

Covid19 and the Commons

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How Our Paper Came About

The ideas in this paper first surfaced when a few of us asked the question, 'What would a Commons response to the pandemic look like?' The group discussing this question rapidly expanded out through our network of contacts in March and April of 2020. Our investigations resulted in organizing a structured collaborative investigation using Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) (Inayatullah, 1998).

We were each encouraged to follow the steps of the CLA analysis, beginning with a look at the litany of surface responses to the pandemic that related to the Commons theme. We then progressively looked more deeply to identify what dominant social narratives or myths exist that are being challenged by the societal and political contradictions arising from the pandemic. Following this, we looked at the tension points revealed during the early stages of the pandemic. Finally we explored what alternative narratives might replace the existing narratives in these potentially transformative times, and what the implementation of these new ways of thinking might look like in practice.



A large group of fifteen participants used Miro Board technology to post ideas in this ‘digging down, building up’ CLA process. Themes were identified in the postings we placed on the Miro Board. Then a smaller group took on the work of crystallising these into themes, focusing on our Australian experiences, and weaving these themes together. Once we came up with a workable version, we sent this out to the wider group of fifteen, and incorporated their suggestions into this final version [Note: This process is currently under way]. What we have come up with from this process is not intended as a comprehensive analysis of how the pandemic is likely to affect our notions and practices in relation to the Commons. We believe that, in these untested times, we need to be careful not to be too definitive about any conclusions. Instead we aim to provide some developed ideas for you to reflect on and respond to, as we build shared views of the impacts and opportunities of the pandemic on our society. We welcome any comments.

“There is a field out there beyond right and wrong, I will meet you there.

- Rumi

We are looking at times of complexity when right and wrong are not clear. We will need some sort of deeper approach, incorporating dimensions of psychology and complex systems, to understand the effects that the pandemic is having on our society. Can we evolve to a level of psychological and cultural complexity not yet seen? Our context is both global and local; the challenges are immense.

What do we mean by ‘Commons’?

This essay explores responding to the challenge of the Covid19 pandemic from the perspective of the commons. Elinor Ostrom (1990) won a Nobel prize for her work on how communities govern and protect localized commons for their own use. Commons are that which we mutually depend on for our collective survival and wellbeing. They include the shared resources which are co-produced and managed by a community according to their own rules and norms. Commons can exist in a variety of contexts (Bollier and Helfrich 2015). Open source communities, for example, produce digital commons. Residents of a city may work together to manage and tend to physical commons such as parks, or water systems or less embodied systems such as common energy production (Gorenflo 2017).

The idea of ‘common concern’ is important here. A domain of common concern invokes a community who are focused on stewarding into the future something the group mutually cares about. Because it is valued by a particular group of people, the group tends to its future – creating it, protecting it, extending it. This notion of ‘common concern’ serves to expand the scope of what a commons is, and who is a commoner. In the case of planetary life support systems, the value of this as a commons has been historically implicit, in that it did not appear valuable to a community until it was threatened. Likewise, when the ozone layer became threatened by industrial pollutants, which in turn fundamentally threatened human well-being, the ozone layer became recognised as a commons for collective governance, an ‘object of commoning’ (Buck 1998).

For an issue as fundamental as climate change, this contextualising of an implicit commons lies in multiple personal awakenings that we all share an atmosphere and safe climate with seven billion other humans (and countless species) as a commons of concern. Through the accident of circumstance, each of us has been ‘plied into’ this shared concern of the twenty-first century. In this way, the planet’s atmosphere has shifted from an implicit commons to an explicit commons. Our atmosphere has become a matter of survival for all, and suddenly people have become commoners to the extent that they see the ways in which they are entangled into this shared concern, with a concomitant responsibility for action. This in turn implies a radical democratization of planetary governance. As a human community we have a shared responsibility and right to engage in the governance of this commons (Bauwens & Ramos, 2018).

