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| Speak Up – KōrerotiaThe Commons in Christchurch20 October 2021 |
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| Sally | Nau mai ki a koutou. Ko Sally Carlton ahau, te rangatira o te hōtaka reo irirangi, Speak Up – Kōrerotia. I’m Sally Carlton, host of the Speak Up – Kōrerotia radio show and podcast. Today we’re doing a really special show, it’s one of the very few shows that we’ve recorded live, usually we do it in the studio. This show is on the topic “The Commons in Ōtautahi Christchurch” and the event tonight is actually part of the Christchurch City Council’s Heritage Festival for 2021. And I’m really excited about this topic. It’s something I’ve been thinking about for quite a while and when I saw that the City Council was looking for people to put in expressions of interest to do an event and that the theme for this year was “People and place”, I thought, ‘Well what is the commons other than talking about people and place?’ So perhaps this is a really good opportunity to do a show I’ve been wondering about for a while. So I’m really, really excited to introduce our panel. We’ve got a really fantastic panel tonight, who will bring such a diverse and wide range of perspectives to this topic of the commons. So starting over there we’ve got Te Maire Tau who is director of the Ngāi Tahu Research Centre here at the University of Canterbury, Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha. Also involved in many, many things including his hapū of Ngāi Tuahuriri and also was really instrumental in establishing Matapopore to provide some cultural guidance on the rebuild of Christchurch after the earthquakes. Next up in the line we’ve got Ekant Veer who is currently Director of the University of Canterbury’s Knowledge Commons, so we will hear about what is a ‘knowledge commons’. When he’s not seconded into this role he is a Professor of Marketing and I’ve known of Ekant for a long time through the multicultural space here in the city. So again, many different hats. Next up we’ve got Simone Reynolds from Gap Filler, but also a very long history of studying and getting involved in urban projects. And this is Michael Reynolds from the Roimata Food Commons which is up in Woolston. So we’ve got the pleasure of hearing from panellists from such a wide range of perspectives on this particular topic. The structure of the evening will be: we will hear from each of them, a little bit about their background, what they bring to this conversation, what do they understand the commons to be, to kind of set the scene; and then we’ll get into some kōrero between each of them; and then there will be opportunity for questions from you guys. To start with: Te Maire, ki a koe te wā.  |
| Te Maire | Thank you. Te Maire Tau tōkū ingoa, nō kōnei ahau. I guess what’s required is a perspective from us on the idea of ‘commons’ and it’s the usual process with me, I have no idea until five minutes before this because I ruminate on it. Look, the first thing that comes to mind is Tragedy of The Commons from Elinor Ostrom and I think there’s a point there. But just on reflection, we’ve got a huge experience of commons and how we do it at home. There’s this thing of property rights that sits somewhere around there and then there’s the rights that communities and people and families have and I think they’re all part of this. We have quite a bit of experience going on through this period of how to manage the commons. I think where we can contribute is how you manage the commons for everyone’s benefit because there’s always the dangers of freeloading and predators. We’ve had all types of experiences, we’ve had Norm Dewes from the Maata Waka community at home where he used our paddock and we grew lots of gardens. But poor old Norm was always doing the work, tonnes of kamokamo and stuff would leave our paddock, but I knew who did the work. But Norm equally got a lot out of that. What we do at home is we do manage it because we do have our customs which regulate our behaviour - but all communities must do this, I don’t think it’s a thing for Māori or indigenous peoples, I think there’s lots of examples of commons and it’s a good discussion to start with. We’re whitebaiting now on the river, which is the commons, but we stake our customary claims very clearly. But to stop the tensions amongst families on some parts of the river, one of the customs we have is we share the catch because some have better fishing places than others and if everyone just keeps their catch, tensions arise and the best way about it is everyone puts their catch in the same bucket and splits it up. Because what that does is over the season it evens out, the catches are harmonised. So if you’re there the whole season the catches all equate because you know, the different bends in the river, the different times, the tides and everything, it does even out - but there’s a lot of mechanisms that I look forward to discussing on this.  |
