoons, Protected Areas, Wetlands, Mountain Areas, Rangelands, Coastal Commons)
- New Commons (Digital Commons, Genetic Commons, Patents, Music, Literature etc.)

Shortly before the conference in 2006, (and similar to the occurrence in England), new commons legislation had been adopted by the central government, leading to optimism that illegal appropriation of commons might be constrained. The Forest Rights Act 2006 has been called the single most important forest law passed since independence, providing a legal framework that recognises the rights of forest communities and empowering local village assemblies to manage and protect the forest resources on which they rely. [Despite the intentions of the Act, however, it has been argued that the aims have been watered down through ambiguities and omissions resulting from weak implementation; enabling government agencies to minimise its effect and open up forest commons to privatisation \(Sarin & Springate-Baginski, 2010\).](#)

Large numbers of people in India still rely on access to commons resources for their livelihood. In terms of forest commons an [estimated 100 million people rely on the 'degraded' forest lands](#) for wood fuel, fodder and their livelihoods. Today, more than ever, indigenous communities must fight to protect their rights to water, land forest and pasture in the face of political and economic forces seeking to appropriate resources.

Five years after the Forest Commons Act was therefore an appropriate time to explore the impact of the legislation on the varied communities within India.

The conference 'took a critical look at the interface between human and natural systems' and provided an opportunity to continue discussions and engagement related to Commons ensuring that they, and their associated principles, are kept at the forefront of strategies regarding ecological health, poverty reduction and collective decision making. The event organisers aimed to maximise impacts by 'pitching it [the conference] at the interface of policy, research and practice' (adapted from IASC 2011 website).

Elinor Ostrom gave the keynote speech at the opening ceremony, and was joined by Sri Jairam Ramesh, the Indian Minister of Environment and Forests. The speech by Elinor Ostrom was given just a few months before she was diagnosed with cancer, to which she succumbed in 2012.

Numerous speeches were given at the beginning of each day by eminent academics and practitioners in addition to the various exhibition, talks, presentations, discussions and book launches, interspersed with several workshops, field visits and social events. Six keynote speeches were also given:

- Elinor Ostrom - Cooperating for the common good: Challenging supposed impossibilities and panaceas
- Ruth Meinzen-Dick – How collective expertise has in the past fuelled policy debates of global significance
- Herman Rosa Chávez – Experiences of working with local communities as an NGO practitioner
- David Bollier – The marginalization of the Commons and what to do about it
- Bina Agarwal - Gender and forest conservation
- Ashish Kothari - What Commons mean to common persons and how they can galvanize to save them from destruction

Footage of these speeches, and of other events from the conference can be accessed online: <https://vimeo.com/iasc2011>



*Map of India showing key cities - © [d-maps.com](http://d-maps.com)*

# First impressions of Hyderabad – City of Pearls

Dropping into Hyderabad in the early morning light after an overnight flight and a long period of anticipation was exciting. Luckily we were met at the arrival gate and guided through the crush of soldiers and people waiting for relatives to a minibus and transportation to our accommodation in the relative calm of the district in which we were staying. Despite the lack of sleep we were all wound up and keen to see some of the city and experience life in India. On the ride from the airport we had met with people from Canada and Japan so decided to get a taxi together to visit Golkonda Fort, an ancient structure pre-dating the Mughal Empire in this part of India. Everything we had heard about India was there: the heat (even though it was January), the seeming chaos of the traffic on the roads, little yellow tuk-tuks crammed with people, entire families riding on motorbikes, cars and trucks weaving in and out, cows standing by the side, roadside stalls and shops overflowing with goods, and everywhere, a riot of flowing colours, people, and vehicles.

Getting out at Golkonda Fort we looked at the length of the queues to get in, a group of westerners clearly at a loss amidst the sugar cane sellers, food stands, and souvenir stalls. It did not take long before a small man in a white shirt appeared and for a fee offered to show us around. We agreed and were whisked through the entrance past the crowds, paying for our tickets at a special window. Those of us from England felt a pang of embarrassment at this blatant queue jumping and hint of our colonialist past – but at the same time we were jet-lagged and grateful not to have to stand in the sun for too long. Once inside our guide took us through the impressive stone entrance, explaining the history and the secrets of the defence systems, pointing out the shape of the roof, which acted as a kind of 'satellite dish' to pick up sounds shouted from above.

As we went through the structure we gained height, going up the ramparts to successive levels. At the top, our guide demonstrated how the lookouts had communicated with the guards in the entrance gate by clapping hands, sounds picked up by the guards standing in a specific spot under the domed roof of the initial gated entrance – and we had a magnificent view of the city – lost in the haze and greenery below. And everywhere around us people were sitting, eating and drinking, the men invariably in white, the women in colourful saris and sandals. Quite a difference from the grey skies and dull light of a Gloucestershire winter landscape. We sat in the sun and drank lemonade – taking in the surroundings, the sights, sounds and smells of a totally different land.



*Golkonda Fort*

The 'City of Pearls' is in south-central India. Its beginnings date back to 1591 when it was founded by Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah (who also built the Charminar), the fifth sultan of the Qutb Shahi dynasty of Golkonda. Within one hundred years the city became part of the Mughal empire, and was then ruled by the Nizams until independence in 1948. It is now the capital of the new state of Telangana but also continues to be the capital of the adjacent state of

Andhra Pradesh (until 2025) with a population of around seven million people. The new state was created in 2014 by splitting [Andhra Pradesh into two parts](#) following years of agitation (basically ever since the creation of the state of Andhra Pradesh in 1956). In past times the city was a pearl and diamond trading centre, and is still referred to as the 'City of Pearls'.

Although hundreds of miles from the ocean, the city became a centre of the pearl trade through development of skills in drilling and then washing, bleaching, colouring, and making jewellery. Pearls from China dominate the trade today and for the last twenty years "[China has been the world's biggest pearl producer ...flooding the world market with small and cheap pearls of costume-jewellery quality](#)". In more recent years Hyderabad has developed a wider industrial base, and is now also a centre for information technology, pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries.



*A typical chaotic street in Hyderabad*

When we finally got away from the conference centre to explore the city we went to see the Charminar. The Charminar, in the centre of the city, is [not only a mosque](#) but also a major piece of Islamic architecture that essentially

consists of four archways supporting four towers or minarets (the name is a combination of Urdu words Chār and Minar, translating to “Four Towers”). It was built in 1591 although the original reason is not clear with at least two conflicting stories ([one says it was to celebrate the eradication of the plague, another that that it commemorates the beginning of the second Islamic millennium year](#)).



*The Charminar from the Laad Bazaar*

Above the four large archways sits the the mosque (which we did not see inside due to visiting restrictions), but the view from the balcony around the outside is quite spectacular as you get to look down on the edge of the bazaar on one side and a major road through the city on two other sides. Standing there looking down on the traffic flowing past and people moving in and out of the bazars was fascinating. Down on the street all kinds of activities were going on: there were beggars and disabled people in the middle of the road, people flying kites, market stalls, tuk-tuks bursting with families, and every conceivable kind of vehicle going past.

Crossing the road was a major gamble and the only way was to wait until there was a sufficient mass of people all trying to do the same thing, then plunge into the flow, which was only moving slowly for the most part.

The Charminar sits on the edge of the Laad Bazaar (famous for bangles and pearls), and also a destination for buying saris and wedding apparel. Although the main street through the bazaar is closed to vehicles, there is a constant flow of scooters and motorbikes manoeuvring their way around the crowds, often loaded with entire families – small children in front of their father who is steering, the wife dressed in a sari or burka sitting side-saddle on the back, and sometimes even another child. Hyderabad is well known in India as a place of tolerance where different religious communities, and in particular Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims, have been living in harmony for a long time, making it one of the most secure and stable places in India. Another example of religious tolerance is the Bhagyalakshmi Hindu temple located at the base of the Charminar and dedicated to the Goddess Lakshmi. Although there is some dispute as to the origins of the temple, there is widespread belief that the Charminar has been a site of religious observance for both Hindus and Muslims since it was built, [though the situation does create tension between the communities.](#)



*Stalls and people in the Laad Bazaar*



*A typical street scene in the Laad Bazaar*

Walking through the bazaar was an experience itself: there are street sellers with carts of spices, rice and dried lentils and beans, people selling chunks of coconut, pieces of sugar cane or sugar cane juice. On each side, shops open to the street selling colourful fabrics and clothing, and endless jewellery stalls and shops full of bangles and pearls. Eventually we got sucked into one of the jewellery shops from which it is very difficult to extract yourself without buying something. But from the City of Pearls, what better gift to take home than a pearl necklace!



*View from the Charminar*

# The highs and lows of running a conference workshop

*Reflections on running a participatory workshop on 'Changing Perspectives within Policy Processes' delivered by John Powell and Tamsin Rajotte*

Tamsin Rajotte and I had met at an earlier workshop in Canada that she had organised, bringing together a group of practitioners and scholars from around the world to focus on commons issues. Based on some discussions at that event, we developed some ideas to explore factors influencing perspectives of stakeholders within policy processes. We thought it might be interesting to get together a group of people at the IASC Hyderabad conference to investigate the activities and strategies taken by people involved with policy processes linked to commons in different countries.

## *Developing the idea*

We spent several months leading up to the conference exchanging emails and developing ideas on how to run the workshop, eventually settling on a title and a three-hour slot with time for discussion and some activities. Time passed and as registration drew to a close we seemed to get plenty of interest with around 18 – 20 people signing up for the workshop.

## *Running the show*

On the big day, Tamsin and I went around early to the building to find the room we had been allocated. One advantage of the conference location in Hyderabad was the availability of space for the sessions, along with wide corridors were large rooms. We got set up and waited with great anticipation for the participants to arrive. One of the highs of running an IASC conference workshop is the wide range of practitioners and academics

you interact with. One of the downsides, however, of large international conferences is that you never know who is going to show up. At the IASC conference in Cheltenham, we had 86 people join into a workshop that was capped at 40 – the room was so packed we had people spilling out into the hallway causing major concerns for health and safety personnel. Here in Hyderabad, we had the opposite problem, not all of those who had signed up made it to the conference due to visa and funding problems. We ended up with a very small group of us sitting in a small circle in a vast room. As the numbers were so small we had to jettison some of the planned activities and re-invent the workshop programme as we went along. In the end it was a small but select international group that met: from Canada, UK, Kenya, India and Indonesia.

We started by exploring what the group understood by the term 'policy process', and it was certainly a learning experience for us to hear participants from different parts of the world describe the same concept in different ways:

- In terms of recognition of rights
- As power to use a resource
- As the way decisions are made
- As a means of exercising decision making powers
- The way in which things are influenced

In terms of the group's perceptions, there was a strong focus on top down policy processes – imposed on communities by central government through formal legislative procedures. There was recognition, however, that even within these approaches 'community involvement' and 'consultation' were an essential part of a policy process. There was also recognition that the way decisions are made structures the process, and that this can be heavily influenced or altered by market forces. This was a particular issue in relation to trade negotiations and commercial pressures on governments to conform with a particular view on 'development'.

A key issue with running a conference workshop is allowing for and managing cultural differences in the way people interact in both formal and informal settings. This group, although small was no exception and we had to be attentive to the subtle variations in how people respond to perceptions of hierarchy, gender and deference to seniority. In some situations, it can become difficult to get a good discussion going and to explore participants' personal views on issues. Lurking in the background is always the worry you might be unwittingly offending someone through acting as you would back home in a classroom. For example, in certain cultures it can be considered quite rude to ask direct questions and we had to be aware that our approach might appear abrupt and impolite.

### *Generating discussion*

Under such conditions it can take a long time to get a good discussion going, so we moved from an exploratory chat into an exercise we hoped would get people talking to each other. The aim was to get participants to tell each other about their own 'positive experiences associated with legislative activity' by talking in pairs. We allowed the conversation to continue for 10 – 15 minutes then got the group back together to discuss what had been talked about. A number of experiences were highlighted by the group, including the following:

- A national campaign (for forest rights - India)
- Community action (Indonesia)
- Community direct action (tree planting to restore a forest damaged by land grabs - Kenya)
- Building on an opportunity afforded by legislation (new legislation for common land – UK)

The key message was that there appears to be a range of positive experiences associated with bringing about legislative activity. Each example above identifies benefits from engaging with the legislative process (except perhaps

Kenya which is more a result of engagement with political processes). All examples seemed to empower communities that engaged in action, through providing more influence by developing alliances with other interests, or through formation of local action groups. We then went into a second exercise to explore 'positive experiences associated with concepts introduced from elsewhere' and ran through a similar process of people speaking to a partner then to the wider group, which was a more successful means of getting participants to talk about their experiences. The key message from this second round was that everyone could cite examples of applying external concepts that had negative consequences, but in the examples discussed, the main outcome was 'community empowerment' which came about as an indirect outcome of the experience. Two examples were examined in more depth:

1. A USAID project in Indonesia, which...

- *Empowered a marginalised community – the project developed skills and introduced new ideas*
- *Built social capital*
- *Helped people to become politicised which led to changes in the decision making processes*
- *Enabled community to challenge accepted institutional arrangements*

2. A community woodlands programme in the UK, which...

- *Built human and social capital*
- *Brought people within the community together to work towards a common goal*
- *Enabled people to see community with different eyes*
- *Empowered communities to start tackling other projects and help other communities.*

It was interesting to see the differences and similarities between countries which operated under very different conditions. The results of the exercise

suggested a range of reasons for why a specific approach worked in a particular context, but the most interesting part of the whole workshop was the final discussion. This explored current issues and problems facing the participants back in their own countries and the strategies they used to try and overcome the issues. Two overriding issues dominated the conversation.

### ***1. Governmental Processes***

Several participants noted that where a range of different approaches was being taken by a government it causes conflict and confusion, undermines democratic processes and prevents an integrated approach from developing. Strategies being utilised to deal with these problems included:

- Proposals for a national council that looks across government departments and deals with overlaps and gaps.
- Provision of evidence to campaigning groups (e.g. the national campaign)
- Evaluating performance of members of legislative bodies and then sharing the information with the media
- Better engagement with government committees
- Raising awareness at the local level to help local communities understand and deal with the problems

### ***2. Reconciliation of differing objectives***

Different external organisations will tend to have differing objectives, which can often lead to actions that are not supportive of sustainable development, negatively affecting community dynamics and in the worst cases totally destroying some communities. Strategies utilised to deal with these issues included:

- Using the annual budget discussions of organisations to raise issues and present marginal voices.

- Coordinating information requests from different organisations to avoid 'community fatigue'
- Getting the community itself to bring together different organisations to explore and discuss their objectives for an area.

Overall the final group discussion suggested that three broad issues might be worth exploring further:

- Engaging in forms of community action that empower (and perhaps 'politicise') the community (e.g. with raised awareness or skills training; funding to create local benefits)
- Exposing the community to external ideas using positive approaches
- A set of 'structural' issues associated with both central governments and international donors involving overlapping mandates, conflicting objectives, lack of integrated and joined-up approaches, recording of rights, and institutional inertia.

### *Wrapping it all up*

The workshop concluded with some summing up and then we all exchanged contact details and went in search of lunch which no-one wanted to miss as the food was fantastic. For Tamsin and myself there was some follow-up work after the conference, more to-ing and fro-ing with emails to agree on the summary notes which were then distributed to the participants - hoping that they got something out of the experience.

When one looks back at the rather slim notes and summary of outcomes from such an activity it often appears that nothing much was achieved – another talking shop, quickly forgotten. But the value of such interaction is usually not the final written output, but the people you meet, and the insights you get from listening to the experience of others, understanding the context

in which they operate and putting it alongside one's own experiences and perceptions. We all come away a little more aware of what is happening elsewhere with some ideas of how we might take things forward. The lows of running a participatory workshop are related to developing the mechanisms to make it work, the highs come from delivery on the ground, never knowing who or what to expect, and the insights, some appear right there in the room during the discussion, others can occur months later when you reflect about the event.

# Workshop on the 'Commons Initiative' *by the Foundation for Ecological Security*

## *An overview of the FES workshop that followed on from the 2011 conference*

The [Foundation for Ecological Security](#) (FES), an Indian NGO was established in 2001 with the aim of ensuring that ecological issues are considered in all aspects of development and that living standards for the poor within the country are improved.

### *Background to the workshop*

Following on from the main conference FES, had organised a two-day workshop to explore approaches to implementing what they were calling a '*commons initiative*' – a means of kick-starting a wider set of thinking and action on commons across India. Thus the day after the conference had ended a group of around 30 of us, mostly from India but also from the USA and Europe, met to discuss these matters.