In this essay, we explore a Commons Response to the pandemic through this lens. We experience ourselves embedded in a variety of different Commons, both implicit and explicit. There is a diversity of commoning activity, and we need to appreciate the broad variety of commoning strategies arising around the world. Synergies are possible between people working in a variety of contexts where commoning work is happening. However, we need to construct a language and body of concepts that can be understood by a diversity of people, projects and organizations, so that we are able to recognise the shared nature of the work we are involved in, and can “talk to each other” in the language of commoning, which enable processes of meta-systemic co-design—the development of new commons-based synergies.

In our extended reflection on a commons response to the pandemic, we are engaged with multiple commons and commoning activity - from a public health system attempting to prevent deaths from Covid-19, to the need for economic security, and to the mutualised self help systems that have popped up across Australia and the world.

Introduction: Covid19 as the Context

This moment, living through the Covid19 pandemic, is unlike anything most of those of us alive today we have ever known. It is unknown and uncertain, frightening and exciting, challenging and strangely hopeful. When the world turns upside down, when so much is at stake, new viewpoints are suddenly available, and change is inevitable.

This moment reveals what can happen when all levels of government focus on solving a huge problem - immense resources can be redirected with the stroke of a pen. Exponential change is required to meet the exponential growth of this deadly virus, and reduce the risk of future pandemics.

The challenge and potential of this time is that interventions aimed at addressing the pandemic could also reset the current destructive trajectory of humankind. Can we leverage the dramatic economic and social changes to create a more just, beautiful, life-affirming future? What can we learn from the various whole-of-society responses to Covid19, that can help us respond to the far more impactful and long-term climate emergency and ecological collapse?

The dominant narrative at play right now is directing resources and attention in ways that do not serve life. The ecologically naive myth of infinite growth that underlies our economic paradigm means that the crisis brought on by the pandemic is not yet the opportunity it could be.

Our attempts to avert the pandemic altogether mostly came too little, too late. While the inevitability of a pandemic was understood by government agencies, precautionary measures that could have supported a rapid response with early detection at its origin, early lockdown measures, and deployment of infrastructure, medicines, equipment, training and health system preparedness were not prioritised. As a result, the Covid19 outbreak quickly reached pandemic

proportions. Measures to contain it have created a cascade of consequences globally, including predictions of huge death-tolls in poorer regions due to starvation caused by disrupted supply chains. These same regions also have greater vulnerability to climate change effects such as heatwaves and flooding. In our own country, we are already seeing an increase in suicide and mental illness due to the loneliness brought on by social distancing or family pressures, in combination with economic stress arising from enforced lockdowns.

There has been an enormous increase in wealth inequality in recent times, as global corporations massively expand their online turnover, in contrast to the many millions of small local businesses that are on the brink of economic failure. There has been a roll-back of environmental protections, along with economic stimulus towards carbon-based energy production.

As lockdowns in Australia continue, fears among sections of our population of the surveillance state grows, along with an increase in distrust of experts and governments, and accompanied by an unhealthy increase in conspiracy theories. The intensified feelings of hopelessness and being overwhelmed lead more and more people into despair.

Yet, while there are immense and unfathomable complexities at play, it is important to look at how, as a society, we have sought to address this crisis. The restrictions imposed by state and federal governments have emphasised caring for the whole of society, and particularly those most vulnerable to the virus. It has sought to communicate that individual actions can have a profound effect on the whole population, encouraging a culture of communal responsibility and support.

Those focussed on recognising and protecting the extent of what fits within the concept of Commons, as well as those working specifically on protecting our society's common interest in countering the pandemic and supporting recovery, are responding with courage and creativity. New skills are being learnt and imagination harnessed. Opportunities are emerging and some are being seized. Local communities have stepped up in numerous ways and people are saying "I can do this", sharing food and provisions, checking in on neighbours, and creating a momentum around relocalisation - for example around growing food, and supporting local businesses to remain viable.