| Simone | Kia ora koutou, I’m Simone with Gap Filler at the moment as a project developer. It was interesting when I was approached and asked to do this talk on the commons, the first thing I thought to was back in university, my very first encounter was a creative commons project, this was with Industrial Design at Massey University. We were designing furniture that anybody could make at home from easily accessible pieces of timber and using really simple tools and skills. And it was interesting because it was quite polar to how we were learning. We were learning how to create something that was manufactured, we were trying to bake in, I guess, value from a perspective of it being something unique and actually difficult to create and then flipping it on its head with a creative commons lens and saying actually something that anyone can make can be equally as valuable - which has its own tensions, I guess, as well within the world of designing to make a living but also designing for the common good. When we think about in the Gap Filler space as well: Gap Filler, I believe, really approaches commons as a process more than anything else. So commoning and creating participatory community building or place building is really the core of what Gap Filler does. And there are lots of approaches to it, I guess, that we do, and some are more seen than others, and some actually fail, but at the end of the day it’s about building that behavioural change or understanding that there’s a different way to do things and that the way we’ve always done it is not always the way it will be.  |
| Ekant | Kia ora tātou, ko Ekant Veer tōkū ingoa. My name as Ekant, as was introduced earlier, and my substantive role is a professor here at UC but for the last 18 months or so, I’ve been seconded to this thing called the Canterbury Knowledge Commons which was set up to try and address some of the issues that we’re facing as a region, effectively. We know as a region we faced a number of tragedies and disruptions over the last 10, 12 years and our city is pretty good at coming together after those. Coming together and collaborating, sharing, knowing more and seeing how we can help one another - but then we kind of go our separate ways afterwards. So rather than always waiting for a disaster or a tragedy before we try to think of these things, we thought, ‘Well let’s be a little bit more proactive’ and so the Knowledge Commons was a way of trying to find aspects of our region or our city or the things we are dealing with as citizens as well as structures and institutions that we could share and be open about and benefit everyone. The idea being that we can all grow stronger together if we collaborate more and we work in kotahitanga. So we know for example that the police, 40% of their callouts can be attributed to mental health issues, we know that the Ministry of Health is dealing with mental health issues, we know that if we support our young people in education with mental health support and wellbeing, then their journey is going to be better. We know as a university we’re trying… Why are we all trying to do this individually? Why are we all trying to find and carve out a path when we could collaborate in this area and find ways of promoting wellbeing and wellness in the city in a more collaborative manner? So that Knowledge Commons, really, is that space where we can come together, we can share the information, the data we have, the resources, the mana, the expertise we have to hopefully benefit everyone. Now one of the problems we faced is that there were literally partners coming to me with USB drives of people’s data saying could you please go an analyse this and I’m like I don’t even want to touch that alright. We can be… in commons, we can be commonality with things but we also have to respect privacy, we have to respect sovereignty of identity and data and so those sorts of tensions with regards to we want to know more but also we have to respect more, knowing the power that information and knowledge has is a really interesting sort of space that we’re dealing with at the moment.  |
| Michael  | Kia ora, ko Michael Reynolds tōkū ingoa. My name is Michael Reynolds and I like to play around the edges of things and so one of the ways that I’ve been doing that post-earthquake is to found and run a project called Roimata Food Commons with the acknowledgement that access to basic human rights and needs are fundamental basis for a healthy way and health experience of living on this planet. I think the only true way that we can achieve that in society these days is to shift the way that we look at the world politically, away from a transactional basis where we’re limited to one-to-one relationships and there needs to be some exchange of level of currency, usually legal tender in order to accumulate or get access to what we need. Roimata Food Commons is, I guess, a space where we relinquish ownership which I think is really important aspect of our work and so what is grown in this space is there for people to harvest 24/7, as and when they need to, which increases people’s accessibility to their fundamental need for healthy food which is very, very limited in these times and especially obviously with what’s happening in the world at the moment with pandemics and those sorts of things. I’m also involved in a thing called time banking which a lot of people have never heard of. It is a complimentary currency where one unit of your time is equal to the unit of someone else’s time, so there’s no difference in value around your expertise or your knowledge or your skills and it’s a way of being able to, I guess, fulfil your needs within community, leaving your economic situation to one side. There’s a group of us looking at how we can set up systems to allow that to happen both within communities, geographic communities, within communities of interest and then across different communities.  |
