

Report on research project - how is the Gabriola Commons participating in an alternative food system?

1st report to the Gabriola Commons - 26 August 2011

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Introduction

In doing this research project, I've realized that it, for me, is part of an ethical commitment that has been clarified, and with which I have been more actively engaged in recent years, through my work with community around issues of food justice. My academic work has provided some focus so that I might dive more deeply into the theoretical questions that thread through my activism (while I also, at times, point a critical eye back to the institution of the academy). But commitments are as much (perhaps more) about process, action, and responsiveness, as they are about the 'thing' that we commit ourselves to. My ethical commitment to a sustainable, regenerative/nurturing, and equitable *way of life* is one shared, I propose, by others at the Gabriola Commons. How we go about enacting that commitment is ongoing; it is important to reflect on our processes and engage them as consciously as possible. Here is my (current) contribution to those efforts.

This report is a follow-up document to the presentation and discussion from July 13th, 2011. It outlines what I have found from my research so far, including some new ideas and questions that arose during the discussion. This report is not meant to be definitive, but is part of our ongoing conversations about food systems and the Gabriola Commons (GC). My dissertation will expand on some of what is contained in this report, as well as include other material. My chapter outline is available for those interested; the full dissertation will also be available once it is defended and finalized at the end of this year. Finally, I will arrange another discussion about this research project early in the new year, so we can explore how this research project might continue to contribute to our conversations and projects at the Gabriola Commons.

I start from an assumption that the Gabriola Commons (and the people who make it thus) *is* participating in the creation of an alternative food system. I conceptualize food systemically; while food plays many roles in our lives (and even more as we think about the multitude of cultures in the world), how we live our lives also effects the ways in which food is produced, accessed, distributed, prepared, stored, consumed, and composted (or, depending on the system, wasted). So in trying to understand how an alternative food system might take hold, we need to see how our collective actions shape its unfolding. I describe the Gabriola Commons as a node in the system - it cannot *be* the system alone, but it is certainly part of it.

Here are the three general questions that frame my research:

- what about the current food system are we (globally) responding to;
- what kind of alternative food system are we (globally) trying to create; and
- how does the Gabriola Commons participate in such an alternative?

Here are the three general, and overlapping, questions that I address in relation to the Gabriola Commons specifically:

- what is the Gabriola Commons project (i.e., what are our efforts going into);
- how is communication practiced and how are decisions made (i.e., how do things get done);
- how is the circulation of our common and collective resources facilitated (and what is the role of money)?

The research

Before addressing the questions above, I will say something about the research project of which this report is part. The proposal for this project came out of a desire to integrate my passion for food justice with a commitment to complete my PhD in Sociology. I did not want to fulfill the minimum requirements for the PhD program, but wanted to explore how, in completing the program, I could contribute to food justice (previously, my energy was divided between these efforts). As such, I was inspired by approaches to Action Research, where the main reason for doing the research is to contribute to the group, organization, or community that is the subject of research - it is *for them*, or in this case, *for us*. This, of course, is more complex than so few words can express, and begs many questions (including, for example, the question of 'authority' of the final dissertation, which, in itself, is for my own sake and, hopefully, a broader research/activist community).

In attempting to engage an action research approach, I am using various methods to help me understand the Gabriola Commons in as much depth and breadth as I can. I try to use methods that employ collective processes of meaning-making and understanding; again, this is an ongoing process, with this research project being only one 'moment' among many others. So far, I have participated in 20 audio-recorded conversations with individuals involved with the Gabriola Commons and 7 audio-recorded team-based group discussion. I have been a participant-observer for over a year, and continue to be. I'm an active member of both the Communications and the Farm Management Teams, and I attend the Commons Coordinating Council (CCC) most months. I am also giving two open and free presentations on the research, followed by group discussions and written reports (the second one will be after my dissertation is defended). I see the reports as (potentially) living documents, which can be used as tools for revisiting some probing questions. The relevance and usefulness of such a 'living document' may also be reviewed, updated and changed through time. Whether these reports do become living documents for the GC, and the way they are 'stewarded', is up to the Gabriola Commons, and not a formal aspect of this research project.