Jagdeesh Rao from the FES started proceedings by explaining the origins, aims, and thinking of the organisation to put the workshop into the larger context of commons in India. He identified the starting point of their work in 1985, when the Government of India let a small set of project proposals with the aim of one project being to “restore common lands to meet the basic needs of the poor”. They got involved in a tree-planting project on severely degraded land, but after 7 or 8 years of activity of growing commercial crops they saw trees being harvested with no money flowing back to the villages that relied on the land for livelihoods. That was the point at which they started a new organisation - FES. It was a time when the value of native species of trees to local communities were being ignored and land was being

turned over to massive eucalyptus plantations for pulp. Biofuels were also of growing interest during the period with increasing demand for energy. State governments involved with commercial companies tried to close down FES. By the time FES were approached by the IASC to run a conference it was already aware that to work on commons at community level was not sufficient, so it took on the task in order to accomplish the following:

- Highlight the role of commons in India
- Give the conference a practitioner flavour
- Create a policy mix by blending together academics, policy makers, and practitioners



*Discussions in the FES workshop*

There was strong recognition that between the state and community level there are many other spaces that need to be filled. They worked with some state governments to help develop a policy on commons and explore why commons were left out of existing laws and development programmes. There was also a lot of interest over the application of the Joint Forest Management

(JFM) concept for regulating forest commons and a new Forest Rights Act in 2006. FES is now based in 16 locations across India employing around 240 people with a mix of social and natural scientists that work with a wide range of other NGOs. They wanted to use the opportunity of the conference to develop ideas on future activity.

### *Identifying future needs*

There were long discussions about future needs with various participants giving views based on their knowledge and experience. David Bollier (who had worked with Ralph Nader) raised the issues of politicisation and of 'markets colonising commons'. He identified the difficulties arising from lack of any discourse for opposing cost benefit analysis, a dominant factor in decision making. The conversation moved into the historical evidence of the need for good laws when it came to commons management and how politicians only respond to pressure. This then raised questions about what type of information was needed and how to supply it, when and to whom? It was suggested that moral arguments do not carry any weight and what was required was robust evidence of positive/negative impacts. Kate Ashbrook provided input based on experience of campaigning for rights of access, noting that to get involved in the policy process requires a long-term outlook and commitment of inputs over the long-term in order to bring about change. Ram Dayal Munda noted that in order to bring in new legislation you needed to "change the mindset of both politicians and the bureaucrat implementers". Liz Wiley, from her experiences in Africa, identified a major problem as the resistance of the state to devolve power to the community level. She suggested there may be a dichotomy at the heart of the problem whereby two opposing processes would need to be resolved: first, turning resources into commons, and secondly, clawing back access rights. Essentially we were seeking 'restitution of the notion of collective private property' that would need international as well as national level action. From there we strayed into talking about what was required of

organisations working with commons resources (research, training, strategic support, access to the media, legal resources etc.), the need for flexibility of approach, and for different organisations to collaborate.



*Kate Ashbrook (Open Spaces Society) considers points raised by George Por (right)*

### *Workshop process*

Following this broad discussion, the participants divided into two groups, one to explore the development of broad aims and a 'vision statement' for commons in India, and the other to look at operationalisation of the proposed FES commons initiative and a 'school for the commons'. So we split up, had lunch, went for a walk, got back together, and worked all afternoon then some of us went out for an evening meal once the first day of the workshop had finished.

The interesting aspect to this part of the workshop was to explore the different ideas people came up with based on their cultural traditions, experience and knowledge of commons. In the final session of the day we asked everyone to say which one thing they would like to change to achieve their aim for commons governance. The responses covered a wide set of actions, including the following:

- More effective engagement with the policy process
- Apply concepts from new commons to stop the 'traditional' commons becoming a relic of the past
- Public-public partnerships
- Give commoners hope
- Bridge the divide among generations
- Individual health is related to the degradation of commons
- Tracking the use of commons terminology – the term is abused and mis-used
- Avoid the romantic vision of communities
- Re-cast the relationship between the state and the individual
- Some traditions are a big problem in Indian society, need for change

We reconvened the next morning and continued working in our groups. The focus of the day was to develop a manifesto or 'commons initiative' for the commons in India. We were directed to explore how such an initiative might be organised, how we might network and engage with others. FES recognised that many of the organisation's members are not interested in policy so they need to think about partnership work and how to engage with other organisations to complement each other's skills. A key concern identified was 'turf' issues which would inevitably result in a watering down of any 'manifesto' coming out of the workshop.

In the 'aspirational' group we focused on a working document ('think commons') that identified five key areas of commons:

- Culture/memory/knowledge
- Survival/security/quality of life
- Ownership and control
- Governance/transparency/devolution of control
- Empowerment/equality/collective intelligence

Meanwhile the 'operationalising' group explored how to build-up understanding of commons, especially across commoner networks and with India government officials to influence the policy agenda. They explored a range of ideas linked to activities such as:

- 'Commons proofing' of planning documents
- Development of a distributive hub or network for information
- Nurturing the culture and understanding of commons
- Looking at the FES initiative as the baseline for a larger plan
- Synthesis of commons issues in a conceptual way - rooted in practice and context

## Outcomes

After two full days we felt like we had accomplished something, even if it was only to clarify thinking about some of the issues facing FES in taking forward their activities in relation to commons in India. The outcomes generated by the workshop would be developed over the coming months by FES personnel and feed into larger strategic thinking of the organisation. For us it had been a major learning experience, exploring in depth how others conceptualised commons, how they approached problems, and what they thought about possible solutions.



*Trying to finalise outcomes from the workshop*

# Forest commons: One village's story

## *How a rural community overcame a threat from a large corporation*

Early in the morning, of field trip day, whilst it was still comparatively cool, we piled into a coach. This had been parked near a group of women dressed in elegant saris, who were sweeping the road; overlooked by a single man who was there to make sure there was no slacking. Driving out of the chaos of the city and into more rural surroundings, we stopped part way for some refreshments by the side of the road where people were cleaning a huge carpet spread out on the ground, watched by monkeys sitting on the wall and in the trees. Back on the bus, we drove for another hour through a flat scrubby landscape interspersed with small villages. Then, seemingly in the middle of nowhere, the bus pulled over and we got out. A narrow track led off into the low density scrubby woodland and under a cloudless blue sky we followed our guide for around half a mile until we reached a reservoir of greenish water, locally called a 'tank', that provided irrigation water and looked to be at a low level.



*The 'Tank' Irrigation Reservoir*

In answer to the question of when would it rain (what else would you expect an Englishman to ask!) the answer came back – “*in about six months*” and all those memories of studying climates of the world in school geography lessons were overpowered by the direct experience of being here, and what it must be like to live in a monsoon climate - summarised in just four words.

### *Walking into the forest*

We continued down the forest path shortly coming to a clearing, and there we found motorbikes and a small van which had brought supplies for making chai (warm spiced and milky tea that was most welcome), and met the local villagers. We sat on the ground (conference delegates from fifteen or more countries around the world), face-to-face with this local community under the blazing sun and listened to their story.



*Arrival of the Chai Wagon*

### *One community's story*

In 1997, the government said that forest areas in this area of Andhra Pradesh could be managed by the surrounding villages and protected through formation of a ‘Van Samrakshan Samitis’ (VSS), a village forest protection committee.

The VSS is an organisation made up of the local people to protect their forests. No records existed of the area to which the villagers were entitled, just oral agreements. One year after the oral agreement with the government had been made, a local corporation started to uproot the natural forest to plant eucalyptus for a paper mill in an area encompassing 470 acres of the village's forest. The community (consisting of around 850 people) opposed the activity as their understanding was that the forest had been given to them for their use and not to the paper company. The forest was a vital part of their livelihood as they not only used the forest for wood fuel, building materials and food, but also for grazing livestock.

The VSS that the community had formed stopped the machinery from working and uprooting trees. The company brought in the police but the villagers would not alter their stance. So to get around the confrontation the corporation started operating machinery at night. The villagers once more stood up to the machines and were arrested and taken to the local police station. The message got out to a local NGO and they came to the village and suggested bringing in the media to raise awareness – the next day it was in the newspapers and on television. The day after that, government forest officials came to talk to the villagers. They sat down just as we did today and discussed the issue. The villagers said they would not change their stance – they wanted to protect all the forest to which they were entitled. When the officials had gone the community made a plan for the VSS to start planting local tree species in the area that had been cleared by the corporation. Both men and women took full part in these activities. They went ahead with their planting and today the forest has re-generated. They planted bamboo, woodapple and other species. There are 21 species of medicinal plants and the area is used for grazing, with an additional benefit that the level of groundwater has risen. Forest resources are used in different ways by the community. A small number for example, make a living from collecting and selling fruit, making broomsticks, plates, and collecting wild cashews.

Although the confrontation with the paper corporation was successful they still face problems today. There are boundary conflicts with neighbouring villages. They have come across illegal dumping of chemical wastes on the land. There are problems of poaching of timber, fuelwood, sand, stone and mud by neighbouring villages, mostly at night. Members of the VSS have to sleep in the forest at night to catch those engaged in poaching and illegal dumping. They take the drivers of vehicles that are dumping to the village and then to a government office in the nearest town – there are large fines for illegal dumping and the money goes to the VSS.

### *Making and enforcing rules*

The chairwoman of the VSS talked eloquently about how they manage and protect their forest. The villagers make their own rules for managing the forest. There are lots of discussions, they decide how they are going to watch the forest, how to protect it. When people are caught doing something wrong, or breaking the rules they get a warning the first time (it is considered 'a mistake').



*Chairwoman of the VSS tells the story*

The second time there is punishment, decided on by all the villagers. They are a small village and once committed they find it relatively easy to stick to a plan. The effectiveness of their monitoring and enforcement was emphasised when they said that from 1991 when they made their plans, until the present (2011) – i.e. a twenty-year period – no trees had been cut down around the village.

Every family in the village, both men and women, get to have their say in selecting 15 members of the VSS with the understanding that the either the Chairman or Vice-chairman should be a woman. The villagers have equal rights in the forest, for example when it comes to collecting fruit the rule is 'first come first served' and the VSS has organised training with a local NGO on correct methods of fruit harvesting. There is no monitoring at village level as the competition between families does not exist – there is enough for all. Along with other uses of the forest area such as fuel wood, grazing, and production of marriage poles, the VSS estimates that the forest resources are worth around 5 – 6,000 Rupees to each family per year (a significant amount compared to average household income).



*Discussions with villagers at the 'tank'*

The multitude of values of the forest commons to the community cannot be underestimated. The village is totally dependent on agriculture, on what it can grow using the water collected in tanks, and on the forest for grazing, fruit, wood to make implements including ploughs, and other materials. The medicinal plants include one that is given to cattle to ward off flies, and the forest cover helps to retain groundwater which is channelled into a system of ten percolating reservoirs. When one realises the significance of an area of woodland to local livelihoods, it is easier to understand the effort spent on establishing and maintain governance arrangements, and why they are prepared to go to prison to protect their forest.

# Forest management by a model VSS

*The creation of a VSS in one community resulted in not just sustainable forest management but also innovation*

After our visit to the village which faced threats from a large paper manufacturer, we went to visit another nearby area that had established a VSS several years earlier. Since its creation, dramatic positive changes have occurred for the communities involved, and was being highlighted as what can be achieved through such collaborations.



*A banner painted on a house wall in the village*

The bus pulls off the road and we bounce along down a dusty track until it ends in a small village. We walk down to an open area surrounded by children, to where an awning has been set up in front of a building next to the school. The children all want their pictures taken and chatter excitedly when you show them the result on the digital camera screen. A bearded man in a turban comes round with a big kettle offering chai which is gratefully received. Eventually we gather under the awning to sit down in front of the village elders for discussion.

Arrayed in front of us on a raised platform are the Chairman and ex-chairman of the local VSS, government forest section officers,

and other locally important people. Surprisingly they are all men, although the Vice-Chair of the VSS is a woman. There are two reasons given for why there are no women at our meeting; first, we are told that traditionally women do not sit with the men to 'show respect to their elders', and second, they had all gone to the market in preparation for a festival that would take place the next day.



*Village children gather excitedly around visitors*

The Chairman of the VSS starts the proceedings, and through translators and a mix of English and local languages, we hear their story. The village has around 2,000 inhabitants (including tribals) and manages 350 hectares of forest, which is sufficient for their needs. But the forest had become degraded due to pressure of use from surrounding villages. At first they hired two 'private watchers' to keep an eye on things but the forest areas were too big so they were not able to control activity. There were people from other areas coming in to graze animals and they also had smugglers operating in the forest. That was when they formed a VSS (realising that two people were not enough to protect the resource), and told other villages in the surrounding area not to come into their forest.

Originally it was only the Forest Department of the government that took care of the forest, but after 1988 the National Forest Policy implemented the concept of Joint Forest Management (JFM) whereby responsibilities were to be shared between the government and local organisations (the VSS). The VSS leaders told us that when the government first handed over joint responsibility to the village they did not receive any help to set up a VSS, and at that time it was very difficult to create a VSS. In the beginning (mid-to-late 1990s) they did not have a good relationship with the Forest District, but since 1999 they have been on friendly terms. The Forest Department collected data from all the villages and set targets. Ten villagers were then selected for the VSS, based on a ratio of people to reflect the make-up of the village. In the early phase of JFM implementation period there were no specific numbers for VSS. Today, one or two VSS members are also elected to sit on county level forest committees.



*Village leaders tell the story of their VSS*

The aim of the JFM approach is to engage villagers in the protection their local forest resources in return for a share of the economic benefits. When the VSS was established they had problems. Thirty houses were being constructed at the time, a lot of timber was required and the first critical task of the VSS was to work out how to do that.

At a village meeting the issue was discussed, and each villager donated 300 Rupees to the VSS to supply the wood to complete the houses (instead of taking it out of the forest).



*The setting of the discussion with the VSS*

When the VSS was established they worked out how to make and enforce their rules. When they caught people from other villages using their forest they imposed a fine, 25% of which would go to those who caught the poachers or graziers. This created an incentive for everyone to be on the alert for illegal users. Initially the villagers went around the forest in groups, and in the first year of operation raised a lot of money through imposing penalties on illegal use, and this also had a large positive effect on forest quality. For example, in the case of fuelwood and poles ('marriage poles') they would watch the forest edges from hides. Anyone taking fuelwood or poles had to get permission and pay 25 rupees per cartload. Prices and penalties for illegal use were fixed by a wider group of villagers, not just the VSS. The revenue for the VSS in the first five years of its operation was around 30,000 Rupees.

As a result of the new management regime, the grazing community in the area started to suffer and they approached local politicians for support. The politicians came to the village and asked for a reduction in the number of sheep and goats so as to lower grazing pressure on the forest. The goats

eat a particular species of plant which raises their value and they are often sold outside of the area. The solution the VSS came up with was to sell the rights to graze but so many people applied for rights that they had to raise the price, which creates a revenue for the VSS, while preventing degradation of the resource.

The VSS keeps track of monthly income and expenditure and anyone is able to see the accounts. This provides transparency and creates trust. They have used some of their income to build a temple but most of the income goes to supporting forest development and around 25% to providing incentives for people to manage the forest in a responsible manner.

It is still the case that in times of crisis or conflict, other communities in the area try to get the system of fines overthrown and political leaders at times have tried to take action against the VSS. But the system is clearly established under the National Forest Policy and "...this is a model VSS, it has good management, so no action has been taken against us". In fact this VSS has been so successful with no NGO or Forest District involvement, that ten other villages have adopted the approach taken. One outcome has been fewer transgressions of the rules as other villages in the area are now doing the same thing. They have also formed a 'VSS federation' for the area, which meets monthly to share information and knowledge on how they do things, how they deal with problems and implement management.



*Sign outside the embroidery centre*

The VSS is also an innovator, introducing new ideas and technology into the village, for example LPG, biogas generation, and small gas stoves to reduce pressure on the forest for fuelwood. It also provides some service for free to poorer people in the village (such as funerals). They have also integrated the needs of the Lambada tribal people, some of whom live in the forest in the area around the villages. One activity formerly engaged in by women was collecting and selling fuelwood, contributing to the destruction of the forest and conflict with the villages in the area.