| Sally | Cool. So even from those three-minute introductions, I think we’re probably getting a sense that there are a lot of different directions that a conversation on ‘the commons’ could go in. We actually met all together a couple of weeks ago just for some whanaungatanga and to talk about where we might like this conversation to go. And so one of the key themes that the group identified was the idea of rights and responsibilities in relation to the commons. So that might be our point of departure.  |
| Simone | I have a minor point directly on that that I’d like to raise straight away and that’s I find it funny in some ways that you mention relinquishing ownership as part of the commons. I was ruminating on this earlier today and I was thinking actually it’s not so much about *no-one* owning something, it’s about *everyone* owning something. And one of the definitions of the commons I came across as I’ve been researching, was actually about a shared resource for all of its stakeholders, as opposed to necessarily a shared resource for all of society. And I think both of those things co-exist. But that stakeholder element, I think, is really important because it shows that someone has a stake or ownership in something.  |
| Michael | Yeah I guess ownership often gets talked about in an economic context and so I guess I would offer that guardianship or the practice of kaitiakitanga would be a way of being a stakeholder that leaves the economic aspect of ownership to one side and that if we stepped into a role of being kaitiaki within our communities, not only for our physical spaces but for a lot of the social spaces and actually and emotional and spiritual aspects of our life, then I think we would be practicing commoning much more easily and maybe without even knowing that we’re doing it.  |
| Ekant | I wonder if it’s not just the issue of co-ownership as in there’s someone who is relinquishing ownership or there’s a shared ownership model as in we own this in a kaitiaki model, but also that importance of the co-creation of this as well. There’s always going to be someone or a small group who will have the greater impetus to start things off but then it needs to grow with the community, from the community, for the community, otherwise we are going to have someone create something and then say now it’s for you and people are like, ‘Well we actually never wanted that, we don’t need that’. How do we do this in partnership from the start all the way through and then it doesn’t necessarily feel like we’re relinquishing ownership because we are growing this thing together, whatever it might be. We’re growing knowledge together, you’re growing food together, you’re growing spaces for play together, you’re growing rights and responsibilities together, and I think that comes down to an understanding of citizenship. But that may not be as easy for some people to grasp especially when some of those resources can be scarce or there’s competitive nature between groups. |
| Simone | That’s definitely a key part of Gap Filler projects in the very first instance is finding who it is that we’re working with, where is the energy, who are the people, who are the champions, how can we lift them as opposed to building something and then handing that on.  |
| Ekant | I was trying to think of what is that lynchpin, what is that thing that will tip this thing over the balance to the point where it’s unsustainable and trust for me is a big part of that. Can we trust one another to do what is needed and do what is right, that importance of that but also to do it together and that trust that we’re all in this boat together, he waka eke noa, all in that sense.And there might be times that some people are doing more, sometimes some people are doing less but there’s trust there.  |
| Michael | I think one of the biggest barriers to co-creation at the moment is actually the level of inequality that exists within our communities. I mean, most people don’t even identify themselves as being citizens of anywhere or anything, they’re just people that exist and they have family, they have communities, they have friends, they live their life and that’s maybe the extent that they go to. It’s hard to be able to find the energy and capacity to be able to step into a co-creative process when you’re struggling on a day-to-day basis to meet your basic human needs. So we need to find ways to uplift people so that they have that capacity in the first place.  |
| Ekant | And that’s for me, going back to the time banking work that you do Michael, is where that’s so valuable in that a lawyer giving an hour of their time is as valuable as a babysitter taking care of that lawyer’s child for an hour because those were the needs at the time and capitalist society says one is far more valuable than the other but to those people at that time, that’s what is valuable. And reflecting after the mosque shooting, I was helping out at the volunteer centre and TV crew came around and they were talking to various people and said what does this feel like when there’s different people helping together and I said, “Let me give you an example: over there is an Emeritus Professor of Law who retired a couple of years ago, he has a distinguished career, spent many years helping in the community but mainly as a very eminent person in society and he’s packing a box full of tins of food because that’s what he can do right now”. It doesn’t matter who you are, if you’re willing to help, if you have an ability to help then we can level that playing field and everyone can. When you bring that heart to it, there’s always going to be someone who can hopefully upskill you, uplift.  |