While the academic framework provides some built-in transparency and accountability for how I, as a researcher, conduct myself in relation to the GC (by, for example, going through an ethics review process¹), a major part of my own learning is the embodied

¹ My approved ethics application is available for reading. Contact ruggle1@uwindsor.ca.

knowledge that I accomplish with others, in process. This kind of knowledge is both emergent and participatory, and relates to both physical work and discursive work. One of the most challenging aspects of this research project, for me, has been navigating the relationship between being a participant and being a researcher. On one hand, being a participant helps me expand my embodied knowledge; on the other hand, as a researcher, my responsibility is to explore and illuminate what we take for granted, to aid in unlearning some of our destructive habits and clearing the path (a little) for new, more creative and nurturing, ones. As a participant, I am actively building and maintaining relationships with others (through working, in various ways, with them). These relationships are built on a recognition of and respect for concrete others, with their own unique histories, dispositions, endowments, needs and limitations. As a researcher, I have found that my work is more removed from those distinct relationships; here, I am looking for patterns, tensions and contradictions, a shared sense of justice and visions of the good, and capacities to collectively engage in activity to pursue those visions². In a sense, there is also a parallel distinction between storytelling and critical analysis. However, these two aspects of life are not always in opposition (as is sometimes suggested in academic literature), but often work together to provide the foundation for deeper and more profound understanding of how our concrete and specific circumstances thread together to create a complex and emerging tapestry.

What about the current food system are we (globally) responding to?

In my research proposal, I suggest that we can better understand the current food system by framing it in a food regime analysis, developed by Philip McMichael and Harriet Friedmann (1989, 2009). Their approach illuminates the central role that agricultural development has played in the historical and spatial unfolding of a global capitalist economy. They identify two, and a possible third, regime.

In the first regime (1870-1930s), an **imperial, expansionist** agenda – of Britain, in particular – led to agricultural sectors within the emerging settler states (notably USA, Canada, and Australia), which combined national agricultural and industrial sectors in their development models. This bore large-scale and centrally managed agricultural practices whose products would return to Britain in order to feed its rising industrial workforce. **Monocultural and industrial-style agriculture** meant increases in a small number of specific crops (such as grains and livestock), as well as a **depletion of existing, indigenous food systems and ecological resources**. This process continues in various countries and regions around the globe, though under different conditions.

In the second regime (1950s-70s), a glut of agricultural products in the United States was re-routed to postcolonial states both as a means of **securing strategic alliances during the cold war** and to export the model of industrial agriculture to the Third World. These states

² The descriptions of ‘concrete other’ and ‘generalized other’ are taken from Seyla Benhabib, 1992, p.10.

internalised the model of national agro-industrialisation, adopting Green Revolution technologies, and instituting land reform to dampen peasant unrest and extend market relations into the countryside. Meanwhile, **agribusiness elaborated transnational linkages** between national farm sectors, which were subdivided into a series of specialised agricultures linked by **global supply chains** (e.g., the transnational animal protein complex linking grain/carbohydrate, soy/protein, and lot-feeding). (McMichael 2009: 141)

This regime set the conditions for a possible third food regime, where “the organizing principle of the world economy [shifts] from state to capital” (McMichael 2009), resulting in **international** (or perhaps more accurately described as supra-national) **regulatory regimes**, such as the WTO and NAFTA, which bolster capital accumulation to the detriment of human dignity and ecological vitality.

This regime change can also be viewed as a shift from a ‘development project’ to a ‘globalisation project’ marked by the **privatisation of agricultural research**. The rhetorical justifications for corporate agricultural practices, such as monoculture crops and biotechnology – and a global order that favours economic liberalization and privileges corporate rights – often refer to ‘food security’ and the need to ‘feed the world’. However, it is clear that this third food regime has led to more landless peasants and farmers, suppressed human and labour rights, the erasure of localized food knowledge and the imposition of culturally inappropriate and nutritionally inadequate food sources, and ecological destruction and toxification. Here we find contradictions of a ‘corporate food regime’: crises in ecological and human survival (both intimately linked) have given rise to global – and localized – movements calling for transformations of the global food system so that agricultural practices prioritize biodiversity, ecological sustainability, and human dignity.