There is the possibility that our best-case scenario in dealing with the Covid19 crisis may indeed be *'our finest hour'*.

Anxiety and Control

Fear and anxiety can lead to a desire for control, or to the belief that someone or something "out there" is in control.

In complex societies, there are many aspects of individuals' lives that they have limited or no control over. When there are significant disruptions to the systems that support a society, the anxiety that this confusion provokes can lead to a range of choices, especially when the actions that government or other agencies take to address the disruption leads to even further loss of control. An example of this is the social isolation regulations introduced in Australia to address the Covid19 pandemic.

Some choose to soothe their anxiety by blaming agents of power or suspected power. This creates a culture of victimhood and powerlessness. Others regain some sense of control (and also some actual control) by engaging in activities that fulfil certain needs, such as food growing within the family or community, localised energy supply, or lending their time and resources to localised decision-making bodies.

The psychological stressor of fear tends to lead to a desire for control in order to manage the anxiety that arises. There can be a strong need to believe that someone or something is in control. This can be positive where societal leaders take decisive actions in the interests of the communities they lead, and with the agreement of their constituents, to address the disruption. However, it can also lead some societies, out of fear or anxiety, to embrace strong, emphatic leaders, even if the evidence is that the pathways these leaders are taking is seriously flawed. Belief systems can arise that promote the idea that a nefarious agent is in control (hence the rise in conspiracy theories) rather than to accept that no one is in control, or as a way of regaining some sense of control, for example by inventing unconventional ideas based on simple explanations that don't require examination of the complexity or inter-connectivity that underlies society. This inability to be with the true complexity of life systems has been fostered by the shifts towards a passive, consumer- oriented culture that the conservative forces in our society have driven. In Australia at least, the consumer-oriented, libertarian elements of our culture have not held sway as the pandemic has taken hold, and the collaborative elements of our culture have at least worked so far to keep the spread of the virus in check, although the 'me-first' tendencies of some people have recently been revealed in the spread of Covid19 in Victoria.

Levels of pay, casualisation of work, dependence on schools and pre-schools for childcare, type of work and distances travelled, are all examples of the complexity in Australian society that individuals currently have little control over, and that lead to heightened anxiety during disruptive events such as the current pandemic. Some people soothe their anxiety by blaming agents of power or suspected power. This creates a culture of victimhood and powerlessness. An alternative path is available to those who are willing and able to learn, and who have the resources to act on these. This requires people to take a compassionate, self-aware, and psychologically sophisticated approach. Such an approach is more likely when people have skills they can rely on, and when they are enabled by governments and those around them to foster and participate in a practical, hands-on culture.

Policies and plans that would enable a creative, empowered and self or community sufficient populace would include psychological education, somatic education, cross-cultural education as well as practical education - for example, the ecological and place-based learning provided through permaculture. Many of these learning situations help to identify and draw on the range of connections that people have in their communities or beyond.

Measures that would foster a sense of appropriate and ecologically-grounded control, with a locus closer to the individual and local community, could include activities that fulfil basic needs, such as food growing within the family or community, local energy production supply, and by enabling localised decision-making bodies and processes. Underlying each of these approaches is a recognition that we are participating in, and responsible for, some type of commons - whether this is physical, social, psychological, ecological, spiritual, or a combination of these. In essence this means that, beyond the need for increased localized agency, we are talking about wide social change or reorientation. A "commons response" includes taking greater responsibility for the care of the whole of society, and that means engaging in systemic issues and structures.

The Covid19 Paradox

We seem to be more separated and yet we are more connected than ever.