| Te Maire | I think sometimes the idea about stakeholders is really important but I also think about clarity over contribution and how that’s quantified and maybe it can’t but just from experience, I don’t think everyone is equal and I don’t mean that in a particular way but we all have different skills where some of us have better skills than others which I think is the point. We all have middling, excellent, skills. What I notice when these things work in what I would call a tribal economy which is in a capitalist system, it’s how we put a value on everyone’s contribution which I find really quite a difficult task. So down in other parts of the island, they have their own formulas. So you know, when you go muttonbirding there’s the helicopter pilot, there’s the boats who takes you but you know, when I go down next year really, I’ll only get a week birding which is fine because I’m not the best birder. But my job next year will be to clean the paths, just to make sure everything is done properly which is really looking after the area, to make sure all the tussocks removed or we call it pūnuī which is another plant. But you get rid of that because the birds need their paths to land. But then you have the gun birders and my god they can get a lot of birds because they’re just bred to do it and that’s their skillset. But what I noticed is when we’re by ourselves, it’s a funny system how we can figure the sharing out of stuff. So this year I came off our island, I actually lost my birding week and I was really miffed because I had to get back for something to do with courts and the island popped up with all these muttonbirds so I was really happy because they know the contribution we’re doing in other areas and that’s how it works. It’s really knowing how people contribute which I find an interesting exercise but I don’t know how anyone codifies this because people get out of things their activities and their work different things that are important to… So I was speaking to Norm who just… you know, every time I’d go out in the paddock, I was frightened in the end because I would find him lying on the ground because he’d had a heart attack and you know, Norm, he’s a tribal leader and people respect him because of his aroha to the community. There’s all those factors and I think what we’re really talking about is how we value values.  |
| Michael | Ekant touched on the idea of trust and I think what I’m hearing when I listen to kōrero on this is that there’s a natural system of reciprocity, that the value is seen between people which is a relational practice of being without it having to be quantified or codified which comes from a completely different context of you know, more of a capitalist economic view of things where things need to be recorded or logged and numbers need to be attributed to them in order to create that sense or quantity of equality. Whereas when you step into a natural community-based system of reciprocity, then nothing has to be quantified because you can feel and experience the reciprocity and the quality.  |
| Te Maire | And it’s an interesting thing because in a community with families, one of the interesting things I note - and you find it right throughout our manuscripts and just how we are - every family keeps track. They know who owns who and it’s trust because it usually does but if you don’t fulfil those obligations, there’s mistrust.  |
| Ekant | And when that community is tighter, when that family is tighter, then it’s easier to do. And I’m not a commercial historian but you can see why money turned up because you had multiple people moving multiple ways and it’s hard to keep track of all that trust, you don’t have the time to build up that whānau sort of approach and so you had to find someway to say this is what I value, you are providing and this is how I will value it. But that also builds up that competitive action, it inherently builds up mistrust and that’s made things difficult. Within our family back in India, you know we have concepts of dharma and karma; you know, you do the work and working hard is important and you will be rewarded, whether it’s directly or in the next life. And that’s just when it’s instilled into your family and it’s instilled into a culture it’s much easier to believe. At the same time, the family will absolutely keep track of who is doing what and who is studying the most and who is blah blah blah blah blah. It’s a very achievement-focused culture in that way as well and that builds competitiveness. So there’s no real right or wrong answer in my mind.  |
| Te Maire | When we do things, we tend to do them in our groups - your stakeholders - and I notice we got taken down to this island one year, shipped on, it wasn’t paid for, it was all covered in our way and the family next door wanted to use the same boat and the captain said no, I don’t know you, you don’t contribute anything, I’m not helping and it wasn’t nasty or anything but that person and that family was outside of the context of how we operate. It’s just an interesting thing that I see all the time.  |