This analysis tells us that we are entangled with a food system that is built on global expansion, national development, and corporate interests. Its methods reflect a long history of industrial production - large-scale, specialized (e.g., monocropping), wasteful (externalizing costs), and dependent on non-renewal forms of energy. It is bolstered by norms and regulations that favour individualization, private property rights, concentrated power and hierarchical decision-making. Far from feeding the world and providing food security, we now have ‘oil wars’ (and wars of other kinds), food shortages, ‘calorie deficits’, toxic soil, water and air, and a sense of impending crisis. And we are quickly losing those resources (materials, energy, knowledge) that might help us shift from a broken and wasted system to an alternative system, a healthy ecology, if you will.

What kind of alternative food system are we (globally) trying to create?

Changing the world is no small feat, but more and more people are waking up to the consequences of an industrial, profit-driven food system and responding in various ways. Many creative and localized approaches have been developed, fueled by the personalities, histories, and politics of places, networks and movements. Many of these

efforts integrate local food and community mobilization³ in an attempt to reconnect us to each other and the land through food justice.

Further, recognizing the links between food and community makes the 'production' cycles more visible, and we can start to see how every part of life has a place. This holistic vision shows us that food plays a central role in the relationship between the natural environment and society. How we feed ourselves - locally, regionally, and in the global context - impacts the earth (its soil, air, water, and its ecological operations) in particular ways. It also influences the capacities of other people and communities, who depend on the earth as we do, to respond to crisis and shape localized food cycles. In trying to create an alternative food system, we are also trying to find new ways of living on this earth - sustainably, regeneratively, and equitably.

These terms deserve some attention. A **sustainable** system is resilient; it can respond to interruptions without being depleted or destroyed. This does not mean that a sustainable system is static; change is inevitable, so a system is more sustainable if it is responsive to change. A tendency towards diversity, abundance, repeating and 'stacking' functions, and short, closed energy cycles helps make systems sustainable. An abundant and diverse store of resources means that the needs of the system can be met in multiple ways (if one resource is interrupted, by an invasive species for instance, then the needs previously met by that resource can be met in some other way if diversity and abundance are present). Likewise, sustainability is increased when each resource meets multiple needs (or plays multiple functions in the system). For example, a tree provides shade, habitat, food, is a windbreak, and prevents soil erosion. This challenges the benefits of specialization. As well, a sustainable system is cyclical; closing cycles means re-cycling everything through the system, thus eliminating waste (which is otherwise translated into externalized costs).

A **regenerative** system nurtures its elements (including humans). Such a system is inclusive, collaborative, and creative. Where an industrial food system degrades itself, an alternative system (that is sustainable) actually works to mend the degradation sown. It does not merely generate new stuff, but re-generates the resources required for sustainability, including skills in reusing and recycling. For humans, who are an intensely creative species, we must create new ways of living that operate within natural limits; but natural limits that, if respected, work with abundance and diversity. To do this holistically, all areas of life need to be addressed: land tenure and governance, land and nature stewardship, building, tools and technology, education and culture, health and spiritual well-being, and economics⁴.

An **equitable** system works with horizontal decision-making, and shared power, resources, and responsibility. Many of our resources are common - though more and more of them are being privatized - and the tools and processes (including policies) we

³ One inspiring example is Earthworks Urban Farm in Detroit. See <http://www.cskdetroit.org/EWG/>.

⁴ This list is taken from permaculture literature. See <http://permacultureprinciples.com/index.php>.

use to create and circulate those resources should be designed for flexibility, simplicity, transparency, translatability, and accountability. These characteristics make a system more accessible and its resources easier to share. An equitable system works to counter oppression and exploitation; power becomes conscious, responsible, collective and dispersed. As with the principles of direct democracy, those affected by the outcomes of a decision are involved in making it. At the same time, through the process of collective, horizontal decision-making, we learn that we cannot impose our personal interests and opinions on others, but must 'think outside our boxes' - both personally and collectively. We may be 'right', but that cannot be discovered through insistence or coercion, but only through reasoned discussion engaged in good faith. The process must always be open - a decision is, in a sense, always provisional, and new insights and circumstances may (often do) change its relevance.

