

We do hope that we shall achieve a huge step forward in the beginning of September...

In this perspective we should, *firstly*, like to repeat the very questions we had asked in spring-time:

- What is your special interest in the heritage of Ostrom's work on the commons?
- What is your special interest in the heritage of Ostrom's work on the method and methodology of research and teaching in Economics?
- Do you have any English texts at your disposition which could give an impression of your interests and possible contributions to the workshop?
- Could you please send us the address of your website or of the website of your collective?

Some of you have replied to these questions - you may find these responses on our workshop blog <http://beyondostrom.blog.rosalux.de/>

*Secondly*, we should like to inform you that Michael Brie has written a very interesting paper for our workshop. It is being translated.

*Thirdly*, we should like to formulate some provocative propositions which will help in stimulating the discussion.

1. The title of the workshop should be "Beyond Ostrom – working on commons, defending scientific autonomy, improving the method and methodology of research and teaching in Economics"
2. One of the greatest advantages of the Ostroms is their ability formulating helpful questions concerning the possible ways for dealing with "threats to sustainability" which could be "ways of increasing the effectiveness of self-governed institutions".

They have questioned the "many studies" existing in this field and have provided empirical data and theoretical arguments for challenging the presumption that individuals were forever trapped in a remorseless tragedy (of commons – J.D.). Commons scholars did not, however, find any 'sure cures' for the problem of over-use. They have found that failure occurs in regard to private property, government property, and common property. Over-harvesting did occur, of course, when a valuable resource was effectively an open-access-resource due to a lack of rules defining and limiting who had access and other rights to use and manage the resource.

Gordon and Hardin along with the myriad of scholars and policy makers from multiple disciplines who do accept the tragedy metaphor as a general theory have been correct in identifying a challenging problem – especially under

open-access conditions. Their analysis has been incomplete, however, because they have failed to recognize the rich variety of complex institutional arrangements that had be used to solve these problems while their own solutions of government or private ownership often failed to solve the problem.”

3. Another great advantage of the Ostroms is their ability to counteract any over-simplification, and reduction of complexity. Some examples: “There are three methods that I would like to mention because they are not frequently seen as being important ways of increasing the effectiveness of self-governed institutions. They are: (1) the creation of associations of community governed entities, (2) comparative institutional research that provides a more effective knowledge base about design and operating principles, and (3) developing more effective high school and college courses on local governance.”

“The commons that are governed by users and the institutions they use are complex and sometimes difficult to understand. It is important to blend knowledge and information obtained in many different ways as we try to build a more effective knowledge base about what works and why ...”

“... the last recommendation that I will make at this juncture is to bring more materials on self-governing communities into the curriculum that is offered in high school, in professional schools, and in colleges.”

“The most important lesson for public policy analysis derived from the intellectual journey I have outlined here is that humans have a more complex motivational structure and more capability to solve social dilemmas than posited in earlier rational-choice theory ... Extensive empirical research leads me to argue that instead, a core goal of public policy should be to facilitate the development of institutions that bring out the best in humans ... To explain the world of interactions and outcomes occurring at multiple levels, we also have to be willing to deal with complexity instead of rejecting it ... When the world we are trying to explain and improve, however, is not well described by a simple model, we must continue to improve our frameworks and theories so as to be able to understand complexity and not simply reject it.”

4. Their engagement in examining and re-examining this thesis, as well as their statements and explanations, especially by looking for the real behavior of individuals and collectives, is undoubtedly helpful, but their focus on the individual and the micro level in a framework of games is debatable and should most probably be corrected.

“Consistent findings from behavioral game theory, as well as from neuroscientific studies of the brain of subjects in different settings ..., have shown that a richer theory of individual valuation is necessary. Scholars are now positing a family of models that change the basic assumptions of the classical model ... Several assumptions are shared across these new theories

of individual behavior ... Once scholars begin to assume that there are multiple 'types' of players interacting in a setting, attention can then be focused on how specific aspects of the structure of the situation affect behavior over time, such as sequential moves, type of feedback, forms of communication, and how individuals are assigned to positions ...

The possibility that there are individuals who take into account the payoffs of other individuals changes theoretical foundations greatly. Now one needs to ask how individuals provide reliable signals to each other about their preferences and intentions and how they gain information about the

actions and outcomes of others ... Once successful 'contingent cooperators' are noticed by others, these successful strategies may be learned and adopted more widely in a population ... Some of the intriguing rules devised by users of common-pool resources through the ages can now be integrated into contemporary theory ... rather than relegated to an irrational and incomprehensible past."

5. Another advantage of the Ostroms is their interdisciplinary approach.

"During the last 50 years, at least four interdisciplinary developments have occurred at the boundaries of political science and economics that have affected the central questions that both political scientists and economists ask, the empirical evidence amassed as a new foundation for understanding political economies, and new questions for future research. These include: (1) the Public Choice Approach, (2) the Governance of the Commons debate, (3) New Institutional Economics, and (4) Behavioral Approaches to Explaining Human Actions."

6. In the middle of the continuing and expanding financial and economic crisis, and in view of massive global poverty, extreme pollution of air, water and soil, of the rapid disappearance of biological diversity and of the increasing scarcity of natural resources, in view of the palpable and menacing violent force exercised over people, we have to defend the idea that humanity should (or could still be) be so embedded in the biosphere that individual people – women, men, girls and boys – could become individually free, socially equal and in solidarity with one another – and that this would at the same time contribute to maintaining, healing and improving the natural bases of their own lives. We contribute to the debate on sustainability "from below", which in no way minimizes the enormous importance of government action, of official international organisations and treaties, but recognises their limitations.