| Simone | And that kind of leads into that private ownership model that we’ve got, particularly in New Zealand but obviously everywhere, where everybody feels like they must own their own house, their own backyard, their own trampoline but actually, if you were to flip it around and have better common space and better shared resources, the need for so much private ownership for everything would be reduced and I think everyone would be happier and more fulfilled, not just economically but also socially.  |
| Te Maire | Isn’t the United States interesting, because when you go there the big capitalist system and you look at their communities… because I think in the United States, they have good communities, they all gather around their church, their clubs, whatever, but those fences don’t exist and the kids are running all over through the different gates and the fences and I did notice there’s a sense of community there more so necessarily than in New Zealand, which is an odd thing because that is the capitalist world.  |
| Ekant | There was a sociologist who said that the internal access garage was the thing that killed community because people would drive into their garage, they would go straight into the house, you never waved over the fence, you never did that and those were the sort of things that would mean that you had a stronger closeness to your work colleagueness than you ever did to your next door neighbour. Let’s flip it around to talk about some of the disasters we’ve had. We hear all the stories of people checking on their neighbours, their local community or being stronger as a community, whether it’s Covid, whether it’s mosque shooting, whether it’s earthquakes. There seems to be times where we do naturally come together but I don’t know what that essence is that draws us to say, “Right, I don’t care if I trust you, know you or not, you’re a human being and I need to take care of you right now”. How do we encourage that in a proactive way rather than as a super reactive way? Or, and this is me being an academic, is this in fact terror management theory which says that when you are faced with imminent mortality or death, that you do the thing that bolsters your self-esteem, you do thing that bolsters your sense of wellbeing? and for a lot of people that is community, that is being close to someone or feeling close to someone. That’s where the earthquakes were hard because we didn’t have the place where we could feel close because those buildings had come down, Covid was hard – we didn’t have that opportunity to feel physically close so we found that closeness in dark places like the internet and… |
| Michael | There are a lot more common spaces in our city or any city than what we realise. We don’t use this terminology and we don’t have that relationship with these physical spaces, we don’t step into that role of being stakeholders. The Christchurch City Councils manages between 800 and 1000 different green spaces across the Greater Christchurch Region which are all commons, we all have a stakeholdership of those spaces. They could all be activated for the wellbeing of the community that they exist within if the community felt that they were empowered to do so and I guess Roimata Food Commons is an example of what can happen when a community does feel like they can do that. Libraries are an amazing example of commons spaces in our cities, maybe post-earthquake they’re used a bit more but again that sense of stakeholdership around them held by the general communities is quite low. So I think even one of the things that we could do as communities is to encourage that feeling of citizenship and stakeholdership over these common spaces that already exist before we think about creating a lot more of them.  |
| Te Maire | So how do people become stakeholders? So if you go up to North Canterbury, we had a great swimming pool in Rangiora called the Dudley Park Swimming Pool, 50-metre pool built by the community. And when it was removed, the community outrage was really quite big because we got a modern indoor 25-metre pool. We don’t need to get into the politics of that but what was interesting was the community outrage was really big because the community built the pool, the land was donated by Dudley, we all knew the contractors and they all donated the concrete and this is you know, folklore within Rangiora but it was the same in our village. All the swimming pools were built by communities but I found it quite interesting when the regulations came and health and safety, all of those things went because the ogre of the state came in and said you can’t and we were never able to recalibrate the stakeholders’ - which is really community - investment in it and I don’t think it’s ever been the same.  |
| Simone | Yeah I think a big part of that is education. A lot of people don’t realise they can be a part of building their community. Like back when the swimming pool was created, that was probably just how things were done and if you wanted… you know, it’s kind of that No.8 wire mentality of New Zealand. If you want something done, you rally the right people together and you just do it. Now there are so many hoops and barriers that it’s too hard or just actually not known about for the most part. |