*Some of the Lambada women at embroidery centre*

Traditionally the women are highly skilled at embroidery, so the VSS and other local organisations worked with them to create new designs that would be attractive to a wider market. Agents place orders and provide the cloth, then pick the work up when it is completed – selling it in Hyderabad. The women earn money which has improved the standard of living for themselves and their families and also no longer need to collect fuelwood, which was a particularly time consuming task

# Where black sheep are celebrated

*Kate Ashbrook visited a community facing pressures from the Indian government and for whom black Deccani sheep are critical to their survival*

The conference in Hyderabad offered many field trip options to visit and learn about 'Commons'. After much deliberation, I selected a trip to study pastoralism in the Deccan region of India. Here people's survival depends on their black Deccani sheep, much as our pre-inclosure communities depended for their survival on grazing their animals on the commons. The [Deccani sheep](#) are medium sized with coarse black or brown wool, ideally suited to the extreme temperatures of the region and for long-distance migration (from August to February) in search of food and water.

The breed is important for its wool, meat and manure. The women sort, card and spin the wool while the men weave it into tough blankets and mats. The shepherds, during their migration, enter into agreements with farmers who pen the sheep on their land so as to collect the dung to enrich the soil, giving the shepherds rice, dal and pocket money in return.



*Being greeted at Saipet with music, song and dance*

We visited Saipet, which is inhabited by 100 families. The villagers welcomed us and serenaded us with music, song and dance as we walked into the centre of the village. We removed our shoes and sat on a Deccani wool blanket and the village elders spoke to us with the help of interpreters.

We were told of the competition from imported 'shoddy' wool, cheap soft merino wool from Australia. The soldiers used to use Deccani blankets, but do not do so any longer. The breed is being crossed with other non-wool, primarily meat-sheep breeds, and the state animal husbandry departments have subsidised the shepherds to replace their Deccani breed with heavier, non-wool breeds. We were told: 'The government is pushing us to the hairy mutton variety'. These mixed breeds are more susceptible to disease and less able to cope with the long migration. The state is encouraging the shepherds to use antibiotics rather than natural cures for illness.



*Women in Saipet spinning the Deccani wool*

Worst of all, the grazing ground is being enclosed: 'Never before in the culture of the region have we had fences.' The sheep survive by grazing on common property—forests and harvested agricultural fields. As soon as the crop is harvested, the land becomes common grazing. The Indian government is liberating the land regimes and this has led to huge land grabs.

We were also told that the state is favouring an industrialised land-use of non-food crops. Irrigation and dams have placed restrictions on migration. Increased private irrigation, such as bore wells, has meant that dry-land crops have been replaced by paddy and sugarcane, so that the land that used to be freed for grazing after six months is now cropped two or three times a year instead. A new dam had been built near Saipet and much of the grazing land was submerged. The people we spoke to were concerned that the old ways may be forgotten. Due to these changes shepherding is in decline and younger women are not learning the techniques of spinning wool.

However, [Anthra, a group which works with the landless](#) to protect indigenous knowledge, has helped the shepherds form community groups (sanghams), which are open to all and meet regularly to share their concerns and provide a voice for the communities. The group works to improve their livelihoods and restore their control and autonomy over their farming systems.

All these issues made me think of our own [Foundation for Common Land](#) here in Britain, which is working to give a voice to commoners. There must be a great deal which we can learn from each other.

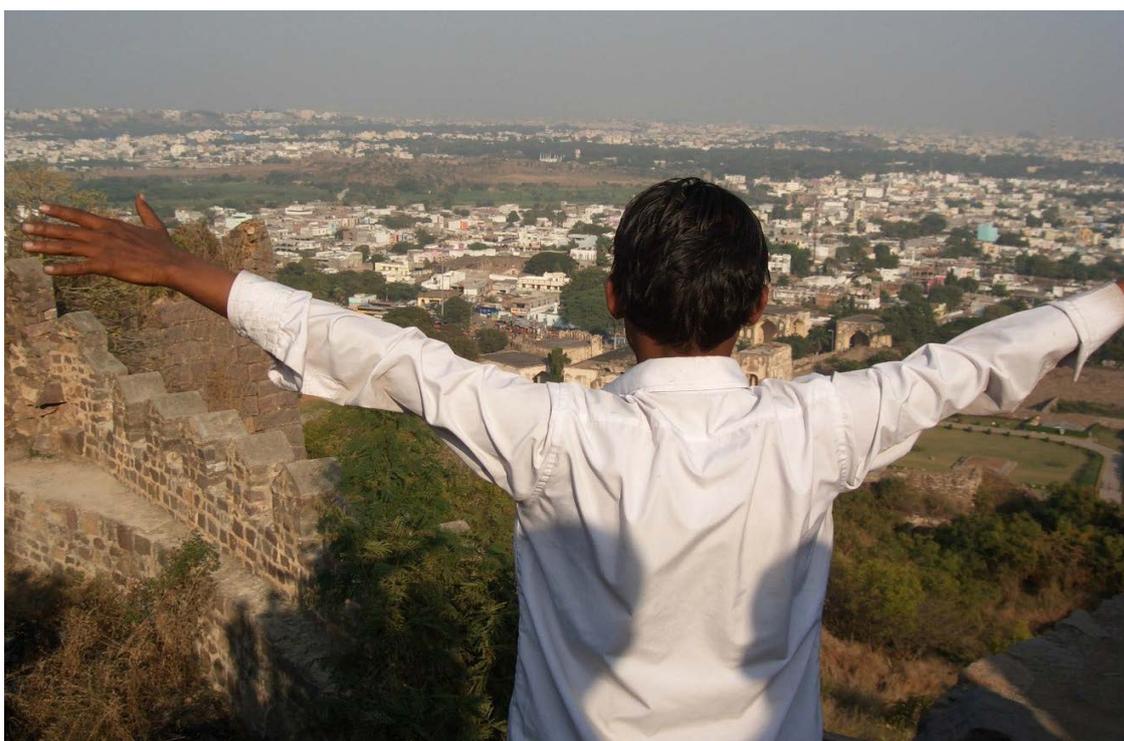


*Villagers tend to a herd of Deccani sheep*

# 'Conference relish' - getting a taste for Hyderabad

*Some reflections on the 2011 IASC conference - held in South Asia for the first time*

The biennial IASC global conferences tend to follow a familiar pattern, a bit like a set menu in a restaurant. You have the starters or antipasti at the beginning – at the conferences these are the initial workshops on the first day and the key note speeches – to get you warmed up on the big issues. Then you get into the main part of the meal – the parallel sessions – with some side orders in respect of individual panels addressing more specific issues.



*On top of Golkonda fort, Hyderabad*

By the time you get around to the fourth day – the field trip day - it is starting to feel like dessert - it is more relaxed, you can kick back and enjoy being out looking at the practicalities of commons management in a new setting. This is often followed by a conference dinner, awards, and a final day of papers,

by which time you are starting to feel satiated, so it is a bit like having the final coffee and 'digestivo'.

Just like every meal does not taste the same – every IASC conference has its own 'flavour', its own way of doing things. Every biennial global event has a tone or a style that sets it apart from other conferences. The local context means it must adapt delivery to the surroundings and available facilities. By using local activities, each will bring its unique character and flavour. In this respect 2011 was no different from other IASC conferences but it stands out as an exceptional event. Perhaps it was the food (which was outstanding), or the setting: in a series of buildings with large airy rooms, and under awnings outside where you were almost in among the trees and shrubs of the grounds of the training centre where the conference was held. A big advantage was the provision of on-site accommodation – which meant we did not have far to go from bed to breakfast to presentations to coffee to lunch...while the downside was that you did feel a bit cut-off from the country context in which we were located and had to make a real effort to get out and see the city.



*Programme board outside the entrance to the conference centre*

For those of us arriving from northern Europe, right from the start it was different - it was January, warm and sunny! We arrived early one morning and were picked up and transported to the conference centre. Then, jet lagged and exhausted (but keen to see some of the sights) we went out to Golkonda Fort – a rapid introduction to the chaotic teeming city, before finding somewhere to eat, then collapsing onto the beds in the somewhat bare and spartan rooms back at the conference centre. It was not 5\* accommodation and washing was difficult. The hot water was intermittent – you never knew when there would be hot (or warm water), so often it was a cold shower, or a quick rinse down with a flannel from a bucket of warm water. Meals were served in a multi-storey car park brilliantly converted into an open air, buffet style restaurant, providing a massive space which allowed people to mingle and network with ease.



*At the opening ceremony with, from Left to Right: Jagdeesh Puppala Rao (Chief Executive FES), Nitin Desai (Chair, IASC 2011 Conference, and Member of the Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change), Sri Jairam Ramesh (Minister of Environment and Forests), Elinor Ostrom (Nobel Laureate), and Ruth Meinzen-Dick (President of the IASC)*

At the opening ceremony on the first night, we were bussed to a park where a huge awning had been set up, large enough to accommodate the whole conference. The whole place was surrounded by armed soldiers and a security search to get in – not your usual IASC welcome - but it was all connected to the arrival of a government Minister. The opening session started with the traditional lighting-of-the-lamp marking the beginning of the ceremony, followed by speeches from Elinor Ostrom, Nobel Laureate in Economic Sciences (2009), and the Guest of Honour, Sri Jairam Ramesh

(Minister of Environment and Forests, Government of India), who 'appealed for a change in the dominant mindset of the nation in light of growing conflicts over common property resources'. After the speeches we were able to stroll around the park, get food and drink from a wide variety of stalls, and to be entertained by music and displays of traditional dancing.

There was no shortage of space at the conference venue, and there were around 10 or 11 parallel sessions for paper presentations and policy panels. We were amazed to see a massive paper copy of the programme on a board outside the main entrance. It was something we could just not comprehend doing in England even in mid-summer – but here in January - the sun shone every day. The large display meant you could quickly locate what you wanted to see and where you needed to go. Coffee breaks were regular and all held outside, and the most fantastic range of food was served at lunchtime in the car park.



*Delegates outside underneath the large awning*

Following the traditional IASC conference schedule, a full day of field trips was organised for Day 4 with buses leaving early in the morning for visits taking place up to three hours from the city. Everything went smoothly: the trips were well organised, and interesting - usually put together with support from other local NGOs and local communities, giving a real insight into some of the common resources issues facing the country. Mid-week one of our

colleagues from Canada was taken ill with acute appendicitis and rushed to hospital. The FES team performed exceptionally well to ensure she received the highest quality treatment, and the support and care needed when she had to stay a few extra days before flying home.



*Final evening on the roof of the car park*

The conference dinner was held at the Chowmahalla Palace of Hyderabad with music performed by 'Manganiyar', a music group from Rajasthan. The final night we all ended up on the roof of the car park for drinks, where lanterns were set off into the sky to celebrate the end of the event. Only then did we get a sense of how many people had been involved in organising and delivering the conference. There must have been at least forty people in the FES team, many working quietly away in the background, and they had done a stunning job all week. What is remembered is the sensory impact of the event, from the enthusiasm of the conference delivery team to the range of intellectual offerings, with a major focus on issues in South East Asia; and from the spiciness of the food to the sights and smells of India. A huge range of activities occurred, both formally organised and unplanned and, on top of all of this - a liberal sprinkling of friendliness – on the part of both the organisers and the other delegates - and a willingness to engage. In every sense it was a 'rich banquet', one that will be relished for a long time to come.

# Reflections on the Hyderabad conference

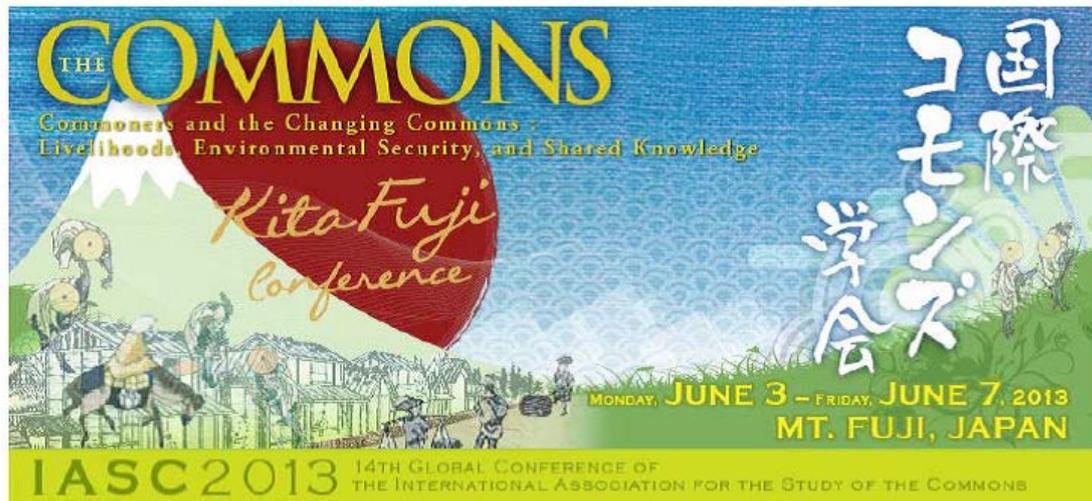
The conference in Hyderabad was a resounding success. The organisers (FES) provided an excellent venue incorporating accommodation, catering and conference facilities. The weather was never going to be a problem with sunshine and warm weather guaranteed – which meant events could be held outside, risk free under the shade of an awning, or on the roof of a car park. It also gave a very different atmosphere to the big ceremonial events such as the conference opening event, and the dinner (held outside at the Chowmahalla Palace).

It was also fascinating to explore commons issues in a country where a large number of the population depend on continued access to commons resources for their livelihoods. The field trips were particularly memorable as we visited local villages and were able to talk directly to villagers and their leaders about the problems they faced and solutions developed. Coming from Europe this provided a very different perspective on the management and governance of commons.

FES did an excellent job of bringing in key speakers, from the Environment Minister for India, down to representatives from local NGOs. The range of topics addressed throughout the week in plenary sessions and special panels incorporated a wide range of 'old' and 'new' commons issues. The organisers also made the most of having a group of international experts collected together in one place by holding a two-day workshop following the conference to help them develop their 'commons initiative', an attempt to develop a wider set of thinking on management of commons across India.

# 2013 Kitafuji

*Commons and the changing commons:  
Livelihoods, environmental security and shared knowledge*



The 2013 International Commons conference ran from June 3rd – 7th in Kitafuji, on the Northern Slopes of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Mount Fuji, Japan. For the first time the conference was hosted within, and co-organised by a commoners' organisation, the Onshirin Regional Public Organisation and Tetsuzo Yasunari from the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature in Kyoto. The Onshirin federation, is a group of 11 villages who hold access rights to around 8,000 hectares of land on the slopes of Mount Fuji. The conference was co-chaired by Tomoya Akimichi from Kyoto's Research Institute for Humanity and Nature and Margaret McKean from Duke University, North Carolina.

Japan has a long history associated with commons, however many scholars showed that it is not just 'traditional' commons that are relevant, as challenges arise associated with 'new commons' due to societal changes in an urbanised and modern settings. Locally Onshirin (a regional public organisation), is a federation of 11 villages holding access rights to about 8,000 hectares of land on the slopes of Mount Fuji. The villagers have been harvesting grass, firewood, lumber and other natural resources in this area in accordance with rules agreed upon in the early 17th century. In general by this time about half

of all forests and grasslands in Japan were commons (today, the figure is about 10 percent). [These commons were called iriaichi — a combination of the Japanese words for “enter,” “meet” and “land” — these areas provided fuel, food and fodder, as well as leaves and brush vital for enriching paddy fields. Then, just over 100 years ago Japan’s commons underwent their own wave of government seizure and privatization \(in the Meiji Era 1868-1912\), when the government shifted from supporting the commons system to undermining it. The aim was tax reform, so they tried to separate commons into private and government property \(so more land was taxable\). The government also wanted to take as much forest as possible under its control to establish plantation forests, in order to generate capital in the push for modernisation.](#)

Villagers deprived of resources fought back, and in Kitafuji protests and lawsuits began around 1889, when the government confiscated the commons, and continued until the 1970s, when local residents finally regained rights to their land, along with compensation for loss of rights.

The theme for the conference was ‘Commoners and the Changing Commons: Livelihoods, Environmental Security and Shared Knowledge’, and around 400 delegates attended. Nearly 150 papers were presented at the event, and in addition to the regular discussion forums and events, there was an opportunity to engage in a policy forum on the role of commons in the recovery associated with the devastating earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster of 2011.