“Last night I talked by phone to my family – on speakerphone, while I cooked dinner. They are in Melbourne. I am in Tasmania. My partner is loath to return to Tasmania where we have accommodation, because it would mean remaining in a room in a hotel for two weeks in quarantine. I am not inclined to return to Melbourne, because flying into a rising tide of virus doesn’t seem like the right thing to do right now.” Colin Hocking

Just about everyone has stories like this, stories of disconnection, dislocation, distance. And yet the cause of this whole dilemma lies in the underlying connections we all have with one another. We are all biological beings, subject to the biological machinery of the Covid19 virus. We are all social beings too, wanting to connect emotionally and physically, and now finding out how much we need this, when it is taken away or reduced. And it is this essential desire for social and physical connection that the virus exploits in its capacity to spread. On the flip side, one key way (maybe the best, possibly the only) of driving infections down while recovering some of our physical, social and economic health, is to re-imagine and realise our social connectivity. For the foreseeable future, this means finding new ways to maintain our emotional connectivity and support, while at the same time working together to keep ourselves physically apart. In the past we have built, or allowed others to build, our connectivity with the world, into narrow streamlined pathways, ones that deliver mobile phones, least cost goods of all types, and much more, to our doorstep. Or for the less privileged among us, streamlined connectivity delivers the less expensive food and service items we buy, or the component parts our workplaces rely on to

function. But this has been done in ways that allow us to ignore the working and living conditions of those at the other end of the global super-highways. These are some of the same pathways that the virus has exploited to expand exponentially out into the world, so that we now understand more about the nature of these connections, the hugely varied living conditions along these pathways, the differential battles that communities face in withstanding the pandemic, with differing resources, and the reliance we have had in the past on these global connections for our standard of living.

We Are Extensively Interconnected



We are more interconnected and more vulnerable, and our lives more precarious, than we would like to admit

The Covid19 Pandemic has reminded us of what a major global-level emergency looks like. It has reminded us, in great detail, of how interconnected we all are, especially now. People in ancient times, suffering other plagues, were also connected across continents, but the speed and extent of Covid19 reminds us that we have built forms of connectivity that affect just about everyone, at global scales and with lightning speed, that run right down into individual lives and through communities. We are beginning to see the extent of our interconnectedness, across our social, economic, health/wellbeing and ecological systems – each of which is now recognisable as operating at a global scale, as well as more locally. The belief that we can dissociate

ourselves, even to some extent, from the social, economic, health/wellbeing and ecological systems that surround us, or that we can dominate or control them, is being challenged.

There are forms of global connectivity that we have been struggling to properly imagine and come to terms with. These include climate change and biodiversity loss. At every level these are failures in our capacity to fully understand, or perhaps actively deny, how interconnected we are, through the atmospheric commons we all share, for example, and through the complex, interacting ecosystems of which we are a part, and on which we depend. In the broadest terms, our failure to fully know or understand our connectivity, with each other and with nature, is reflected in our cultural tendency towards individualism and dissociation from others and the systems that support us, which is sometimes expressed as the notion of having to dominate nature, or else succumb to it. And this is reflected also in our political tendency to believe that, if Someone is in charge, they will rescue us from our vulnerability and precarity.

A Regenerative Response

Regeneration is a word now commonly used. Regeneration moves beyond the notion of Sustainability. Sustainability is often used as a way of describing how we need to stop further damaging our environment and atmosphere, to find a 'balance' with nature and leave the world in a better state than we found it. Regeneration, by comparison, refers to the possibility and need to generate positive socio-ecological outcomes rather than just repair damage. It requires us to re-trace and re-connect the environmental and social threads that hold us together biologically, and to find new, fulfilling ways of living with nature, and with each other. At its essence it means putting back more than we take out, and making the whole stronger and more resilient.



Many people are now suggesting that, even as we go through the current pandemic and eventually emerge from our experiences of Covid19, there will be opportunities to take a more regenerative approach to recovering from its social and economic impacts. We need to go beyond narrow narratives that talk about jobs, growth and productivity. As we craft and construct systems that aid in the recovery, we need to acknowledge and address some of the critical underlying issues that reveal both the positive and negative dimensions of our social, economic and ecological interconnections. These include re-tracing and re-weaving the interconnecting threads between us at the local, national and international levels, including through our global pathways of trade and influence, in ways that repair, care and do no harm - and in ways that generate positive outcomes. We will do this both for our own sake (now that we realise this), and for those humans and other beings with whom we share our planet, and come to know that we are connected to, now and in the future. Regeneration will be needed in social, economic, cultural, political and ecological dimensions, as we make anew our world, and address the looming climate emergency and biodiversity crisis.