How does the Gabriola Commons participate in such an alternative?

It is obviously much easier to describe an ideal food system than it is to create such a system in actuality (or at least create the conditions for its unfolding). People all over the world are developing local strategies for an alternative food system, central to more sustainable, regenerative, and equitable ways of living. Every effort adds to our capacities for shifting our patterns, policies, practices, and relations. At the same time, as we have witnessed (and some of us have experienced), such endeavors to make major social change are vulnerable to default to the status quo. Sometimes we default to patterns of behaviour - both personally and collectively - that support destructive and hierarchical power; sometimes the pressure comes from 'outside', from regulatory bodies and corporate interests. 'Success' is variable and never fully achieved; attending to the intricacies of how we operate - the questions we use to frame our discussions and decisions, the processes we engage as we proceed, the relations we foster with others, the ways we struggle with contradiction and tension, etcetera - will bring to light some of what we take for granted and help us work consciously towards a qualitatively different world.

The characteristics of an alternative food system, outlined in the previous section, are demonstrated in many ways at the Gabriola Commons. This can be seen in the principles that guide action: public trust, ecological and social sustainability, local democracy, and community service. An overall commitment to contribute to a sustainable, regenerative/nurturing, and equitable way of life is clear, but how is such a commitment practiced, how does it unfold, and what challenges arise? Through my research, three general and overlapping themes have appeared prominent. First, I hear people ask, and often wonder myself, what is the Gabriola Commons project (in other words, what are our efforts going into)? Second, there seems to be a lack of clarity for some about how communication is practiced and how decisions get made (and how things get done). Third, there appears to be some tension around the role of money, which I discuss within the context of the circulation of common and collective resources more generally. My comments on these questions are provisional, and meant to report back on what I have found so far, as well as to inspire further discussion. This report is

only one piece of an ongoing (and collective) cycle of inquiry - of action and reflection and then adjustment based on knowledge gained through experience.

1. what is the Gabriola Commons project?

The Gabriola Commons operates in a way unique from many other land-based commons. In situations where the natural resource (e.g., land, forest, waterway) is managed in common by several people, the relationship between those people and that resource is usually quite direct, meeting a specific need. People who steward a common resource do so in order to glean some benefit from it (though done to be sustained and maybe even enhanced - not depleted - for use by others). For instance, people who steward a forest in common are making decisions together about how to manage the forest so that they can harvest wood (and other resources, perhaps) for their own use without preventing others (including future generations) from doing the same, and without damaging the forest's integrity and habitat capacity.

While the GC is certainly being stewarded in a way that does not deplete it but enhances it for 'community benefit', it is not clear how the relationship between the Gabriola Commons and the 'community' is mutual. This may be partly because, while the 'community' is somewhat contained on a relatively small island, it is still variously involved (sometime not involved at all) in the work of stewarding the GC. While some aspects of the GC meet some needs for some people - and it clearly cannot meet all the needs of all the people in the community - the **mutuality** in the relationship between the GC and the community 'it serves', and/or the people in the community who 'serve' it, is not clearly articulated.

Would it be appropriate to identify the Gabriola Commons as a **knowledge commons**, as a **site for experimentation, learning and transformation**? If we understand 'knowledge' as diverse, including embodied and codified, passive and active, fluid, situated and partial, then stewarding a knowledge commons (which is also, importantly, land-based) remains quite open and flexible, but could focus energies into drawing out learning potentials; the learning experience itself would be the connection between the GC and the 'community' (the more participation, the more 'mutual' the relationship would become). The aim would be exploration, experimentation and transformation rather than prescribing the way forward. Such a project plays an important role in meeting our needs for qualitatively new ways of living on this earth.