The conference was further divided into a number of subthemes:

- Commons and Social Capital for Livelihood Security in Crisis
- Commercialisation and the Commons
- Urban Commons
- Collisions in Law and Culture

- Mobile Resources and Fluid Spaces
- Equity and Distributive Justice within the Commons
- State-Society Relations and the Protest Politics of Commons
- Commons and Complexity
- Commons as Local Energy Sources and Carbon Storage affecting Climate Change

A number of sub-themes also related to global commons:

- The Global Digital Commons
- Biodiversity and Genetic Resources as Commons
- Cultural Commons with Non-Consumptive Uses
- Campaigning On the Commons: Practical Lessons and Strategy
- Advancing research on the commons: methods, comparable data, and theoretical research frontiers

The conference also involved a range of field trips exploring commons issues in the wider Kitafuji area, and two keynote speeches were given:

- Michael Heller – [The tragedy of the Anticommons](#)
- Bonnie McCay – [Tragedies, comedies and other dramas of the Commons](#)

The Kitafuji conference was the first occasion where the Elinor Ostrom award was presented. Inspired by being jointly awarded the Nobel Prize in economics in 2009, Elinor Ostrom established the award 'to acknowledge and honour individuals and organisations who have excelled in the area of collective action and the commons'. The goals of the award are:

- *To acknowledge Ostrom's legacy for scholarship and policy-making while making it accessible to wider and more varied audiences, within and outside the realm of international academia.*

- *To promote Ostrom's commitment to the training of students, young colleagues and practitioners.*
- *To promote research on the commons, collective action and governance of commons, as well as its application to the governance and sustainability of socio-ecological, cultural and knowledge commons of different types and scales.*
- *To acknowledge and give visibility to applied policy and civic experiences of governance, management, protection, and/or creation of different types of commons in different regions of the world, particularly those related to great contemporary socio-environmental and social exclusion challenges. (Elinor Ostrom Award, 2016)*

At the Kitafuji conference, the recipients of the Elinor Ostrom award were:

- The Open Spaces Society, and Kate Ashbrook, from the UK for their work on stewardship of the commons and policy impacts in Japan and the UK.
- The Foundation for Ecological Security, India for their work between communities and Government to strengthen commons management.
- Ben Cousins from the Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies in South Africa, for his work exploring property rights in agrarian settings where community engagement is essential.
- Michael Cox from Dartmouth College, USA, for a range of works including that on Social Ecological Systems.
- Charles Schweik from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, USA, for his use of the Institutional Analysis and Development framework and influence upon policy
- Eduardo Araral from the National University of Singapore, for local and international work related to commons policy and governance.

- Grupo de Estudios Ambientales A.C from Mexico for their work in related to indigenous communities and forest management within the country.
- Harini Nagendra from Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment, India for her innovative research methods and as an active practitioner on commons.



*Map of Japan showing key cities - © [d-maps.com](http://d-maps.com)*

# Arriving in Japan - first impressions

The public transport is excellent. We go from the arrivals hall at Narita airport down to the N'Ex train straight into Tokyo central. The train is fast and smooth with a constant stream of information on our location from an electronic screen. Views from the train are grey skies and grey buildings, lots of concrete and raised expressways, power lines strung between poles, and high blocks of flats in the urban areas, broken up by the neat and orderly watery green of rice paddies in between, which diminish in number as we approach Tokyo.

Tokyo Station is a maze and we get lots of help from fellow travellers and the police when we get lost in the labyrinth of corridors and multiple exits trying to find our way out to the bus stop. People are very friendly, polite and helpful but we don't get to see much more of the city than the bus station.

Taking the bus out of Tokyo we start to climb, past steeply sloping tree covered hillsides towards the Kitafuji area. As we get closer, it rains more heavily and the cloud level drops. It is warm and very humid. We are staying on the lower slopes of the mountain but there is no sight of Mount Fuji at all. Next morning the cloud slowly breaks up and the sun comes out, gradually revealing the snow covered summit of Mount Fuji high above.



*Dawn on Mount Fuji*

## *The Sushi Bar*

On our first night in Japan, we were invited to a local sushi bar with some of our new-found friends who were working on the conference organisation. Despite the jet lag we decided this was a cultural experience not to be missed.

Steve has been living here for nine years – he knows the good spots, so a small multi-cultural group of us follow him down into the centre of town to a sushi place. We are a mixed crowd from Mexico, USA, Japan and UK, but as there are so many we end up on different tables, on opposite sides of the open kitchen, which is in the middle of the restaurant surrounded by an endless conveyor belt of tasty looking dishes. It is noisy with lots of customers and chefs shouting orders.

Luckily, on our table, we have Haruo and Will with us to translate the menu and describe the different dishes. They also recommend a good quality Sake – which goes well with the various seafood dishes. In between discussions of life in Japan, covering topics such as drinking age (20), penalties for drunk driving (very severe), learning English (they start at 12), commons management and language lessons, we consume a range of dishes: yellowtail, octopus, shrimp, cuttlefish, tuna, mackerel and – the best of all – conger eel with camembert! The quality of the fish is superb. Desserts, washed down with green tea, available on tap at the table, are rather bland by comparison.



*The fantastic Conger Eel with Camembert*

Victor appears and asks Haruo to identify which is the men's toilet, as the Japanese characters are rather difficult to interpret, and then it is time to work out the bill, which is quite complex as it is all in Japanese – and it is a collective action problem with the potential for free riders to operate – after all we have only just met each other and trust is limited. Being good students of common pool institutional arrangements, however, it all gets worked out to everyone's satisfaction in the end and we can leave.

### *The 14th IASC conference starts*

The next day the IASC international conference started in earnest. The registration desk was packed with delegates getting their conference packs and moving off to workshops. People are greeting old friends and striking up new acquaintances. A Japanese person I met four years ago came up to me and had a chat and earlier in the hotel I had met new people from Spain, Argentina, Indonesia and Iran. There are people from all over the world here and they are involved in a wide range of work with commons resources. Some are involved in research and governance of natural resources, for example on forest or marine commons, while others work on what are termed 'new' commons, such as intellectual property rights, genetics, and knowledge commons. There are academics, resource managers, international development agency personnel, and government policy makers all mingling together, talking and getting to know each other.

I attended the first workshop of the day introducing people to the theory of the commons. There are delegates from Iran, Malaysia, Brazil, Mexico, UK, Indonesia, USA, Australia, Uganda, India, and Japan. And they are working on a myriad of issues associated with commons management including land tenure, governance issues, property rights, resource allocation, game theory, institutional structures, custom and tradition, to name just a few of the topics mentioned.

The fascinating thing is that in a workshop like this, which Ruth and Leticia have delivered many times before, it that is still a learning process for those doing the teaching. The wide range of disciplinary backgrounds, cultures, and experience with a wide range of resources under different social, economic and cultural conditions, always creates new insights on the concept of commons and how people interact to manage them in a sustainable fashion.



*Delegates arrive at the conference*

### *Conference management*

As we now know from our own experience, organising and running a major international conference is a huge task. It is even harder when there are multiple organisers divided by language and culture and living on different continents, and made even more difficult when the conference is to be delivered in a rural area, with limited facilities.

The 14th IASC Global conference on commons held on the slopes of Mount Fuji in Japan is therefore something of a triumph. The organisers, particularly Meg McKean of the IASC, and those at Japan's Research Institute for Humanity and Nature deserve to be congratulated for pulling off such a feat so successfully. It was the first global conference of the IASC to be held on a commons (large areas of the lower slopes of Fuji are common grazing) and organised with the support of local commoners. Almost 400 people from

around the world were brought together to discuss issues around commons management and governance.

The conference organisation was complex involving people in Mexico the USA and Japan. The conference was jointly chaired by Tomoya Akimichi, from the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature in Japan, and Professor Margaret McKean from Duke University, USA. Tetsuzo Yasunari, the Director-General, Research Institute for Humanity and Nature, Kyoto, Japan, was President of the Overall Organizing Committee. A multitude of organisations were involved including the IASC itself, the commoners of the Onshirin Federation of 11 villages holding access rights to the north slope of Mount Fuji, the Onshirin Regional Public Organization, and Japan's Research Institute for Humanity and Nature (RIHN).



*A small army of local high school students contributed to the smooth running of the conference*

As the northern slopes of Mount Fuji are in a rural area, the conference was held in three different locations around Fujiyoshida (the largest town in the area), including the Citizen's Hall in the town, and the main building of the Onshirin Regional Public Organisation which actually sits on the commons of Kitafuji. Conference delegates themselves were scattered across

the whole area in a large number of small hotels and brought together daily through a complex system of bus transport. Shuttle buses picked up those of us at the far end of Yamanakako Lake along with others in outlying districts. We had to be at the bus stop by seven in the morning to get picked up and deposited at one of the three main conference venues for breakfast. Breakfast was a choice of rice, vegetables and miso soup, fruit, bread and the inevitable green tea. At the Onshirin building (owned by the Kitafuji commoners) we sat on tatami mats at low tables, enjoying the food and the early morning light on Mount Fuji.

There were the inevitable grumbles from having to get up so early to travel into the conference venues, but the great thing about this arrangement was that it provided plenty of time for discussion before the crowds arrived and before the first panel sessions took place. There was half an hour between panel sessions giving delegates the chance to switch to another venue across town if a more interesting paper was being delivered elsewhere. The split-second punctuality of the conference shuttle bus transport system enabled us to move not just between sessions but between venues. Then there was a generous 90 minutes for lunch as everyone gathered at the Jibasangyo venue. The good weather invariably allowed us to sit outside under the trees and meet up with those who have been at other venues earlier. The lunch venue also hosted the exhibition hall where there were poster displays, organisation stands, local products, and opportunities to try your hand at origami, calligraphy, or the tea ceremony. Afternoons incorporated a variety of events including a plenary on disaster management attended by a member of the Japanese Royal family. There was also a complete day of field trips with groups travelling to visit a range of commons-based activities (forests, fisheries, pasture, geological features, mountain villages and eco-tourism) up to three hours away.

The opening ceremony was impressive, held in the grounds of the Onshirin Regional Public Organization, with a huge variety of local food, displays from local school children, and traditional dancing as night fell.



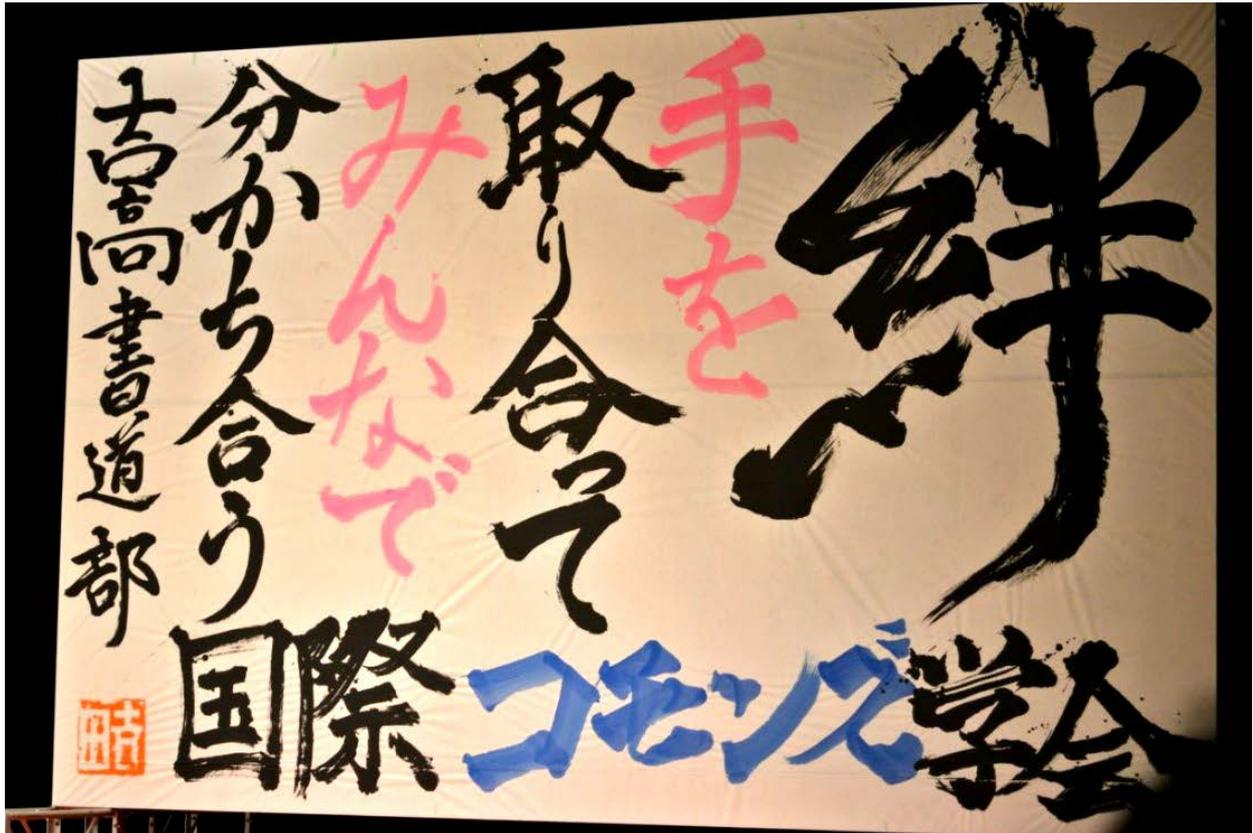
*The Mayor of Fujiyoshida city welcomed delegates*

The conference dinner held later in the week, in a large hotel in Fujiyoshida, went with a swing once the barrel of sake had been broken open in the traditional way with large mallets. These were wielded with great delight by members of the IASC Executive Council and some of the Ostrom Award winners! Such events give everyone an opportunity to socialise and meet a much wider range of people with similar interests compared to just sitting in a classroom listening to lectures. Transport back to the hotels spread out across the local countryside in packed buses was a rowdy affair after the event, but as with every other day the bus system ran like clockwork.

The work undertaken by a large team of volunteers recruited from within Japan should not be underestimated, and those managing the process have

done a brilliant job. Bringing hundreds of people together from around the world for a few days is a mammoth task – the IASC and all the conference organisers should be congratulated on overcoming their problems, disagreements, difficulties, language and cultural barriers to pull off a truly exceptional conference experience.

It only remains for us participants to say 'thank you for all your effort'!



*Poster created by schoolchildren during plenary session*

# Managing complex commons

*John Powell was involved in two sessions which explored the issue of complex commons*

Commons theory developed by Elinor Ostrom and others suggests a 'nested hierarchy' of institutional organisations is the desired optimum approach to managing complex commons. Applying this approach enables us to address problems of scale and trans-boundary conflict, which can be handled by successive levels of institutional arrangements that operate from the local up to national, regional, or even international and global levels.

Chairing a panel exploring the 'Governance of Complex Systems at Multiple Scales' suggests the issues are not quite so straightforward. Ngeta Kabiri opened the session by describing problems of managing wildlife (large mammals) in a trans-boundary region (between Kenya and Tanzania) where different legal and management regimes are operating in each country. Hunting of large mammals is allowed in one country but not in the other, leading to a lack of any incentives to conserve either animals or habitat in the area where the benefits of hunting are not available.

In separate presentations, Alyne Delaney and I then addressed issues of managing complex marine resource systems within the EU institutional context. Alyne looked at barriers and drivers of EU maritime commons while I examined implementation of regulations at the level of the fishing vessel. It was interesting to note that a fundamental measure utilised in ecosystem management - 'quota controls' - was being used to limit the take or catch of Elephants in Africa and Cod in the North Sea. In both cases these measures were failing due to poor quality data, and because they failed to account for fundamental human response behaviour of key stakeholders.

## *Whose water? Discovering complexity between local and the global*

Later in the week, taking part in another panel discussion exploring the nature of water as a commons resource, we again came across similar issues of managing complexity. The panel was chaired by [Ruth Meinzen-Dick](#) from the [International Food Policy Research Institute](#) with Chandra Rappagari from the Government of Andhra Pradesh as discussant. The panel was made up of those who had received a Fellowship or a travel grant from the Foundation for Ecological Security in India.

The panel started by discussing the issue of state versus community control of water resources, and it quickly became apparent that the issue is highly context dependent. Groundwater and surface water need to be considered differently despite the hydrological link between them. The panel suggested that groundwater needed a greater level of local community control, whereas surface water required some level of state control to coordinate information needs and resolve disputes between communities that may be separated geographically. In India it was pointed out that surface water should be under community control but government regulations often interfered with local arrangements. For groundwater, the problem was more a case where individual uses needed to be controlled and brought under some form of community level management. In China on the other hand there is conflict between what is written in the constitution (all water belongs to the state) and what happens on the ground (in practice it belongs to, and is used by, the community).