To do this, we will need a clear acknowledgement that all of our activities and the systems we construct around them – including jobs, growth, productivity, commerce, travel, our public health system and indeed our local and global economy – sit and operate within the interconnected,

ecological and social systems of our one planet. Failure to acknowledge and address these integral connections will prevent us from making the comprehensive, long-sighted and integrated responses that are needed to prevent the next pandemic, or climate crisis, or biodiversity crisis, each of which could have a far worse death rate and global impact than we are currently experiencing.

Government and Beyond

A new understanding is emerging, in Australia at least, that we may need strong State and Federal coordination to address the spread of the Covid19 pandemic, but with coordination that is based on solid evidence, and with the agreement of the majority of those affected.

At our national level in Australia, our current conservative government has a history of supporting an individualistic culture, and has traditionally governed through divisive politics. So it seems somewhat paradoxical that this same government has now re-oriented to provide widespread social programs of public health and economic support, actions that would have been unthinkable from this same government, just a few months ago. We should remember however that, at best, this government has traditionally been a climate change laggard, and at worst a denier. It has also not traditionally supported social welfare programs. The government understands, as do many, that without these temporary supports, the economy would likely collapse. The national level conservative government has a history of expressing a dominant individualistic mindset that keep people disconnected from social, economic, health/wellbeing and ecological systems, and continues to skew our understanding of the interconnectedness of these.

Another dominant assumption in our society is that someone (usually a strong, directive government) is in charge and will be able to 'fix' the problems that beset us. It has become more clear that public health is a shared commons and that, while governments should play a critical role in supporting this, stewarding the commons of public health goes far beyond just government action.

Our personal experiences of Covid19 remind us of the reality that there are forces far bigger than each of us, that can affect our safety and prosperity for better and for worse. Our societal beliefs in the state's ability to fully control events have also been shaken. At the same time, the pandemic has had the effect of reinvigorating and empowering many at the local level, as we watch the mixed reactions of our previously 'in control' conservative federal government now agreeing with the health experts.

We've seen a shift away from the Federal Government's conservative 'lifters and leaners' rhetoric, to instead allow people in diverse situations to survive, physically/health wise and economically, and to downplay judgemental attitudes about who deserves to survive and who doesn't – with some notable exceptions such as childcare workers, academics and artists.

The simple logic of the Covid19 virus makes this clear. Regardless of government action, all it takes is one person with the infection to shirk responsibility and the disease can spread exponentially. This virus enfolds everyone within a logic of common concern - commoning public health.

The idea that a 'strong government in control that will look after you' has been further shaken by the failure of some overseas governments based on 'strong personality leaders with directive, self-interested approaches' to keep their citizens safe from Covid19 (for example, Trump, Modi, Bolsonaro). Now these approaches are beginning to appear naïve, simplistic, bombastic and downright dangerous. By comparison, some other centralised governments with directive approaches, such as China, New Zealand, Vietnam and Taiwan, have been able to take advice from health experts, and act in the broad interests of their citizens.

Public health includes government but goes beyond it. If public health is to be understood as a commons, then this includes all those that have a stake, and implies shared governance.