From the beginning, the GC has engaged experimentally with ways of self-organizing, developing an organizational structure that is open and horizontal, and breaking new regulatory ground (e.g., the addition of a 'community commons' to the Islands Trust bylaw). Approaches to land stewardship, including methods for growing food and protecting natural areas as well as the interface between the two, unfold in response to new ideas and interests. Processes of building design and implementation are collective and innovative, influenced by ecological principles. There are diverse ways in which we 'use' the GC to attend to our health and well-being, contributing to the health of the GC in the process. Learning potential rests in almost every aspect of the GC, from how we

grow, store, and consume our food to how we do so collectively and in perpetuity. Examples include, but are not limited to: the potato co-op, grain growing, seed collecting (esp. various kinds of grains and beans), the orchard, workshops, group discussions, covenant writing, team and Council structure. Further, several projects that are in the planning and building phase (two being the sustainability centre and the community kitchen) will be incredible resources for knowledge sharing. As many people have said during conversations, 'we are learning as we go'.

A learner's perspective is important here. It turns our minds and bodies from routine, taken-for-granted knowledge and skills (things for which we feel a certain degree of expertise or authority and thus often do in routine ways) to seeing and feeling how things could be, and are, done differently. While we want to learn from people who are competent (and we, ourselves, want to feel competent), there is also a danger of falling into the same patterns and missing the benefit of experimentation and a potentially new approach. There is also the possibility that, as a collective, we would fall into knowledge 'classes', where some are the teachers and some are the learners. An approach to learning that is collective and horizontal is, ideally, more relevant to the concerns of more people. In order to avoid falling into knowledge 'ruts', we need to continually revisit what we have concluded in the past: the questions we ask ourselves, the learning/teaching practices we engage, and the relevance and appropriateness of our 'findings' for what we value (and also revisiting, perhaps clarifying, what it is we value). In these instances, disagreement is valued for what it shows us we do not already know (rather than being fodder for competition).

Sharing is an important aspect of knowledge development. If we are a site for experimentation, learning and transformation, then sharing our perspectives, experiences, and 'findings' happens both here, at the GC, while we do the things we do, and beyond the GC about what we've found together. This illuminates a distinction between doing something in order to expedite it (or task-oriented action) and doing it in order to expand the experience and knowledge of more people. Our pace is at question here. If we are doing something for the sake of it being done, we'll find the most efficient, expeditious procedure; if we want to tap into the learning potential of the things we do here, then our pace will relax (and we may even become more comfortable with the messiness and changability of our processes). It is clear that we're consciously doing the latter with many things at the GC (such as the covenant writing - one example among many). However, this tension - between action that is oriented to tasks and procedures and action that is oriented to learning and sharing - is present in almost everything. It is unlikely to ever be resolved, especially since, even with the latter approach, many things always need to get done. Our focus and purpose will shape the balance we strike between these two aspects of our actions, and the pace we take.

2. how is communication practiced and how are decisions made?

Communication is key to learning and sharing, as well as to any kind of collective action. For the Gabriola Commons, communication is practiced at five scales (at least):

through self reflection and boundary management, within interpersonal networks, within and between teams, at Coordinating Council, and with other organizations and institutions. Decisions are made at each of these scales of communication, and in order for local, direct democracy to be practiced (which will also tap into learning potential), communication needs to be as transparent as possible. But this is complicated. We tend to set up procedures and policies that should work to maximize transparency (or other outcomes we're aiming for), but are also conscious of how too much structure can impinge on other values, such as openness and flexibility. We want decisions, as much as possible, to be made from the ground up, but our commitments and lines of communication go in all sorts of directions. We're involved in this project (of building a more sustainable and equitable world) with many others, building various kinds of alliances and navigating all sorts of tensions and contradictions. In our efforts to avoid top down authority, we sometimes lose sight of how power can still become concentrated. Perhaps this is unavoidable; but our commitment to local, direct democracy and shared power and responsibility calls for some reflection on these issues.

We all have personal lives aside from the GC, and limitations on what kinds of commitments we can make. Some of us are able to committ more time, energy and/or other resources to the GC, getting involved in several ways. The work is inspiring and fulfilling for us personally, and so our involvement deepens and expands. Some of us have less time and energy to give to the GC; other life commitments are at the top of our priority list. Sometimes the work of collective participation becomes more draining than fulfilling, and limits are placed on involvement in order to preserve our energy (and sanity). These are, for some, fluctuating states, and participation with the GC correspondingly comes and goes and comes again (hopefully). How, and how much, we participate are **personal decisions**, influenced by practicalities, values and emotions; at the same time, our personal decisions effect the whole project and everyone else who is also participating in various ways and degrees (as well as those who are yet to participate). We are learning simultaneously to be responsible to ourselves and to others, and to the GC as our common project; striking this balance (or connection) is often difficult.