We think of this process of re-embedding as the result of people's striving for the fulfillment of their individual life-goals, while defending themselves against heteronomy, discrimination, violence and the destruction of nature, therefore they orient themselves towards the actions of all those who share in this thinking or may be won over to it.

In seeking possibilities of political action within contradictions, in analysing and discussing these issues, we have, in particular, identified three political areas of action, which are interconnected (liable to be connected): The striving for democratic, for social – in particular, a poverty-proof minimum social security – and for ecological standards (1), for the maintenance and democratisation of the public sphere, above all of public finance (2) and for an active striving for a constructive local and regional development (3).

Participatory processes as such do constitute an essential connecting bridge between (1), (2) and (3). We do see real existing and potential possibilities for people here to appropriate knowledge and capacities for solidarity based cooperation, for dealing actively with the causes and perpetrators of social and ecological problems, and in so doing for creating (or being able to create) viable political alliances and for positively changing (or being able to change) collective and social life in a sustainable way – acting, via solidarity networking, locally and regionally, supra-regionally, on the European level and globally.

We are going to the spaces and places where people are acting here and now in more solidaristic, more socially and ecologically responsible and more reasonable ways than the mainstream of our societies, and helping to strengthen and spread such trends, instead of the left just declaring “what one would have to do”, or what it “actually would want to do”.

Such an alternative practice will have to cope with social activities especially in four interrelated dimensions: public finance and social security systems, developmental aid, budget consolidation and debt cancellation.

It will have to address effectively (a) the comprehensive problematics of financial markets , as well as (b) ‘special projects’ of the ruling forces, of those in government, concrete concerns such as privatisation, PPP (public-private partnership) , megaprojects or problems in the municipality or region. These often have to do with energy, transportation, agriculture, with agro-business, “security/defence” and as a whole therefore with the competitive national positions of the perpetrators of problems, with concrete technologies and investment; (c) the coping with poverty/social exclusion, discrimination and repression/violence – especially by advocating and implementing social, democratic and ecological (minimum) standards ; and (d) struggles against already realised or about-to-be-realised socially and ecologically destructive projects/practices of governments and international institutions (EU, WTO) such as the EU services guidelines, planned free trade agreements and WTO regulations.

Further analysis of the actual social activities points to the consolidation of the three interconnected strategic areas of action mentioned above: struggling for democratic, social and ecological standards; for the democratisation of the

public space and of political decision-making processes regarding priorities and principles for the mobilisation and use of public finances; and active and participated local and regional development. In this respect, political engagement for the structural improvement of the conditions of life of the socially and globally poorest and for the organisation of actors and participatory processes should be especially emphasised. Political confrontations, the struggles against privatisation, destructive projects, corporate practices, megaprojects, and so forth, begin to take shape primarily in the municipalities or regions. Local and regional development is highly relevant for political activities against social and ecological destruction and thus for the critique and reconstruction of the economies of energy, transportation and agriculture and the dismantling of the MIC/security sector. This is where citizens can and do operate effectively as collective actors, committed to concrete problem solutions and specific alternatives. This does not imply a restricted horizon or a 'not-in-my-backyard' attitude: Quite to the contrary – in defending their own very interests, they are obliged, from the very start, e.g. to "think European", because their own concrete problems always have an EU dimension, explicitly or in a latent way.

There are still more arguments for stressing local and regional development: It does constitute, in fact, the other side of globalisation, in particular within the six economic sectors named above. Labour power is not as mobile as capital. It is capable of meeting capital's needs only to a certain extent – and may want to so in an even more limited way. For the social life of the municipalities and the regions, the prevailing social, democratic and ecological standards and the decisions taken on public finance are of decisive importance. Municipalities and federal states in Germany, for instance, are the actors in the revenue sharing in and between the federal states and in relation to the federation. The municipalities and regions are the places, where actors from diverse social and political groups come together most immediately, and whose alliances on the levels of the nation state, the EU and global international levels are needed in order to impose social standards, rules and laws on public finances – including help for the global poor – and in a perspective of reconstructing sustainable economic structures and corresponding ways of life.

The political confrontations and struggles around the raising or setting of social, ecological and democratic minimum standards – standard setting – reflect or change the existing socio-political relations of force, and thereby affect their real dynamics. After all, set standards imply the right to make one's claims effective, and therefore they are the object of demands of concrete actors with their specific interests. However, they can also define limits of what is admissible or they also could be re-articulated as demands for concrete limits (e.g. maximum working hours). The setting or changing of standards involves complicated processes: *First*, those affected – citizens and, not least,

critical scholars – articulate what they and others regard as necessary and desirable in order to be able to mitigate or solve problems in a sustainable way, for example to redress shortcomings in services of public care or to reduce traffic noise. *Then* it is a matter of the collective formulation of demands – such as comprehensive school or the introduction of limits for admissible noise levels – which are primarily addressed to state or supra-state and political institutions, but also to other actors, such as corporations and multinationals, etc.. The addressees should accept the demands as norms of action and regard them as binding, make them into laws and regulate their implementation legally. *Third*, it is a matter of struggles to reinforce and realise demands for concrete democratic and social rights, for social and ecological minimum standards, for limits set on socially and ecologically destructive actors.