An Eco-Family of Beings



Our globally shared experiences of Covid19 might lead to a shared story about us being much more connected than we have been previously aware, at a range of scales: local, national, global. Metaphors and stories that describe this include the notion that we are all 'Global Citizens', that we all exist together, intimately interconnected, often in ways we have not been

conscious of, on one blue planet. This idea is epitomized by the Earthrise image from space, captured by the astronauts on the Apollo 8 mission in 1968, as their spaceship emerged from the dark side of the moon, to reveal the entire 'blue marble' of earth, on which have existed all people, for all of human history. Other metaphors and stories that describe the extent of our interconnections, drawn from biology and ecology, are 'that we are linked like the Mycelia underground in a forest connecting the trees together, through which they communicate', that we are 'all part of One Nurturing & Connected Eco- Family of Beings' and that whatever happens to some of us affects all of us, even though we exist in political and economic systems that try to dissociate and 'externalise' many of our interconnections.

A Collaborative, Contributive, Inventive and Informed Culture

Recognising that we are an inter-related part of a great weaving of interconnections requires us to honour our vulnerability and lack of control and be more humble. We now face large long-term societal changes that will affect us in ways that we have less control over than what we had previously thought, even a few months ago. Developing resilience in the face of these changes and challenges requires us to widen our notion of interdependence, and to act in ways that recognise and strengthen our inter-connectivity with one another, and with the wider systems that we are a part of. That is, we need to become more collaborative, contributive and informed, beyond our immediate horizon of concerns. We need to be careful not to come up with, or fall for, quick solutions. We are in circumstances that we have not been in before, and the ways forward may be quite different to how we have addressed problems in the past. This means being open to new ways of imagining, thinking and acting. Instead of asking 'what can I get out of this' we might ask 'how can I be of service' to each other and the systems that support us. This includes becoming collaboratively more innovative, inventive and creative – ways of behaving that require us to act with honesty and integrity. Some of these ideas, cultures and ways of behaving, this knowledge, already exist in indigenous cultures. Previously largely ignored, these perspectives may now become more valuable to us all.

Generating a New Sense of Place

In Australia and around the world our indigenous elders understood and affirmed our connection with place, which we are now relearning. We need to find and generate a new sense of place and community through initiatives that are socially, economically and environmentally interconnected, and that recognise the multiple types of commons that we share and are part of. This requires us to have policies for equity, that value culture and creativity, that protect us from corruption, that makes governance more collaborative, and that bring decision-making closer to the daily experiences of those that are affected by these decisions. These new policies need to be based in evidence, they need to appropriately and comprehensively address the climate and biodiversity emergencies we face, in ways that optimize the essence of local places, and bring together the social, environmental and economic dimensions of each place.



How we will know if we are being successful?

The extent of our success in creating a more interconnected world, one in which we acknowledge our vulnerability, as well as our creativity and inventiveness, will become evident when:

- the natural systems we depend on are being repaired, and becoming more healthy
- our social and health systems are improving, to provide greater well-being for all - this includes improvements in equity and justice
- more people are actively involved in democratic processes, from local to national and global levels
- innovation, invention and creativity are recognised and valued, both via increased collaboration and by financial and social support, including at the local level – enabling improvements in ways that have been conventionally difficult to measure

From Precarity to Universal Care

Many people in Australian society now feel that their lives are becoming more precarious and uncertain - this is what we mean by 'precarity'. The casualisation of whole sectors of our workforce, along with sub-contracting through hire companies that erode pay and conditions of work, and outsourcing through the gig economy, are examples of government policies that have contributed to this sense of precarity for many. The extended droughts and extreme bushfires resulting from shifts in climate are adding to a sense of precarity for many. While economic, social and environmental precarity had been a trend for decades, the Covid-19 pandemic has dramatically accelerated this. Unemployment is about to reach unprecedented levels. Many business owners in retail, tourism and services have lost their life savings and many are likely to lose their businesses entirely.

We are also experiencing new socioeconomic tiers. There is an increasing divide between the wealthy, privileged and those with secure institutional jobs, and the large group of people who have been thrown out of work altogether or who are part of the perpetually unemployed or chronically under-employed, including those who work in the gig economy.