A lot of informal knowledge sharing and collective action happens through our **interpersonal networks**, which reshape and permeate the boundaries of the GC, tying it into the world beyond its 26 acres. Both on the Gabriola Commons and in other places, we relate interpersonally with others, having conversations before and after meetings, while we weed and water our gardens, when we encounter a friend in the village. These conversations often have enormous substance, inspiring new ideas and collective projects. We have varying degrees of intimacy with and loyalty to others in our interpersonal networks; we may or may not feel comfortable expanding the boundaries of relationships to include others. At the same time, we can enrich our experiences and better share our knowledge and resources by making our networks more dense. So how do we manage the boundaries of our interpersonal relationships (which are more or less flexible and permeable depending on who we are interacting with) in such a way that the informal networks that are composed of all these linkages,

and have significant influence on our more formal decision-making processes, visible and welcoming? How do we respect some people's desire for confidentiality while also encouraging more direct communication between each of us as we work together?

Gabriola Commons' **teams** are one place where the informal conversations that happen within our interpersonal networks get heard more broadly. In a sense, they get formalize, and change in the process. The recent process of reviewing and clarifying team mandates helps to differentiate between the teams, what each is responsible for and has the 'authority' to make decisions about. Defining the boundaries between teams can facilitate more coordinated action and better communication between teams (as is necessary for cross-team work). This can go too far though, when teams become protective of their authority, and selective about what they communicate with others. The resistance to being 'stymied' by bureaucratic processes is healthy when appropriate. To what degree has the GC become bureaucratic? Is it helpful, or does it stymie the 'progress' of teamwork? Are there times when, at a team level, we lose sight of our shared values and visions, which, by virtue of what they are, slow down our 'progress'? When does the interdependence between teams constrain the independence of a team?

In the other direction, when does the integrity of a team outweigh the concerns of individuals? Where is disagreement heard and worked through? This last question is posed with the following thought in mind: individually, we may have a concern about something but not know the most appropriate place or way to voice it (so that it will be heard and respectfully addressed); this dis-ease then often turns into indirect communication (sometimes called '3rd party talk' or 'gossip') within our interpersonal networks, creating mis-communication and bad feeling. This calls for both clarification of the collective processes for addressing disagreements of various kinds, and mutual support to speak and listen (giving each other the benefit of the doubt that we are all engaging in good faith, even when we bumble and fumble) - as was expressed during a discussion at Visions and Voices, being responsive rather than reactive. This takes practice.

Coordinating Council is the place where teams share what they are up to, as well as address Commons-wide issues that arise. It may also be the place where some concerns can be heard. However, two hours a month is not much time to cover all these aspects. The format and process of Council has evolved significantly in the 16 months that I've attended, and it continues to evolve. At times, there is frustration (stated and demonstrated by various people) that some issues are dropped too quickly and others seem to take a lot of Council time. Decisions about what gets taken up and the process we engage for working through them often seem to be made implicitly without much discussion. The desire to 'move through' the agenda can influence such decisions; this can be a point at which disagreement is silenced for the sake of timeliness. If we set Council time and format too rigidly, there is a danger that it will become routine (almost obligatory) and we will stop really hearing each other. How do the facilitators balance all the needs that Council is supposed to meet? The last Council meeting (August 2nd) was one of the most relaxed I've attended, which indicated to me

that we're moving the right direction of using the time to converse with each other instead of just 'moving through' items. Continuing to allow for change in what happens at Council might serve our needs more aptly than trying to establish regularity. I've heard differing opinions about how Council should be started (for instance, whether or not there should be a 'check-in round'). One idea, again that came up at Visions and Voices, is to rotate the decision for how we begin (which could be as diverse as our participants are); each participant can decide or pass. A time limit could be put on this starting exercise, so as to make sure that other aspects of Council can be covered.