The concern in many countries was the overriding power of the state to take control of the resource, disenfranchising those dependent on clean water for their livelihoods, while enriching others. Other key factors influencing water rights that became apparent from the discussion included: empowerment, gender (the role of women), and both the availability and quality of water.

How communities operate to get the state to devolve power in a practical manner that is supportive of community aims was considered to be a major challenge in all the countries represented by panellists. Even more interesting was that the issues identified applied as much to the developed world as to developing countries.

Parallels were drawn with other complex commons such as marine resources, where 'global' interests (e.g. multi-national energy companies or national governments) effectively control the resource while local coastal communities no longer have a voice in how the resources (in particular fisheries) are managed.

The need for state support was recognised in the case of large-scale complex resources in order to deal with conflict and trans-boundary issues but the major concern was how to ensure the state did not dominate (or become domineering). The panel suggested that both freshwater (surface and ground) and marine resources should be re-conceptualised as 'shared resources' and local communities need to reclaim a larger share in the decision making over management and use. Empowering communities through building capacity at the local level was seen as the way forward.

# Global commons and their communities

*At the Kitafuji conference, Kate Ashbrook chaired a session called 'Campaign for the commons: what can community-based organisations accomplish?'*

The bulk of each international IASC conference is taken up with academic sessions each lasting about 90 minutes. Up to six scholars present their work briefly, often speaking very fast to get a great deal of information into a short time. The chair of the session has to keep the speakers to time, allow for questions and endeavour to promote some kind of discussion. I have found that often the speakers take up too much time and sadly there is no time left for discussion. By the end one is bemused by the amount of information which has been provided at high speed.

When I was asked to chair a session I decided that I would try to make it work for everyone. I was pleased that my session was not totally academic but was about practitioners, to whom I could relate. The title was 'What is the role of community-based organisations (CBOs) in protecting and managing commons, and how do they relate to non-governmental organisations (NGOs)?'

For the session which I was to chair, there were three papers to be presented on CBO and commons. They focussed upon India, Uganda and Senegal and Burkina Faso.

## *India*

Pratiti Priyadarshini and Kiran Kumari who presented the paper focused on India, were from the [Foundation for Ecological Security](#) (FES), an Indian based NGO.

They worked with communities in Rajasthan and explained the importance of commons for the survival of the rural population and how commons were declining. They promote collaborative action and encourage the government to formulate policy and recognise commons in the five-year plan, with the aim of devolving management and governance of commons to the lowest tier. FES has been campaigning for commons to be recognised in public policy.

FES sees empowerment of, and collective action by CBOs as the means of achieving a better deal for the commons and that there appears to be a symbiotic relationship between the NGOs and the CBOs.



*Kiran Kumari and Pratiti Priyadarshini*

## *Uganda*

Stonewall Kato was studying the influence of CBOs on the fragile ecosystem of the Mount Elgon National Park in Uganda. The communities on the mountain have formed 300 environmental organisations. He made a distinction between CBOs (grassroots, normally membership organisations serving a specific population in a narrow geographic area, people who have joined together to further their own interests) and NGOs which are local, national or international intermediary organisations, formed to serve others.

On Mount Elgon he found that areas with functional CBOs were more likely to participate in the management of forests, water and soil than areas without CBOs. However, the CBO's success depends on its characteristics such as membership composition and strength, and how it seizes opportunities and

addresses challenges. The CBOs have not fully achieved their goals because of poor internal organisation and operational inadequacies.

Stonewall concluded that the CBO's longevity, coverage and strength influence their role in forest, water and soil management. It was important that they kept good records of the resource use, crop harvests and work carried out, and undertook monitoring and evaluation. He said that CBO's adherence to democratic governance is widely believed to bring about legitimacy, recognition and acceptance of the CBO by the local communities in the areas where they operate, with better outcomes.

He recommended that government should put in place a special CBO advisory body to oversee the community management of resources; that CBOs should seize the goodwill of the local community to manage these resources and that CBOs should establish revenue-generating enterprises and sustainable funding for the management of forest, water and soil.



*Stonewall Kato*

### *Senegal and Burkina Faso*

The third presentation was on village organisations in Senegal and Burkina Faso and was made by researchers Cecilia Navarra and Elena Vallino from Belgium and Italy respectively. They were presenting preliminary findings from their work.

Cecilia and Elena also made a distinction between the village organisation (CBO) and NGO, and had investigated whether the starting motivations gave rise to different kinds of village organisation.

Their preliminary conclusions were that donor sponsorship is relevant, and the origin of the funding has an impact on the path followed by the CBO. The number of members of the CBO is positively correlated with a partnership with an NGO, provided the NGO came in because it was contacted by the CBO—the correlation is negative if the NGO came in uninvited.



*(L to R) Kate Ashbrook, Elana Vallino and Cecilia Navarra*

### *Discussion*

Having heard these thought-provoking presentations, I invited discussion. No hands went up so I asked all the speakers to what extent they found that the CBOs were muzzled by the involvement of government. In the UK, campaigning groups risk getting sucked into government and thus losing their independence.

The answers were that in India it was essential to work with government, they could not risk falling out with it and in Uganda there was a danger that the CBO's effectiveness was reduced when they got involved with government.

Despite my best efforts there was little plenary discussion—language may well be a barrier—but our session ended with a large amount of fascinating

information on the table. It made me think about the distinction between CBOs and NGOs which is perhaps more marked in these countries than in the UK. Here, a residents' group is clearly a CBO and a national body like the Open Spaces Society is clearly an NGO, but what about a county organisation like Surrey CPRE or the Sussex Wildlife Trust? I don't think it is obvious. It would be good to follow this up elsewhere.



*A plethora of staff ensured that the Kitafuji conference ran like clockwork*

# The Yui Fisheries Cooperative Association

*One of the numerous field-trips during the conference was to Yui Harbour near the busy port of Shimizu*

Two hours by bus took us to the Yui harbour on Suruga Bay near the busy port of Shimizu where we are welcomed by the president of the association, Mr. Junichi Miyahara. We walk down past several dozen shrimp boats tied up at the quay (it turns out today was the end of the spring fishing season for the Sakura Shrimp). The Yui Cooperative Association is one of the most successful fisheries cooperatives in Japan with over 700 members and 60 active shrimp boats. In addition to the famous shrimp, they catch whitebait and some shellfish. The Sakura shrimp makes up about 60% of the catch by volume but contributes over 80% of the income of the Coop.

Although the shrimp itself is unique to the bay and commands very high prices in the fish markets (whether sold fresh or dried), the fishery is affected by a similar litany of problems found in fisheries elsewhere:

- Declining catch (income is only 50% of the previous year's income)
- Decreasing market price (following the Tsunami Japanese people have reduced consumption of luxury items)
- Need for controlling the supply in order to ensure high and stable prices
- Sea temperature changes – possibly from climate change
- Uncertain scientific data

However this still remains a highly successful fishery, and young people are keen to enter and to innovate. As a group of commons researchers and practitioners, we were interested in understanding what makes this cooperative so successful. Mr. Miyahara and a group of fishermen, explained through an interpreter how the co-op was organised:

- The shrimp are caught at night when they rise closer to the surface by paired boats, which requires a high degree of collaboration between boats
- Shrimp are unloaded locally
- The co-op has begun to diversify its activities, for example, by engaging in direct selling through provision of a local restaurant right on the dockside, this has increased visitor numbers who come to eat and purchase the shrimp to take home
- Rules are made by the cooperative itself (not imposed from outside) and strictly enforced, and the harvest only takes place in two periods of the year
- The association has instigated a shrimp festival to improve social and cultural capital in the area, and to build stronger relationships between fishermen and the rest of the community
- Women are involved in processing, selling and education work with local schools
- Each vessel owner is responsible for all operational costs and all sales are through the co-op which sets rules on catch limits on a daily basis - based on close observation of market prices. Profits are allocated equally across core members (primarily the fishermen).



*Some of the fishing boats*

In addition, it was explained that during two periods over the previous 40 years the fishermen had united to fight against potentially damaging development proposals, and this had created a strong sense of collective action among the fishing community.



*Shrimp sculpture at the harbour*

Success of the cooperative is also due to the younger fishermen who are keen to innovate, and in recent years the cooperative has achieved the Japanese Marine Eco-Label (MEL) for their production and processing. They have also engaged in branding and promotional activities (such as an annual shrimp festival, which brings thousands of people into the community), as well as setting up a dockside restaurant and improving storage and transportation facilities. More recently they have been experimenting with artificial 'reefs' of live cedar trees set in concrete, which are then strategically located in the bay to create the habitat that will encourage growth of the shrimp. With a well-managed ecosystem and seemingly secure incomes, young fishermen are keen to get involved in the fishery and see a sustainable future, as long as the rules governing fishing are followed. It was fascinating to talk to a strong and cohesive group of fishermen that were actively engaging with their community and finding innovative solutions through collective action.

We had long discussions on detailed operations of the fishery, then some live shrimp caught only a few hours earlier were brought into the room for us to look at. To our surprise, chopsticks and bowls were produced and we were encouraged to sample the shrimp more closely. This was not to everyone's taste but they were fresh with a slight salty-sweet flavour, and a slight tickle as they went down your throat!

With the fishing season closed, we were unable to go out on a boat but we did the next best thing and went to see the diversification activities on the quayside. The Association has built a small pre-fabricated restaurant. It is jammed under the raised expressway that goes roaring over this little harbour, carrying an endless stream of traffic down the coast from Tokyo.

*Diversifying under the expressway – or, making the most of what you have got!*

The food at the Association's restaurant was fantastic. It was easy to see how this had become such a successful diversification activity, increasing the revenues from the shrimp harvest.



*The tables next to the harbour, with expressway in the background*

Yui is located within a highly industrialised piece of coastline, but instead of looking for some pleasant location in another part of the town, away from the docks and the sea.

The cooperative deliberately avoided creating anything too fancy or expensive as they wanted to enable people to get as close to the fishing boats as possible, and to experience the environment in which the fisherman operate, and to see the boats come and go. So, there's a 'shack' where the food is prepared, and a few tables outside on the quay next to the boats, a few more tables with a covered terrace partially under the expressway, and a couple of portaloos around the back.



*The main building is a very simple construction*

Japanese people are very safety conscious, but the association has avoided all the fences, ropes, and signs and warnings that you see in so many small fishing ports preventing people from getting anywhere near a real fishing boat or unloading quay. Here in Yui harbour, we are right on top of it. Looking down on the shrimp boats while we eat our deep fried freshly caught shrimp, with the trucks thundering along the expressway behind and above the restaurant. There are no ropes to stop us from falling into the harbour, or fences to keep us away from working boats.

And visitors flock here, it doesn't put them off – in fact they positively enjoy this opportunity to soak up the atmosphere of a working fishing harbour. It is the local version of the 'eat the view' concept using local food and local produce. It is a good example of how a high-quality product directly

associated with a place and the people that live and work there (i.e. the local community), can provide a more rewarding experience to the visitor. Instead of sitting in a restaurant on the more 'appealing' and quieter side of town, away from the sea, with a plate of fish that could have come from anywhere, a constant stream of visitors come down here to sit under the expressway on the edge of the sea to make the link between what they are eating, where it has come from, and who caught it.



*A fisherman on one of the many boats*

The quayside is noisy, busy and smelly, but the food, prepared by some of the fishermen's wives, is incredible, the experience unforgettable, and it is helping to secure a sustainable future for this small fishing community.



*Enjoying some of the day's catch - a memorable experience*

# Receiving the Elinor Ostrom award

*In 2013, the Open Spaces Society was recognised for their enduring work in the area of commons and received the Elinor Ostrom award*

I was overjoyed that the Open Spaces Society was the first winner of the Elinor Ostrom Award for practitioners in 2013. I received the award, on behalf of the society, at the conference in Japan. The society was nominated for the award by [Countryside and Community Research Institute](#) because of our work on commons over a very long period. The citation on our certificate reads:

*On the 5th of June 2013 the Council of the Elinor Ostrom Award on Collective Governance of the commons grants the present recognition to the Open Spaces Society for their outstanding contribution to the practice of commons governance and to their understanding, as well as their long-term stewardship of the commons.*

At the ceremony I had the opportunity to say a few words. In summary, this is what I said:

*"The Open Spaces Society is proud to have received the award and grateful to the University of Gloucestershire for nominating us".*

*"Lin had a phenomenal influence over a wide field and with countless scholars. In particular she was an optimist; she believed in problem solving and that anything is possible, that people will collaborate. As a campaigner I admire those attributes because campaigners must stay positive and believe that anything is possible".*

*"Lin understood the symbiotic relationship of scholarship and practical action, and that research and evidence underpin, reinforce and inform campaigning and collective action."*

*"The OSS feels a bond with this view, because it is vital that campaigners stay positive and believe in their ability to achieve. My organisation has promoted collective action for the last 150 years; we were founded in 1865 to save the commons. In 1866 we took direct action, when we pulled down fences which had been illegally erected on Berkhamsted Common near London. Today we protect the commons with campaigning, advice, and collaboration. We welcome the recent formation of the Foundation for Common Land which brings together many interests on pastoral commons, and we are pleased to be involved."*



*Kate in 2003 [re-opening 'Framfield 9' path which had been obstructed and was the focus of a lengthy court case](#)*

*"It is so important that IASC follows Lin's lead and embraces practitioners and activists as well as academics, to extend its influence, attract new members and grow".*

*"In tribute to Lin, I can assure you that we shall keep up our vital work of championing the commons through campaigning and collective action, as we have done for the last 150 years".*

IASC has produced a video about the Open Spaces Society and other award winners, [which you can watch here](#).



*Kate receiving the Elinor Ostrom award from Leticia Merino*

## Managing shared resources, addiction, and the best coffee in town

Japan is the land of green tea. Coffee can be found in Tokyo but in more rural areas, such as where the conference is being held, it is a rarity. For those of us gathering every morning at the Hirano bus stop at the far end of Yamanakako Lake, the coffee machine in the 7/11 is the place to meet.

There is only one small machine and it is slow as it grinds the beans first before dribbling the steaming hot nectar into the cup. It makes the best coffee, perhaps the only coffee, in the whole area! For a West European coffee addict it's a great source of pleasure and relief!

7/11 is chain of small convenience stores commonplace in the USA but also ubiquitous throughout Japan. This one goes above and beyond the call of duty, as it always seems to be open. We head out of the hotel by 6:40am, walk down the road with Mount Fuji looming over us, often with a dab of cotton wool cloud partially obscuring the summit. Upon reaching the bus stop we head straight into the 7/11. Inside, the shop assistant sells a paper cup for 80 yen and you take it to the machine, put it in and then wait. It is important to get there early as up to 40 conference delegates gather here to take the bus into the IASC International Commons Conference venues at Jibasanyo, Oshirin or the Citizen's Hall in Fujiyoshida.

The cup itself (and by inference the coffee grounds) are clearly market goods, fully excludable and allocation is by price. But the coffee machine is different – it is a shared resource and like any form of common good needs some form of institutional arrangements to ensure benefits are allocated in a fair and equitable manner. Time is the constraint, as the bus is punctual and waits for no man, or woman.

We resort to the standard prior appropriation rule – first in time, first in right – or as the English would understand it – we form a queue. With such a big crowd and so little time Game Theory might demonstrate that we could possibly optimise benefits through sharing cups of coffee between two or even three people, thus reducing total time required to satisfy all those demanding the dark black liquid, and ensuring the maximum numbers get some coffee before the bus leaves. But the addict, like any large corporation addicted to a single aim – the pursuit of profit – does not think like that and does not share vital resources. So, we all line up one behind the other and wait, each hoping he or she has long enough to satisfy their craving. Addiction creates a single focus at the expense of all others and, in terms of economic development it is ultimately fatal, resulting in negative or even fatal consequences on the addict and the society around him, or her. This was much more succinctly put by one of the winners at today’s awards of the Elinor Ostrom Prize, “we need to manage our common resources more effectively in order to work against the most destructive force of possessive individualism which, if left unchecked, will ultimately destroy society”.

There is a lesson here for all of us junkies at the bus stop!



*Caffeine addicts at the Hirano bus stop*

# Reflections on the Kitafuji conference

It is difficult to summarise a five-day conference in just a few lines but in the case of the 2013 conference held on the slopes of Mount Fuji several words spring immediately to mind – spectacular, efficient, fascinating, and inspirational.