In Australia, the social and economic framework that underpins this has been very mixed. Australia has a universal health care system, that while underfunded, is responsive to citizen needs on an equal basis. Economically however, Australia tends more towards being a neoliberal economy, which is tilted toward the interests of large business owners rather than workers. Unemployment support through Centrelink exists, however it is widely understood that it is punitive - those trying to access the support have been essentially punished through Labyrinthian bureaucracy. In normal times, this approach has been acceptable to the majority, as it's effects have been hidden from the experience of the majority. However the pandemic has fundamentally ruptured this normality, and the viability of such a system is in question. For example, it is clear that the recent outbreak of Covid19 in Victoria has been exacerbated, perhaps even led, by the spread of infection through the casualised workforce and their families and friends, in the aged care sector, in meat works, and in the security services that have been guarding people from overseas in hotel quarantine. These are people who have multiple places of work, have not had adequate training, and who are in fear of losing the most basic income if they do not turn up to work.

Underpinning this tiered and punitive system is a worldview that sees economic precarity as an individual failure, that he or she was lazy, or didn't save properly, or didn't invest. Wealth is often subtly seen as a demonstration of someone's worth. In this narrative, there is little acknowledgement of the different circumstances that people may experience through no fault of their own. For example, consider a single mum trying to raise four kids, with little capacity for extra work. Or a person who has come from a family with serious drug problems. Or someone who has suffered from a mental illness. Or simply someone who has decided to live with different values.

Time for a Change



We *could* choose to see society as an extended family. We depend on each other in intricate and extensive ways. In a family everyone should be taken care of. We need equity and respect for all. In a world of structural forces and shocks, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, many beyond our control, we need to make sure no one / no group is left behind. Everyone is equally deserving, because we could have been born into any circumstance. This is a “cosmic principle” in our existence. We need to nurture a culture and understanding that any one of us could have been born into some difficult situation. The people that we engage with day in and day out could be us in any other circumstance, or another life.

We also need social policies and strategies that reflect this ethos. Universal basic income and assets could be a way to reduce precarity. We could also focus on eliminating corporate “tax bludgers” rather than “dole bludgers” (for example, the mineral and fossil fuel companies that get tax subsidies and special treatment). We also need to remove or reduce lobby interests from Canberra that produce the perverse outcomes of one group’s interests being favoured over another, which generates our inequality. We need to bring homelessness and physical precarity to as low to zero as possible. And we need to build a fully sharing economy, as a way for citizens to provide goods, services and mutual aid systems for each other, in ways that drive social resilience.

This crisis is teaching us that we need to actively reduce precarity across multiple groups and communities. We need a multiplicity of safety and resilience systems, that not only "catch" people in multiple ways, but support them to live meaningful lives with others - even as we deal with multiple crises, a pandemic, a climate emergency, etc.

The Shift Toward Cosmo-localism

The Covid Lockdown has shown how vulnerable we are to external shocks. An extended lockdown has birthed a new pattern of hyper-local behaviours around shopping, eating, entertaining; but we have also been pushed into the interwebs of zoom and other internet communications technologies, locally, regionally and globally. It could be said we have birthed a world where the local becomes imperative to human sustenance and survival, but also where our context is planetary.

When we consider our new sense of place, it is clear that we are neither from "here nor there". The virus is a Global virus. It started in China but has spread everywhere. It must be managed via our deep interconnections, nation between nation, state between state, community between community.

Interconnection takes on new meaning when the local and planetary are weaved together in a new tapestry. For years there has been growing awareness of where we get our food, how we grow our food, with a new emphasis on buying locally made products, eating locally, as well as supporting local tourism. During the lockdown the hyperlocal has taken on new meaning. Indeed in some regions (Melbourne) people have been legally restricted to 5 km from home. Whether we like it or not, we are getting to know our local places and regions like never before. As more people work from home, and are restricted in their movements in ways that keep them closer to home for extended periods, it is possible that we will see a boom in the return of local businesses, mainstreets and economies.