The Gabriola Commons exists within **an array of organizations and institutions**, on Gabriola Island, regionally, nationally, and globally. Multiple policies, regulations, and strategies must be navigated by the GC. These include Islands Trust policies (for instance, those related to stewardship of resources), regulations of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), and strategies that, while working within existing legal systems, attempt to transgress them, such as de-privatizing resources (and returning them to the 'commons'). At times, there may be tensions between the commitments and priorities of the GC and existing policies and regulations. Challenging the status quo of markets and governmental management of our community practices is part of our commitment, but the stakes are high. What does it look like for us to challenge policies and regulations that are clearly not in our best interests? As a collective project that is attempting to forge new paths, this is a political endeavour (on many levels). The Board of Trustees is responsible for our legal and fiscal status. If the health of that status is always our first priority, is our ability to challenge the status quo limited? One example is the ban on the use of the term 'potluck'. This may seem insignificant, but the language we use (and the control of it) illuminates histories, cultural practices, and political and economic relations. This ban would be a good opening for us to explore those aspects of our Commons as a way to challenge regulatory control of our language, to re-awaken what a potluck is for us.

3. how is the circulation of our common and collective resources facilitated?

The Gabriola Commons offers a place for people get involved in various ways, to feel a sense a belonging, to develop relationships with the land and other people. There is an openness to the GC that facilitates diverse forms of participation (including this research project). However, our diversity is still fairly limited in terms of age, economic status, physical ability, and ethnicity, and this reflects the form and direction of the GC as a whole. We value 'volunteerism', as opposed to paying people for their work. At the same time, people have multiple types of limitations on the time they can 'give'. Ideally, it seems, each individual would find their own way of participating that would both enhance the GC and meet some of their own needs. The most valuable resource for the GC is freely given time and labour; paying people for their time and labour would deplete that resource. So **here's the tension**: we don't want to deplete the resource of freely given time and labour (which produces all kind of unexpected outcomes), but if we ignore the limits to participation, then we lose out on the participation of some people, and not from a lack of desire to participate but only because they feel they cannot give their time and labour freely. Perhaps closer attention to how the circulation

of our common and collective resources can be facilitated would address some of these limits.

One of the things that currency allow us to do is exchange resources (goods and services) across space and time. There are many examples of local currencies, which concentrate exchange within a defined area. For example, Salt Spring Island has a local currency that is backed by Canadian dollars (you can 'buy' Salt Spring Island dollars with Canadian dollars at par). Local currencies tend to intensify trade between locals of goods and services. Under-employed resources (expressed in terms of unemployment, for example) can be better utilized, and locally produced goods and services are encouraged. At the same time, local currencies need to be backed by something that has **trusted value**, and if part of our intention is to 'divorce' ourselves as much as possible from the mainstream economy, then we would want to find a local source for backing. Establishing a local currency on Gabriola Island (or perhaps even a Commons currency) is perhaps a larger project than we have resources for right now. Is there a simpler way in which we could get some of the benefits of a local currency, some kind of mutual credit system?

How would it work **if we backed our exchanges with time** (one hour of time given is equivalent to one credit)? "Time Dollars are the simplest currency system to implement: the only infrastructure needed is a central registry, which can be as simple as a notepad or blackboard, to record account balances" (<http://www.transaction.net/money/timedollars/>). One can imagine that such a system would stimulate more local exchanges of time and skills (if not goods), encouraging new people to participate in ways that enhance the GC, and create new connections between community members (and research of various kinds of local currencies supports this). But would we be trading in something else - **a sense of freedom, time unaccounted for**? How do we address the tension described above - do we want to?

Conclusion

This document is for the Gabriola Commons and all the people who make it thus. The comments and claims made here are shaped by my research - a combination of formal and informal conversations, interpersonal and group discussions, participation, observation, reading, and analysis. This is a description (in fairly short form) of my understanding of the Gabriola Commons and some of the themes and questions that I have noticed during my time here. This understanding is partial and provisional; just as the Gabriola Commons itself is always changing, shifting, evolving, so too do our understandings and narratives of it change, shift, evolve. The processes of our engagement call for as much attention as what we engage about. As such, this is not merely an exercise in expressing myself, but is also a contribution to an ongoing conversation. I encourage and welcome any and all comments in response.

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