| Te Maire | Well it’s interesting, I mean back in those days everyone fundraised and those discos and sausages things, those were all big community efforts because people had a stake in their community. And I’ve always wondered with Christchurch - if you go to Ponsonby in Auckland, they’ve got that lovely community hall and everyone goes there - and I’m just wondering whether Christchurch needs more community centres where the community takes ownership, looks after it, you’ll always have the busy-bodies trying to control it but that’s just a part of community, isn’t it.  |
| Michael | Well you need leadership so you need people within your community that are willing to stand up and be the voice, the vision holder and work with community to find the outcome, find the resources and kind of maintain the energy so that a project or whatever it is, has the legs to come to some sort of level of fruition. And that’s actually one of the hardest roles because there’s obviously a certain level of social risk, social and political risk that comes along with adopting or assuming a role of leadership within community and it’s also finding the capacity. It’s incredibly energy sapping to step into that and it needs to be resourced and that’s the other thing that’s usually missing with a lot of these community projects, is that it’s a lot easier to find funding to fund the infrastructure, it’s much easier to take pictures than it is to fund the person that will create the context for the thing that needs to be there to be there in the first place. So there needs to be a shift, I guess, in the allocation of resources to support leadership within community to allow these common spaces to become activated more so than there is today.  |
| Ekant | It comes back to one of your earlier points as well, Michael, is just we have inequity and inequality in the city and I wonder if that ability to engage in these common goods is a privileged position. If you’ve got two parents working 60 hours each and you’ve got kids to feed and you’re tired, putting your hand up and saying yeah, I’m going to go out there and do this because it’s the right thing to do - it’s energy sapping as well. How do we find a space in our city where we can reduce that inequity and that inequality and distribute that privilege a bit more as well? And that can only happen through a commons model in my mind, in that what we have can be shared. John Price, the Commander of the Police, says this regularly. We need to move from a system of a ‘need to know’ to a ‘need to share’. And I think that can be extrapolated further to a ‘need to an own’ to a ‘need to share’ model. Accumulation of wealth just doesn’t seem, for me, to be the way that we can address that but that has been what we’ve been guided in for the last 50, 100, 150 years to be the goal. I’ve got a mate who owns a big farm up north and he was offered I think something $50 million for the farm and he says, “I’m 73, I can’t drink that much in the last few years of my life, why would I want $50 million” so he just carries on farming. He just doesn’t see the point in having $50 million because he doesn’t know what to do with that. While other people, if they said look I’ll give you $50 million and you just have to move house, they’re like yeah, I’ll take the $50 mill. What is the mindset associated with that? How do we reduce that inequity in our city? How do we build capacity within the city to allow that as well and redistribute some of that knowledge, resources, whatever else it might be, in a way that doesn’t make people feel like we’re turning into horrible socialist/communist word?  |
| Michael | I think it goes back to one of Te Maire Tau’s earlier points, that we need to recognise everyone’s uniqueness. The problem with the world that we live in today is that everyone is a homogenous unit of consumption, we are a product of a system which consumes other products of that same system and the cycle keeps going around. It’s only when we actually take a step back and actually start to see the value and the uniqueness that we all have, that we can all contribute, that inequality actually starts to become a thing of the past. We can find mechanisms to then shift energy across from different areas of communities to another, I think the academic and intellectual capacity to find those and develop those mechanisms exists. At the moment there’s not the economic will. There needs to be a social will that is greater than the economic desire to stop that from happening in order for it to start doing what it needs to do.  |
| Simone | In a previous life, I guess you could say, I was with Boosted crowdfunding and that is just what keeps coming up in my mind now: that crowdfunding is a really good way to kind of break down that inequality. You can give $5, you can give $5,000, and all be part of that same project. Like wouldn’t it be great if that were also hours or skill based crowdfunding so that your ideas could become something in reality. And that is in some ways what Gap Filler and The Commons - the physical site that Gap Filler currently works out of - was intended to do. Not necessarily the crowdfunding itself but being a place where people could come with their ideas and find a way to use the knowledge that was already built up after the earthquakes, so that they could actually empower themselves or be empowered by the other groups who had already gone through it all. Like Greening the Rubble and Life in Vacant Spaces - all equally with so much knowledge and so much experience that they can easily help and want to help other people actually get their projects off the ground. So the mechanisms are there, it’s just growing the desire for people to do that.  |