At the same time this new localism stands in contrast to a new planetary context. A virus in Wuhan China jumped from a bat or other creature to an intermediary species and human, which then quickly spread around the world in our era of globalised travel and trade. At the same time, we have become a global learning laboratory. The lessons from one country pass to others quickly, whether as folly or wisdom.



The idea of Cosmolocalism describes the intimate twinning of the local and planetary. At the most fundamental level it asserts that we are all planetary beings, brothers and sisters, and by sharing our local knowledge and experiences, we empower and support each other. This is called the planetary mutualization of knowledge. The idea here is that, in an era of climate change, and a myriad of other challenges, we cannot afford to keep knowledge in siloes. By accelerating societal learning and cultural evolution, we can address our challenges faster than the challenges can overwhelm us. At a more functional level, it is said that “what is light is global, what is heavy is local”. This means that, even while we reduce travel and transport (thereby reducing carbon emissions), a global sharing of knowledge can be done that supports localised resilience, regeneration and sustainability.

Placemaking and the Commons

How can we reconnect with and reclaim our Commons?

At a physical level, fear of going out into public spaces during the time of Covid-19 creates significant challenges and opportunities for the commons. Public space is political, as we have seen with the Climate and Black Lives Matter rallies in this Covid-19 period. The reclaiming of our streets for people and not cars will be a significant revolution, closing down parts of streets for our local businesses to use to meet, sit down and eat, celebrate, and breathe. We can transform our towns and cities, as well as our local streets and neighbourhoods, in ways that grow food, create playgrounds, establish parks, civic labs, co-productions centres, sharing libraries, the possibilities are endless. Can Covid-19 see a New Local emerge, with a deeper

care and understanding of our local places and environments, people, and fellow species. Covid-19 has brought us back to the primordial experience of Place. It is both fundamental to human experience, as we are creatures of the Earth, as well as returning us to Ostrom's primary commons. Place is at once how we belong to our local community and how we belong to Planet Earth in the 21st century. We affirm the importance of understanding the places we live and work, our places, and how they need to be cared for by all citizens. Citizen-led placemaking, at many scales, has the potential to revolutionize our world.

Enlightened developers can help lead the way in partnering with citizens to create more regenerative developments, in which there is a gifting of public space back to the community. Activating and making the whole stronger may well be seen as a future direction for development, as a way of getting more community buy-in and approval, and a way of creating places that are walkable and liveable, and with an authentic sense of place that people love.

The Commons are in Our Hands



When we realise that we are implicated in commons that we mutually depend on for our survival and wellbeing, we are moved to actively identify, generate and protect commons. Therefore, the very idea of the commons signifies a radical democratization of our world. We can no longer be bystanders in the play of life. Much of what constitutes our power and governance systems has tended to be top down and disempowering, and substantial aspects of this have failed us. Our sense of power is often substituted by being a consumer, without participating in real local

democratic life. We come ALIVE when we have ownership and a say in something that matters to us, especially if it affects our everyday life. There is now a strong yearning for a new story of reconnection and participation in something that has deep meaning and a larger purpose that connects the local to a greater planetary good. New governance models are now emerging from deliberative democracy, citizen juries, open democracy, asset-based community development, participatory budgeting, Town Teams and many more places. When these powerful processes are used they give active hope to community members that positive actions will happen, because they themselves own the actions and, most of the time, they have a say in the delivery.

How we facilitate and hold space for the birthing of this new story will be critical.

The power of enlightened leadership, including working within and as part of groups, is vital to facilitating the best possible outcomes. Community leaders and facilitators will need to learn or enhance the use of these soft skills to create more inclusive, open and transparent processes that everyone has ownership of, and responsibility for. We may think that the more vulnerable groups in our communities need to be given agency and power, to empower themselves in this journey, but these capabilities are often already there in our communities. The task for us is to find the creative breakthrough gems that can spark individual and collective healing and transformation.

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