The Onshirin Federation – a commoners association - was the prime mover in sponsoring and getting the 14th IASC Biennial Global Conference off the ground. We first learned about the Federation and the significance of commons resources on Mount Fuji when they came to the Hyderabad Conference in India to make a presentation in 2011. We were intrigued, first of all, at the extent of commons in Japan and second, at the story of how the commons on Mount Fuji had been managed over the last 100 years.



*A boisterous bus journey after the closing ceremony and dinner!*

As it turned out, the conference design and development proved a challenging task as this was the first time an IASC Conference had been delivered by a Commoners Association. There were at least four organisations involved, on different continents, which made communications somewhat difficult, but with support from Meg Mckean of the IASC, Tomoya Akimichi from the

Research Institute for Humanity and Nature in Kyoto, and a small army of helpers, the outcome was highly successful.

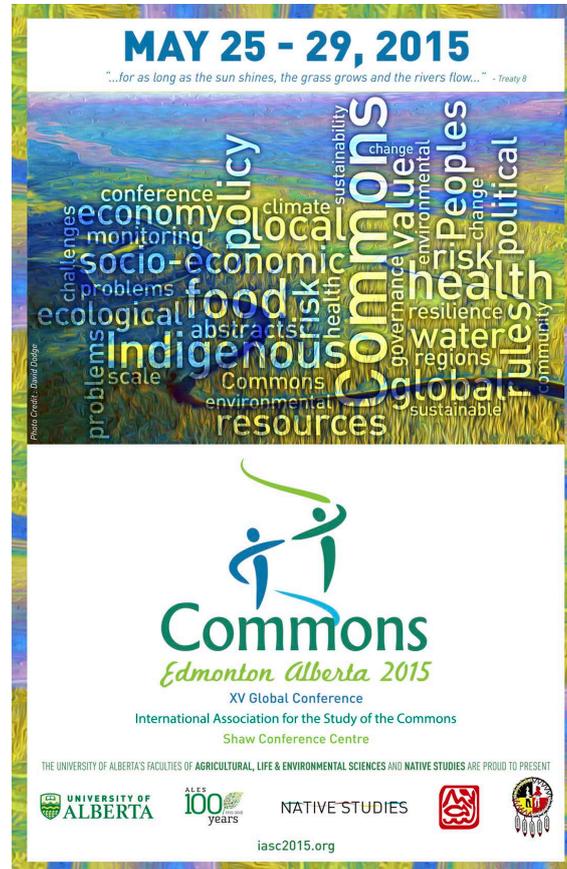
The setting on the slopes of Mount Fuji was spectacular. Waking early in the morning (due to jet lag) the day after arrival to see the dawn light turn the snowfields on the tip of Mount Fuji red, then rose-coloured as the sun rose above the horizon, was an astonishing sight. To then have an opportunity to learn about the religious significance of the mountain, to visit the temples at its base, and even to walk on some of the lower slopes, provided a new perspective from which to explore the value of commons resources to the local people in this part of the world.

Although the conference was held in Fujiyoshida City, the delivery of conference sessions had to be spread across three locations, and in terms of accommodation, we were spread far and wide across the Mount Fuji and Lake Yamanaka area. Yet this did not feel at all like it was a problem to those of us participating in the conference. The conference organisation was phenomenal. It operated an entire bus transportation system to move people around and between the three sites, and across the region to move people from accommodation into the conference centre and back again at night. It was a precision operation that picked us up in the morning and whisked us to one location for breakfast, then to another location for conference sessions, back to a central location for lunch so that we could all be together for networking, and out again in the afternoon to other events.

Behind the scenes were people helping: academics from a range of Japanese Universities, student volunteers, local high-school teenagers packing delegate bags and making wooden name tags and other items for every participant – and behind all of them the Conference Co-Chairs and the Commoners Association who worked together to make this a highly successful event.

# 2015 Edmonton

*Commons amidst complexity and change*



The 2015 International Commons conference ran from May 25th – 29th in Edmonton, in the province of Alberta, Canada. Sponsored by the University of Alberta, and organised by Brenda Parlee, the conference theme was 'Commons amidst Complexity and Change', and again attracted a truly global delegation. Over 900 papers were submitted for consideration from nearly 70 countries. These were classified into the following categories:

- Defining the Commons: Building Knowledge through Collaboration
- The Commons in a Global Political Economy
- Food Security, Livelihoods and Well-being
- The Commons in Action
- Social-Ecological Resilience

- Dealing with Risk, Conflict and Uncertainty
- The Commons and Climate Change
- Indigenous Peoples and Resource Development

Commons issues within Canada cover a range of diverse issues. Locally, the Athabasca oil sands in Alberta are a key source for crude oil in the country. As a fossil fuel the oil sands are an issue of much controversy attracting international and high profile attention due to their extent (covering an area of 141,000 km<sup>2</sup>) and environmental factors (overlain by peat bog sand boreal forest). Notwithstanding these aspects, ownership of the expansive areas covered by the sands is complex and contentious. In Canada the Constitution Act of 1867 grants provincial governments full ownership of resources within its borders. The Province has significant control over development as it essentially owns the land, and is therefore able to lease land for development by energy companies, while the Federal government regulates taxation and trade<sup>\*1</sup>.

The tar sands however, lie within Treaty 8 lands of the First Nations, and the treaty grants First Nations peoples living in the area certain rights ( for example, it stipulates the need for continuation of hunting and trapping of animals). Extraction of oil from the sands clearly disrupts such practices as well as polluting the water, leading to conflict, but at the same time some of the First Nations have set up companies to service the oil industry. The situation is also complicated by foreign ownership of many of the companies currently extracting oil; one recent estimate suggests 71% of ownership of oil sands production is foreign owned<sup>\*2</sup>.

Nationally, there were significant developments during the course of the conference relating to Canada's 'First Nation' population when a Supreme Court Judge referred to Canada's treatment of First Nation people as 'a history of cultural genocide', with particular reference to a long-standing

policy of 'assimilation', which continues to have negative impacts although the policy has now changed. The full transcript of Justice McLachlin's speech [can still be accessed on the The Globe and Mail website](#).

The conference offered a diverse selection of field trips covering natural and cultural issues and attractions, and delegates were provided with further activities and six keynote speeches:

- Heather Menzies – Righting Relations with the Land and the Global Economy: Lessons from our Ancestors on the commons
- Nancy Turner – Working Together for a Common Goal: Food Security Traditions for Western Canadian First Peoples Ancestors on the Commons
- David Schindler – The Oil Sands and the State of Science in Canada
- Francois Paulette – As long as the rivers flow...
- Rob Huebert – Arctic Sovereignty and Climate Change - Canada's Future in a Changing North
- Itoah Scott-Enns – Sustainability in Northern Canada - A Future for Indigenous Youth

The Ostrom awards were again given to a number of individuals who excelled in the area of collective action and the commons. [Recipients of the award at the Edmonton conference were:](#)

- Abdon Nababan as practitioner, for the work in Indonesia of [AMAN](#), over whom he presides, for their work with indigenous communities within the country.
- Marcedonio Cortave as practitioner and the director of [ACOFOP](#) for their work concerning community forest management in Guatemala.

- Scott Shackelford from Indiana University, USA, as young scholar for his work which applied poly-centric governance theory to advance sustainable development in internet law.
- Fikret Berkes from the University of Manitoba, Canada, as senior scholar for his works linking social and ecological systems.
- Bonnie McCay from the State University of New Jersey, USA, as senior scholar for her work that has focused upon the social, economic and political complexities of fisheries commons.



*Map of Canada showing key cities - © [d-maps.com](http://d-maps.com)*

# What to do in Edmonton while waiting...

*John Powell and Kate Ashbrook arrived early to  
the 2015 conference to meet with the IASC Executive Council*

Although the 15th Biennial IASC international conference started on a Monday, a small group of us had arrived in Edmonton the Thursday before. This was partly due to limited flight options, but also because, the IASC Executive Council holds its meeting prior to the biennial conferences. The Council reviews current activities of the IASC, considers proposals for future regional and international conferences and undertakes organisational management.

We have also had some time to explore the city a little. On the architectural side Edmonton does not win any prizes, with the standard set of concrete buildings and high rise office blocks you could be almost anywhere and, as the [Edmonton Journal last Friday](#) noted, “*the unremarkable-to-hideous nature of Edmonton’s 1950-90 building era brought on much complaining*”.



*Racing in downtown Edmonton*

It is not the built environment that makes a city but the communities created by those living there. How they work collectively to create and share a living space. Pleasing architecture and a well ordered urban landscape help, but what really makes a place interesting are the people, and the relationships they develop with the place where they live.

Attempts to create a 'sense of place' in an area that was settled only relatively recently by European migrants can be seen in the memorials and sculpture that dot the city. In the park below the Provincial Legislature building, there is a statue titled 'Perseverance' dedicated to the merchants who created the agricultural wealth and built the railroads, there is an everlasting flame dedicated to policemen who have died in service, the First and Second World War memorials with their long lists of names, and a sculpture to Ukrainian migrants that came over to make a living off the land, to name just a few.



*'Perseverance' - Statue of Donald Alexander Smith, Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company and founding member of the Canadian Pacific Railway*

Alberta had just elected [May 2015] a new premiere, Rachel Notley, whose manifesto included a commitment to raise the minimum wage to \$15/hour by 2018 (from its current level of \$10.20/hour), and there was a massive impromptu festival in front of the Legislature building on Sunday to mark the end of 44 years of Progressive Conservative party rule, with promises to make the government more accountable and clean-up political cronyism.

There is a definite dynamic to the city, and although we felt that the centre was something of a 'dead zone' there are plenty of activities going on elsewhere. Whyte Avenue for example, in the south part of town is alive and busy, full of small craft shops, bars and cafes. Kate, Leticia Merino and I spent a pleasant couple of hours on the rooftop patio of the [Black Dog Pub](#), planning the development of the IASC short courses on [Commons](#). A local craft brewer has linked the price of its 'flagship' beer to the price of crude oil – the beer costs 10% of the price of a barrel of crude – which meant the beer price had gone down when we were there – not great for the local energy-based economy but good news for beer drinkers.

On Saturday Kate joined in with a demonstration on Genetically Modified Organisms, and there was also a campaign to preserve an open space for farmer's market and other community activities.

In short, scratch below the surface, and you soon find that there is plenty to do in Edmonton, while waiting for the conference delegates to arrive...

# A First Nations' welcome in Canada

*As with any IASC conference, the opening ceremony is a time where the host country will incorporate important cultural and historic elements*

There are two overarching benefits to being a member of the IASC. First are the people you get to know from other countries, other disciplines, and those involved in other aspects of commons activity – whether it is defending their own commons, working for an NGO in some remote corner of the globe, or fighting private interests. The second benefit is being able to visit different countries, meet with different communities and, for a short while, have the privilege of seeing the world from their perspective.



*One of the First Nations leaders in the opening address*

Both those benefits are available at this year's IASC conference in Canada. There are conference delegates here in Edmonton from over 50 countries, and it is an energising mix of academics, researchers, theorists, those working to improve commons governance, and indigenous people defending their common rights. In Alberta we also received a wonderful welcome from the

Treaty 8 First Nations who have been involved in supporting the development and delivery of the conference objectives.

We started to appreciate the importance of the First Nations at the opening ceremony of the conference on Monday night held in Blaxford Hangar at Fort Edmonton Park (technically part of Treaty 6 land). Fort Edmonton was originally the fur trade headquarters of the Hudson's Bay Company who controlled an area that encompassed what today is southern and central Alberta and south-eastern Saskatchewan. The First Nations greeted us with a 'Grand Entrance' (made up of tribal chiefs and elders, and other dignitaries), drumming, traditional song, food, speeches, and dancing.



*Welcome dance*

Both drumming and dancing from the different tribes were impressive displays, and the speeches from the tribal chiefs were not mere platitudes but heartfelt greetings to people they had never met – who share some of the same concerns over the need to protect and manage our natural resources wisely.

## *A note on Treaty 8*

[Treaty 8](#) was signed on June 21, 1899, between Queen Victoria and various First Nations of the Lesser Slave Lake area. It was one of 11 agreements made between the Government of Canada and First Nations. The Treaty, covering 8.84 million square kilometres, is larger than France and includes northern Alberta, north-eastern British Columbia, north-western Saskatchewan and the southernmost portion of the Northwest Territories. It pre-dates the formation of the Province of Alberta and thus constitutes an agreement between the indigenous nations and the government of Canada. First Nations that are considered signatories to Treaty 8 include the Woodland Cree, Dunneza, and Chipewyan. The treaty still governs the region based on a promise to the inhabitants that they would be free to continue hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering. However, there are two Treaties: one is an oral treaty (which was understood by the First Nations as the legal treaty), and the second is a written document, understood by the Federal Government as the relevant legal agreement. The two are interpreted differently which leads to continuing conflict today, especially with regards to the oil sands exploitation taking place 300 km to the north of Edmonton.



*Northern Cree dance*

# Challenges for the Arctic commons

*Two of the keynote presentations at the Edmonton conference addressed issues associated with Arctic commons*

Two interesting keynote presentations were given at the IASC Commons Conference in Alberta, and provided alternative views of the problems facing the Arctic in the immediate future. Rob Huebert, a research fellow at the Canadian International Council and Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute, focused on 'Arctic Sovereignty and climate change', while Itoah Scott-Enns, a member of the Tlicho Nation (First Nation) of Canada who was born and raised in the Denendeh (land of the Dene) in the Northwest Territories, explored issues surrounding 'Sustainability and a Future for Indigenous Youth in Northern Canada'.

Rob Huebert pointed out that the entire Arctic region was at a point of transformation with many drivers of change influencing how we think about the environment, security, and resource development, which challenge our understanding of the terms 'sovereignty' and 'commons'. He explored three interconnected themes: that the speed of change in the Arctic is unprecedented; the drivers of the transformation; and, what this would mean for Canada. He pointed out that for the first time 'as a species' we would see the Arctic melt and the ways in which we respond to this massive change will be a matter of security. This is due to several factors, firstly the perception of the Arctic as a 'treasure trove' with oil, gas and mineral resources as the prize for those with the capacity and will to extract them. He pointed out that Russia had been producing oil and gas since 2013 and that Canada was now interested in drilling in the Beaufort Sea (although current plans have been shelved due to low oil prices) but the key issue would be the role of

national boundaries and the Law of the Sea in determination of how these resources could be shared among competing interests. Rob also pointed out the focus on security with Russian concerns for protection of their nuclear deterrent (submarines), American concerns over missile attacks, and as the ice melts, a range of interests from other countries including China, Korea, Japan, India, Singapore and the EU. Numerous concerns were highlighted for Canada to address, including: opening up of the Northwest passage (viewed by Canada as internal waters, by others as international waters), extensions of the continental shelf and maritime claims to resources, disputed land claims (e.g. Hans Island is claimed by both Canada and Denmark), and oil off the west coast of Greenland, which may provide the impetus for Greenland to claim independence from Denmark.



*Rob Huebert presenting*

In contrast, Itoah Scott-Enns provided a much more personal view, noting that the overwhelming policy focus on resource development was ignoring a wide range of environmental and social issues in northern Canada. Climate change is already bringing environmental damage, with a record number of forest fires in 2014 (even as she spoke The Edmonton Journal was reporting 65 forest fires burning in Northern Alberta due to a very dry spring), and the

Great Slave Lake, one of the world's largest freshwater lakes, was revealing a decline in water levels. She pointed out that intensive resource exploitation was not the only option for the indigenous communities of the Arctic and there is a need to capitalise on the skills 'within communities' instead of creating a future for young people where their only options lay in 'serving an industry that has no interest in the local people and communities'. She noted that the Arctic region provided an abundant range of natural resources, which could be captured and utilised by local people with a long history of living off the commons resources of the North. A key strategy for ensuring the continuation of thriving indigenous cultures and communities would be to build strategic alliances across the range of indigenous groups across the Arctic, to ensure that local people were involved in consultations on developments at an early stage, and to learn how to deal with intensive resource exploitation from those who had experienced similar struggles in other parts of the world.



*Itoah Scott-Enns presenting*

An interesting point to note from the two talks was the lack of any connection. Rob's focus on resource development, underlain by security issues, made no reference to the concerns of those living in the region, while Itoah's presentation did not recognise the overwhelming power of market forces driving change. Both points of view would do well to recognise the

other's arguments and identify a role for the indigenous communities in development of the Arctic – a role that needs to go beyond platitudes and tick-box 'consultation' exercises – and a form of development that must go beyond the mere economic - to include both social and environmental issues.