| Ekant | I’m thinking of a specific community project that’s happening right now is that we’re trying to get as many people vaccinated as possible - and I don’t want this to turn into a vaccination discussion - but what I am hearing from the rhetoric is “I’ve had my jabs, I’ve had both my jabs, those people need to now pull their weight otherwise we’re not going to”. That is not a community-based approach to doing things but that is the natural approach a lot of people have taken and the longer this drags out, the bigger that divide is going to be. And we see that same pattern happening with any point after the earthquakes, have and have-nots, comfort, lack of comfort. After the mosque shooting - it’s time for you to get over this, you know, it’s time for us to move on. When businesses opened up after lockdown - time to suck it up and get going. This is not great ways of building community but it is a natural response we have and how do we understand that in a way that we can turn off the natural response? How do we get to a point where it’s like okay, I’ve done my bit, now it’s time for me to help you do your bit as well? It’s time for us to do *our* bit and not be divisive in this. I kind of feel like Sally hasn’t asked us any questions.  |
| Sally | That was actually my intention. I knew you would have so much to say. It’s over to you guys now for some questions.  |
| Audience | This might be a bit cynical; like, time banks are kind of like a tax dodge in a way because you’re not paying GST you know, on the services that you’re giving to people. So that tension there.  |
| Te Maire | There’s tensions when we do things and I’ll just go back to the river example. On our particular bend, you start off when you’re a child and you make your way up. I’m at the top end now, really happy. It’s interesting because before we got there, someone within that group when they caught their bait, sold it instead of sharing it and that just led to all sorts of grumblings because they actually hadn’t come in through the system, they’d come in, parachuted over the top. So there was tensions about that.Now it could have been easily resolved if they’d followed the system, everyone shared and that was really in the end, these people didn’t know and we’ve come up with another way now for everyone to have a good catch but it means everyone gives and takes and I think that tension will always exist. But to the point about leadership is right, you’ve got to have the conversation. Quite often I find there’s tensions when people leave their villages, they’ve forgotten the practices, they come back, they think it’s all theirs and it’s because a lot of people are divorced from communities.  |
| Simon | I think it could also depend on scale a little bit as well because for instance this week I turned up at home and there was a box of vegetables at my front door. No note, no nothing, I had absolutely no idea where it came from, I didn’t order it. It turns out it was my neighbour, not Michael but… that would have been lovely but it was my neighbour who was at a friends’ house and they had surplus in their garden and then he gave it out and likewise we’ve got chickens and we dish the eggs out to all of the neighbours in the neighbourhood and that kind of scale you wouldn’t even, I think, consider that goods and services tax and whether or not that’s a thing that needs to be considered. But when you get into that really time-based mechanism, I think that that does become more of a conversation because we’ve attached time with money more than anything else.  |
| Michael | There are some legal issues that pertain exactly to what you’re talking about in that one of the things that stops time banking in any community where it has reached a moderate level of success is that it is illegal at the moment for a business to operate within a time banking context with their primary activity that drives their economic success. So a mechanic cannot offer their mechanic skills within a time banking context through their businesses because the government would see that as tax evasion. So it does require somewhat of a legal shift as well and there are communities that have started up both time banking and I guess local currency based systems that have been able to manage that situation. The other way that you can do it as well is more of an American context, is mutual aid systems. Where you can accumulate or encourage financial resources from outside of the community or even from within the community, to be injected into the community and be rewarded with non-monetary based rewards. So practicing reciprocity between economic and non-economic currencies which then allows community members who maybe have money, to participate in commons type activities in a way that encourages connection in a way that they wouldn’t otherwise experience. So we’re starting to play with that a little bit with Roimata Food Commons and with Toha Kai.  |