*An oil refinery on the outskirts of Edmonton  
The industry is a key employer in Alberta*

# Indigenous rights in Canada

## *Dealing with unresolved impacts of 19th century treaties*

*"We lived here, we were a nation, we were sovereign. We still believe we are a nation, that this land we live on is ours. But if we don't continue to move forward as a people, then I foresee more problems. We need to remind this country we are here to stay. We are not immigrants – we have nowhere else to go."*

*Rose C. Laboucan, Driftpile Cree Nation*

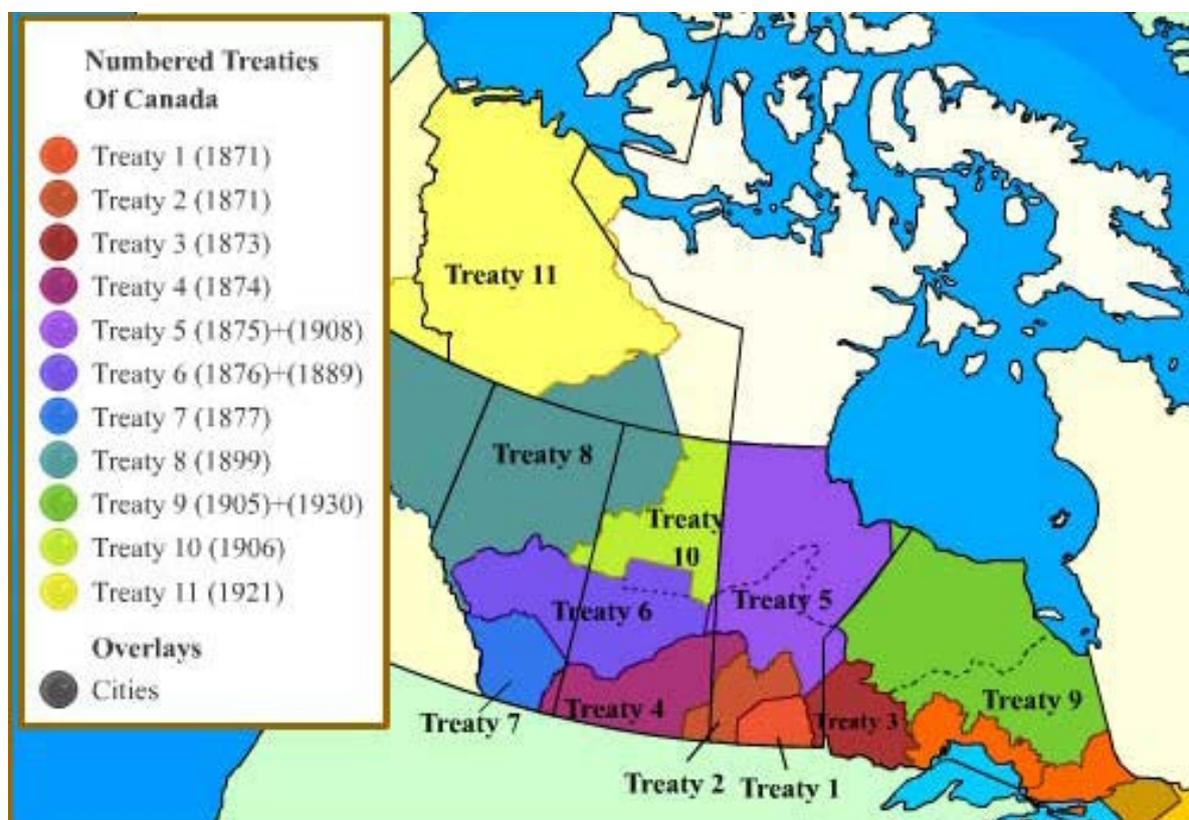
*(speaking at the IASC International Conference, May 2015).*

The first thing one realises, when starting to explore the whole issue of indigenous rights, is the complexity of the situation. We were fortunate, at the IASC Global Commons Conference in Edmonton, to have access to representatives of different indigenous groups, which are usually referred to here as 'First Nations', or 'Treaty Nations' due to their recognition originally stemming from Treaties made with the Crown.

On the first day of the conference, there was a panel session entitled 'Treaties: a way of life for Western Canada's indigenous peoples' which explored some of the issues stemming from the series of treaties signed by the First Nations in the late 19th century, and the way in which the Treaties continue to influence the relationship between indigenous peoples and the Canadian government.

Treaties were made across Canada between 1701 and 1923 starting with the British Crown and finishing with the Government of Canada. The Treaties can be found across 9 provinces and cover 50% of the land area of the country. In the north and west of the country, a total of 11 treaties were signed between 1871 and 1921 (referred to as the 'numbered treaties') covering Northern Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, the Yukon, the Northwest

Territories and British Columbia. The treaties allowed the Canadian government access to land and resources in exchange for providing reserves for the first nations, hunting rights, and access to education and other services.



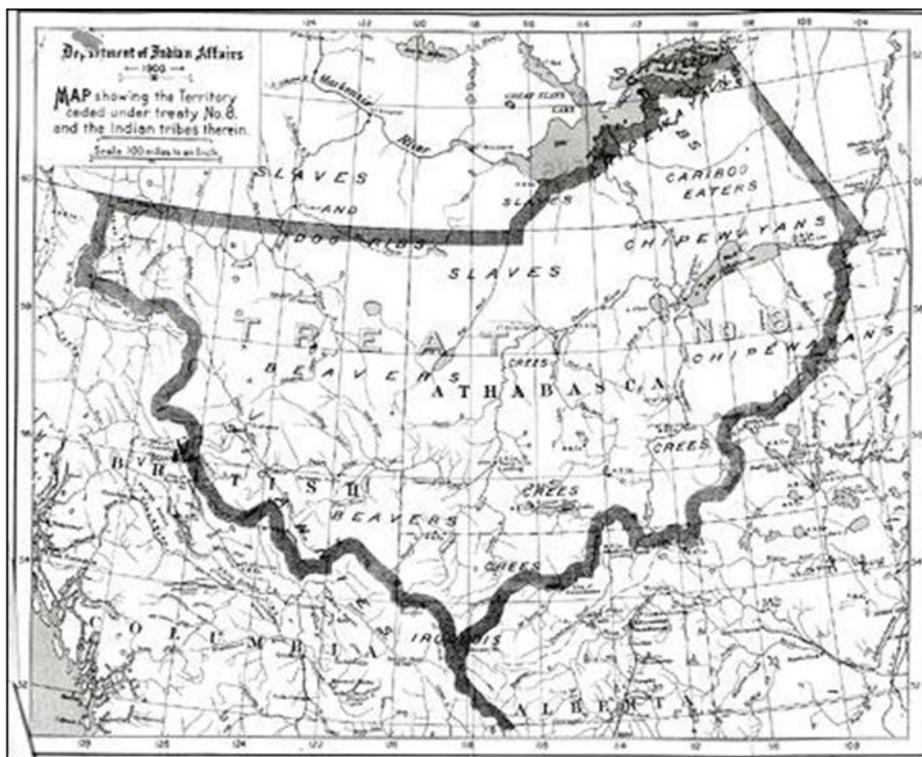
*Map of Numbered Treaties ([Thinklink](#))*

A key problem which has reverberated down the generations, stems from a difference in interpretation between the Canadian government and the First Nations over the meaning of the Treaties. For the First Nations, the oral treaty was the one they recognised, while for the Government it was the written document – this difference in interpretation continues to cause problems within Canada today.

In Alberta the two key Treaties covering much of the province, are Treaties 6 and 8. We were reminded, both at the opening ceremony of the conference, and at the panel session, that we were sitting on Treaty 6 land, which covers south and central Alberta. Treaty 8, covering most of the northern part of the province and extending into neighbouring provinces, is much more

contentious as it includes large areas of the Athabasca tar sands, currently being exploited. The misunderstanding over the Treaties also illustrates the problems that arise when two cultures, with vastly differing levels of power and differing conceptions about the nature of property, collide.

The First Nations that signed the Treaty viewed it in the following way "*...they saw the white man's treaty as his way of offering them his help and friendship. They were willing to share their land with him in the manner prescribed by their tradition and culture. The two races would live side by side in the North, embarking on a common future.*"



*Original 1899 Treaty 8 Map (Source: Glenbow Archives)*

There was clearly a difference in the way the two sides interpreted the treaty. For the white man it was about surrender of land and access to resources, while for the Treaty Nations it was about sharing the resources in a culture that did not understand the concept of private property. The following excerpt from a research report ([Madill, 1986](#)) highlights the issue:

*"...it is improbable that the commissioners in their hasty journey through*

*the north could have clarified the interpretation of the treaty, particularly the concept of land surrender...How could anybody put in the Athapaskan language through a Métis interpreter to monolingual Athapaskan hearers the concept of relinquishing ownership of land, I don't know, of people who have never conceived of a bounded property which can be transferred from one group to another. I don't know how they would be able to comprehend the import translated from English into a language which does not have those concepts, and certainly in any sense that Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence would understand...and it has continued to puzzle me how any of them could possibly have understood this. I don't think they could have."*

Mid-way through the 20th century, a 1959 Commission (The Nelson Commission) set up to investigate the unfulfilled provisions of Treaties 8 and 11, noted that the situation had not altered much between then and when the Treaties were signed:

*"It should be noted that although the Treaties were signed sixty and thirty-eight years ago respectively, very little change has been effected in the mode of life of the Indians of the Mackenzie District. Very few of the adults had received an elementary education and consequently were not able to appreciate the legal implications of the Treaties. Indeed some bands expressed the view that since they had the right to hunt, fish and trap over all of the land in the Northwest Territories, the land belonged to the Indians. The Commission found it impossible to make the Indians understand that it is possible to separate mineral rights or hunting rights from actual ownership of land."*

Madill ([1986](#)) described interviews with elders of the Alberta portion of the Treaty 8 area as providing some revealing comments regarding the Indian interpretation of the written text of the terms and conditions:

*"Interviews with Indian elders have indicated that the Indians' perception of*

*the Treaty Eight provisions – particularly those regarding hunting, fishing and trapping rights, reserve land, social services, education and once-for-all expenditures – differed substantially from those of the government. Of all the treaty provisions, the most significant were hunting, fishing and trapping rights. Indian elders have stated in no uncertain terms that Treaty Eight would not have been signed if the Indians had not been assured that their traditional economy and freedom of movement would be guaranteed...All elders of the Treaty Eight area agreed that the treaty terms provided that there would be no restriction of hunting, fishing and trapping rights.”*



*Treaty No. 8 commissioners, northern Alberta, 1899. Left to right, Harrison Young, secretary; Honourable David Laird, commissioner; Pierre D'Eschambault, interpreter. (Source: Glenbow Archives)*

The affairs of the First Nations after the treaties were signed were assigned to a small, under-resourced federal office, far from the Treaty lands and the people it was supposedly looking after. The situation was further complicated in 1905 when control over natural resources was transferred to the newly created provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan, and *'the fulfilment of treaty promises, particularly those concerning reserve land and hunting, fishing and trapping rights, were in direct conflict with settler interests as represented by the provincial governments'*. A situation was thus created whereby

implementation of the Treaties made between the Crown and the First Nations became divided between a central government that had signed the treaties, and a provincial government that had not, and thus had no obligation to implement the terms.

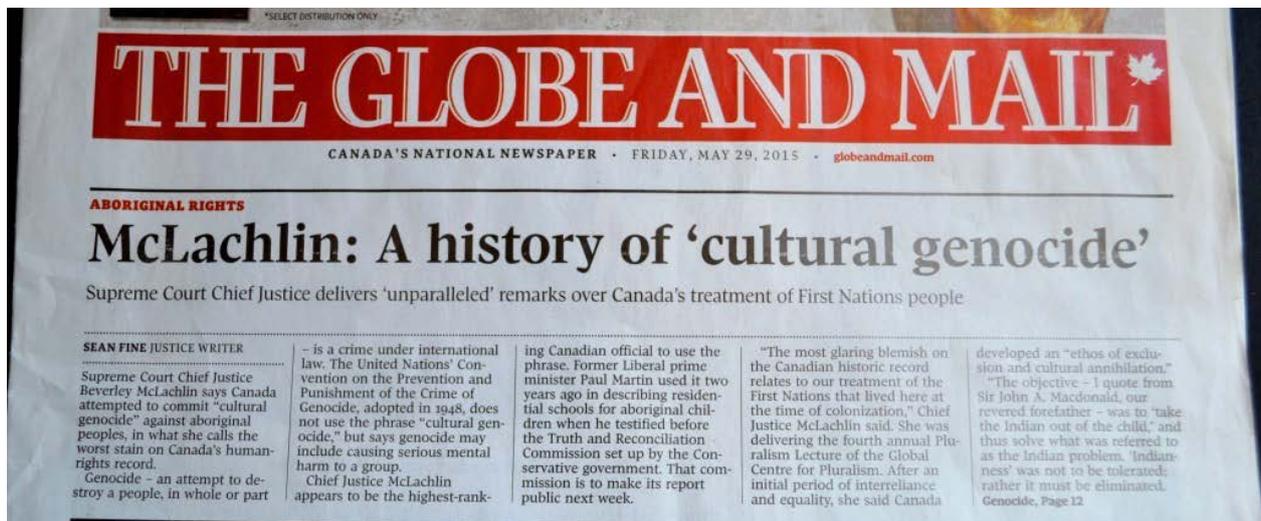
The conflicts over the terms of the treaties, the implementation of those terms by the Canadian government, and the rights to both renewable and non-renewable resources on treaty lands, continues to the present day. With the development of energy, such as the Athabasca tar sands, and mineral resources in the northern parts of Canada, and the subsequent environmental impacts on water and ecological systems, the unresolved issues of First Nation Treaty rights have come to the fore, and require resolution. There are indigenous communities living around the tar-sand deposits, mostly along the Athabasca River basin area where current [development has affected the landscape](#) through de-forestation, hydrological impacts, and contamination, resulting in adverse impacts on biodiversity.

The Treaty Panel session at the conference included around 40 young people from the Treaty 8 First Nations, many of whom were also involved in creating a poster display in the main auditorium, and who were available for discussion during the lunch break. Some of them were very eloquent, and they made it clear during our discussions that they saw themselves as Canadians but they also value their culture highly. The posters they had produced clearly indicated the importance they place on the need for a high quality environment, and their concerns over ecological damage as a result of pollution and climate change.

*"Treaties are an on-going issue, treaties need to be upheld and honoured, it's not the text, the Canadian text is their version – our elders go by oral treaty – and first and foremost we did not cede and surrender the land. Under Treaty 8 we have rights to a livelihood, rights to maintain a way of life, and rights to retain control over lands and resources."*

Treaty Panel discussion, IASC Conference,  
Edmonton, 26th May 2015

On day four of the conference we were clearly reminded of the continuing effects of the unresolved Treaty issues we had heard about in the opening ceremony and in the panel session on indigenous rights by stories in the national media. The main headlines in the [Globe and Mail](#), a national newspaper, referred to Canada's treatment of First Nations people as 'A history of cultural genocide', in reference to remarks by the Supreme Court Chief Justice Beverly McLachlin.



*Globe and Mail - May 29th 2015*

She is identified as the 'highest ranking Canadian official to use the phrase'. The paper reported her as saying that Canada '*developed an ethos of exclusion and cultural annihilation*' as she identified a number of activities that had occurred over the previous century and a half, including:

*'...laws barring Indians from leaving reservations, rampant starvation and disease, outlawing of religious and social traditions, and residential schools where children removed from their homes were subject to [physical and sexual abuse](#)'.*

### *Indigenous rights in Canada – 'cultural genocide' and the legacy of 'assimilation'*

The history of Canada's relationship with its native peoples, especially the now discredited concept of 'assimilation', which originated under the Indians Act of 1867 and was implemented over the following 150 years, has created deep-seated problems that continue into the present. These problems continue to hinder economic and social development, particularly in the northern regions of the country. Indicative of the situation is a report, also on the front page of the same newspaper on the same day, concerning placement of foster-children in rural hotels in Manitoba, a neighbouring province of Alberta. The report indicated that the provincial government had *'no idea how many foster children are living in hotels in rural and northern communities'*. This follows a case of sexual assault on a foster child placed in a 'Best Western' in Winnipeg and comes, 'days before a provincial deadline to eradicate hotel placements'. There are an estimated 10,000 foster children in Manitoba, 90% of them are native.



*Children in a residential school - late 19th century*  
*[Image courtesy Simon Fraser University](#)*

One of the key components of the assimilation policy established in the 19th century was the control of education (and the role of First Nations education continues to be debated today). From the 1880s onwards, the federal government, in conjunction with religious institutions, operated residential schools for aboriginal education. Children had to attend from the ages of 5 to 16, often being forcibly removed from their parents, separated from brothers and sisters, forced to speak English and not their native languages, and to practice Christianity (we would meet someone from the Nakota Sioux First Nation later in the week who had direct experience of this assimilation policy). In the 1970s the government started shutting down the schools, although it was not until 1996 that the last school closed.

The massive damage inflicted on indigenous peoples by the residential schools programme has recently been recognised to the extent that a '[Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#)' was established in 2008 under the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, with the mandate '*to reveal to Canadians the complex truth about the history and ongoing legacy of the church run residential schools...and to guide and inspire a process of truth and healing...*'



*Aboriginal students attending the Metlakatla Indian Residential School.*  
([Credit: William James Topley / Library and Archives Canada / C-015037](#))

The findings of the Commission were released this week, following six years of work including national and local events held across the country, documenting 6,750 statements from survivors of residential schools, and legal battles to obtain evidence from the Canadian Government. The Commission's June 2nd report (entitled 'Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future') also contains 94 'calls to action', including taking steps to protect child welfare, preserve language and culture, promote legal equity, strengthen information on missing children, and the need for governments across Canada to adopt and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

At the time of writing this piece [May 2015], the Canadian Government had not made any formal response in relation to the summary report that had been published and had been the focus of the newspaper articles. They stated that they would wait until the full report is submitted later that year. However, in a news report earlier in 2015, former Prime Minister Paul Martin was quoted as saying:

*"...if I were to single out one action that has for too long been ignored, it would be to repair the mistake that was made by colonial governments who, believing that native culture had no value, assumed its people had nothing to say. This false assumption has contributed grievously to the wrong and repeated attempts to assimilate the First Nations, which is a root cause of so much of the poverty and missed opportunity we see today. From outlawing traditional ceremonies to the horrors of residential schools, the history of Canada is fraught with examples of a culturally genocidal dismissal of First Nations values and sense of worth, a policy of unconscionable discrimination that continues apace."*

Paul Martin (Prime Minister of Canada 2003-2006)

(Source: Globe and Mail 9th February 2015)

The [final complete report was published](#) on December 15th 2015.

# An invitation to visit the Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation

*First Nations were closely involved with the IASC and the development of the conference. The Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation kindly invited delegates to visit one of their communities near Edmonton*

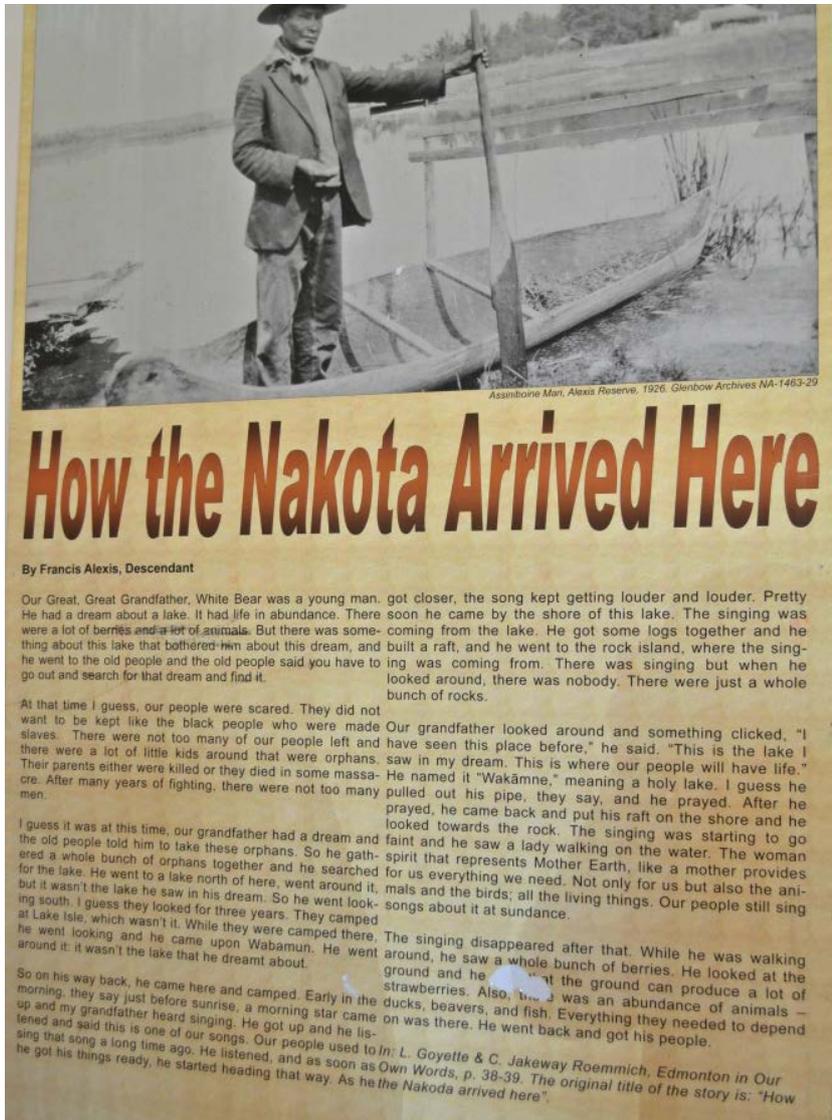
Due to the close working relationships developed between the IASC Conference Organising Committee and the First Nations we were given the opportunity to visit the [Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation](#) at their reserve, around 72 km north-west of Edmonton, Alberta, on the shore of the sacred Lake Wakamne (also known as Lake St. Anne).



*Upon arrival we were greeted by our hosts*

The Nation signed Treaty 6 with the Crown in 1877, in which they agreed to 'share' their land and its resources with the new settlers. The Nation is regulated by the Government of Canada's Indian Act and can now be found

in four separate areas, two for living on and developing, and two primarily used for hunting and gathering. We visited the main reserve area consisting of slightly over 1,000 people living on 6 square miles of land (a similar number live off the reserve).



*Poster in the school telling story of how the Nakota Sioux came to Lake Wakamne*

On arrival, we were met by Lloyd Verreault (a teacher), Reggie Cardinal, and Lyndon Cardinal. They took us first to the monument erected in memory of chiefs and tribal councillors, where we discussed organisation and management of the reserve and the Nation. Lyndon talked about the difficulties of being a chief (which is currently an elected position), of the weight of responsibility, and trying to please different interests. He told us that it was his grandfather's grandfather who signed the Treaty, which he

did in the best interests of the Nation. We were then joined by Grandma Isabelle, a fluent speaker of the Stoney language. Tradition and cultural values continue to be important and the resurgence of the Stoney language among the young (which was started in 1993), has been successful in improving well-being, happiness and creating a sense of pride in belonging to the Nation.



*Lyndon explains the governance system in front of the monument*

We walked down to the shore of Lake Wakamne where Grandma Isabelle described some of the history of life on the reservation. For a large part of the 20th century (following the Indian Act of 1876 and subsequent amendments), the Nation was prevented from using its own language, and from 1920 onwards children were forced to live in residential schools and learn English for virtually the whole period of their childhood. This effectively left the reservations childless under a policy of 'taking the Indian out of the child', which was viewed at the time as a means of assimilating the First Nations into Canadian society. Grandma Isabelle herself was taken away at the age of five, coming close to tears as she recalled the memories (the last residential school did not close until 1988).

In addition, she explained that children who wanted to be educated beyond

the age of 16 had to give up their Treaty Rights. At one time, First Nation people were forbidden to leave the reservation, hunt, or grow crops, creating a culture of dependency on government handouts and food rations. Members of the tribe did not finally become Canadian citizens until 1961.

We walked back to the school building where we were treated to a lunch of beef stew and bannock, and had a Skype presentation from the Chief, Tony Alexis (who was away on business). We were then entertained by children demonstrating some of the traditional dances, to the sound of a drumming group. It is difficult to describe the sound of the drumming, which drives the rhythm for the wailing of the drummers and the movements of the dancers. Even though this event took place in a school gymnasium, it was a powerful performance which you have to experience to fully appreciate – and clearly plays an important role in strengthening community values.



*Drummers prepare to accompany dancers*

We gathered outside for photographs and learned the Stoney word for 'thank you', so that as we got back onto our big yellow bus to leave we could say 'Isniyes' (pronounced 'Ishneesh') to our hosts for sharing their food, their culture, and a small part of their lives with us during that day.

We left with a better understanding, and a more optimistic perspective on the lives of the people of the Alexis Nakota Nation. The children were eager to learn the Stoney language, and there was a thirst for maintaining the traditions and the culture, now seen as essential to underpin the future well-being of the Nation. While there are significant unemployment and social problems on the reservation (which they did not shy away from discussing), and significant barriers to gaining better educational opportunities, the future for young people looks much more promising than the recent past.



*IASC visitors and hosts in front of the Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation school*

# Reflections on the Edmonton conference

The conference hosted by the University of Alberta was held in a large conference centre on the edge of the downtown area of Edmonton. The centre was constructed on the side of a hill overlooking the North Saskatchewan River. Delegates entered what looked like a small nondescript build at street level and were then faced with an immediate plunge down two long and steep escalators, which descended the side of a waterfall. At conference room level there was a huge and cavernous hall, which could have held a conference three or four times as large as ours, and multiple presentation spaces. The conference rooms were all equipped with the latest technology and there was a terrace outside overlooking the river and a main road. It was all very slick in terms of technology and communication.

The key attraction of the Edmonton Conference however, was the integration of First Nations communities into the programme. From the opening ceremony to the closing event, the conference organisers had made extensive efforts to focus attention on the rights of indigenous peoples of Canada. This also reflected the reality of what was happening all round us at the time. Edmonton is a hub for the energy industry, based on the extraction of fuel from the Tar Sands 300 miles north. Much of the land is Treaty Land, which guarantees certain rights to the indigenous tribes in the area, but they are poorly equipped to stand up to the large multi-national corporations involved in the energy development.

Edmonton itself and the wider Province of Alberta also feel the effects of a local economy driven by the energy industry with its wild fluctuations depending on global oil prices. During 2015, oil prices were depressed and

the local economy was suffering from high unemployment and all the attendant issues that go along with that.

Additional problems also arise in terms of environmental impacts, not just in the tar sands area but further to the north, arising from global warming. The Canadian Arctic suffers from problems arising from climate change, which again have potentially serious implications for the indigenous peoples of the area. Some of these issues were identified and highlighted by keynote speakers but there was relatively little focus on the wider area in the panel sessions. The issues affecting both indigenous people in Canada, and the impacts of climate change were not integrated into sessions that explored similar issues happening elsewhere, which to a certain extent perhaps was a missed opportunity.



*Paskwamostos sculpture - by Joe Fafard  
Located next to the conference centre, Paskwamostos is Cree for bison*

# The future - making new roads

## *IASC 2017, Utrecht, the Netherlands*

In the immediate future we look forward to the 16th Biennial Global conference in Utrecht in July entitled: '[Practicing the commons: self-governance, cooperation, and institutional change](#)'. Having already visited Utrecht to see the location it will certainly have its own unique character, set as it is in the centre of an ancient medieval city, with its canals and narrow winding streets. The Conference Organisers at the University of Utrecht have maximised the use of their local resources and events will take place in the central church, in ancient medieval halls and even in a museum for mechanical musical instruments. The conference will also have a focus on commons issues of relevance to the Netherlands, one of the most densely populated parts of Europe, in particular associated with water management, marine resources, the role of cooperatives, and global warming.



*The Dutch idyll – pragmatic, practical, and extracting every bit of value from a limited land area - using one 'free' resource (wind) to control another (water) while well-fed cows look on in wonder*

The conference has stated one of its aims as “...to build on the recent ‘wave of collective action’ that we see occurring (in Europe) in virtually every sector of society including: energy, care, infrastructure and food”. As such it promises to shine a light on new forms of commons activity, and point the way towards new avenues for commons research and action that will prepare the ground for new forms of resource management.



*Utrecht Street Scene – interesting architecture, narrow streets, canals, and bicycles*

One innovation this year will be the development of ‘practitioner’s laboratories’. A call that went out earlier in the year received over 60 responses from a wide range of commoners practitioners to deliver special panels of events to explore commons management from their own unique perspective. Some of these will be sponsored events by organisations involved in managing specific aspects of commons resources, while others are from groups of individuals, covering topics from genetic resources and food manufacturing to water, forests, and landscape management. The

ones that get selected should provide some interesting insight into the practical aspects of managing commons on the ground.

As with any IASC Biennial conference, bringing several hundred people from all over the world to live and work closely together in a new location for a few days always generates some interesting cultural interactions. The Dutch are renowned for speaking their mind and will ask probing questions about issues other cultures deem to be very private. What they call 'openness', can appear to others to be a very blunt, direct, and even rude form of communication, providing plenty of scope for cultural misunderstanding. They can also appear to be very obstinate and stubborn, often sticking to their ideas and arguing their case strongly...until they decide they will change their mind of their own accord. They are also very tall (some say it is to ensure that they can keep their heads above water), and for the most part they are kind, friendly, tolerant, and open to new ideas – thus an ideal location to explore new forms of commons and alternative forms of governance.



*Netherlands near Utrecht – parcels of land surrounded by water – like a 'partially dried-out seabed'*

## *Into the future - IASC 2019 and beyond...*

The IASC Executive Council is currently engaged in discussion with organisations in Latin America to deliver the 2019 IASC Biennial Conference somewhere on the continent. This offers the prospect for the IASC to venture into an area where many natural resources managed in common by indigenous people are under threat from privatisation and state appropriation. The region also has a strong history of conflict, violence, and social movements in relation to resource ownership and use – difficult issues which the IASC needs to grapple with more directly.

The only IASC conference delivered in that part of the world was the highly successful event organised by Leticia Merino (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México – UNAM) in 2004 in Oaxaca City, Mexico, which explored 'The Commons in an Age of Global Transition'. It is time the IASC developed stronger links in Latin America where commons underpin livelihoods for large numbers of people, where there is a strong tradition of commons governance, and where drastic changes to large scale ecological systems such as the Amazon rainforest, have global implications for all of us. There is also recognition that it is not just natural commons that are at risk, knowledge, intellectual property, innovation, and a wide range of resources such as genetic diversity, are at risk from being taken into private control, limiting efficiency and restricting the potential for social and economic development. The proposed conference is likely to focus strongly on the role of social movements and collective action in defending and even creating commons in the 21st century. These are vital elements for commons governance, not just in Latin America but in every country, and not just necessary to manage local commons, but also to improve governance of global commons. The Latin America conference has the potential to engage commons scholars and practitioners in vital questions that affect us all – how do we ensure long-term sustainability of commons resources, and equitable distribution of the benefits?

The issues of commons management and governance are not going to disappear; if anything they will become even more relevant and more urgent as we discover or 're-discover' that many activities, resources, and processes on which we rely can be conceptualised as commons, offering alternative means of managing and organising society. Ultimately we all share one planet, and we are all impacted by changes to the socio-ecological systems upon which we depend for survival. Identifying a resource, or a process, as a commons is a first step to more effective and stable management, and IASC members are playing a role in that process, exploring issues such as the internet, biodiversity, knowledge, urban spaces, and even cities themselves as 'new commons'. But that is the easy part, much more difficult is to work out the governance arrangements, in particular, how society should assign rights to access commons, the extent to which the economic benefits should be concentrated or distributed, and how we treat customary, local, and indigenous rights to resources. The Dutch will demonstrate how cooperation and collaborative action can lead to stable environmental management, though not without cost, and the Latin American conference will explore power relationships and the role of social movements in bringing about change. Beyond that the IASC needs to build on what is learned from these conferences, and to spread that understanding far and wide.

There's still a long way to go. The IASC Biennial Conferences play a vital role in bringing together people from different cultures, with different knowledge and experience. Such events may be difficult, they are always challenging to deliver, they are problematic for many with limited resources to attend, but they play an essential role in enabling us, as a community of scholars and practitioners, to share ideas and to explore alternative ways forward. Let's hope we meet at the next conference!