| Simone | There’s also - this is something I don’t know very deeply but I’ve heard murmurings of, Te Maire you might know a bit more than I do - but there’s a collective of Māori businesses who operate between themselves on a koha basis and they share resources, like staff when people have a really period, or maybe advertising, and they actually share in a non-monetary way but are actually driving economic wealth through that commons model. I mean that’s a system within itself and that kind of can’t really become more of a commons in terms of a society but it’s an interesting way to think about a model and it’s actually so much less risky than how we operate in the day to day.  |
| Ekant | And I guess it comes down to that understanding or belief that the economy runs on money and money alone. The reality is we have a massive level of economies that run in multiple ways and volunteerism is one of those ways. If we said you cannot volunteer your time for anything then that’s a lot of mahi that will not be done as a result because there’s so many people who volunteer and gift time and gift things.I can understand when you get certain points to scale, when you are starting to say well I’m going to gift my legal time for you and in return you’ll give me this and that starts to look like a tax dodge. I firmly believe if you really want to drive innovation in a system then tax the hell out of the status quo and someone will come up with a creative way to try and get around it and that’s what probably… that cynical view is coming from but in reality we have so many different ways of valuing our time, our things and everything like that, money seems to be the simplest for a lot of people but there are many, many other ways that exist and have always existed and there’s no way that we’re going to be able to control all of them.  |
| Te Maire | It’s interesting, you know, the capitalist system. To some extent it’s there because it’s easy to measure. The thing about capitalism is it breaks down communities so you have to figure out a way to do it. But I did think Gareth Morgan’s book on taxation was interesting because Ekant is right, people contribute in all sorts of ways, rural communities run on volunteers you know with St John’s, the firefighters, they all run outside of Christchurch on a volunteer basis and that’s how communities function. But of course the question is how do you put value on it and the easiest way is monetary, digital, easy to measure. But I did like some of Gareth’s comments on… it’s just an easy way to deal with it. What about the elders at home that spend huge amounts of time on the marae and we all know them because we’re local, we know what they’re doing. The question is the tax dodging where if they just claim things we all know is fraudulent outside of the community and it’s that that we don’t know how to manage which is why the digital economy, the capitalist system is good. But of course there’s big gaps in it and it doesn’t recognise community input. |
| Michael | And maybe part of the problem with that is that the current set of rules that we have that manage the people that step outside of those expected behaviours is… maybe those punishments or ways of achieving reparation don’t actually work. You know, putting people in prison or fining people, maybe that’s not as effective as bringing people back into line with the expectations and the set of rules that a community holds as it needs to be. Maybe we need a different way of dealing with people who want to operate outside of what a community expects and needs.  |
| Te Maire | We had a case years ago on our island where the commons on our island… so every family has their patch, stick to it, look after it but we rotate these patches on an annual basis as well. So there’s flowing around, it evens up. But the best part on the island where they all are, the birds are, is the commons in a sense. One particular family destroyed it, just destroyed it, environmental punks. But the system we had to manage it is they were banished, simply not allowed back on for life. Now it’s a harsh penalty but for us, it was looking after the environment because it was destroyed and it will take decades to get back into the position and there were a whole bunch of things… I don’t know if that’s the best system but it’s the system we operate by. It always crosses my mind, is there a better system because that will hit that family quite bad and it’s a shameful thing to happen. So that’s the way they operate, just to shame it.  |
| Michael | Well it’s hard to achieve justice within a community where you’re trying to build connection and relationship and the way that you punish people is to exclude them. That seems contradictory in terms and that’s the way that our system currently operates. So how do we set up a system whereby those people are actually included, still included in the community but it’s made clear to them that the way that they’ve behaved is outside of the norms that are expected in that group. |
| Te Maire | I should say this has been repeated behaviour.  |
| Ekant | That speaks to... This is a completely different topic, but when working in some of the rural communities with some of the mental health work that I was doing and promoting positive mental health. I mean rural communities, one of the strongest parts of them is how strong that community is. Everyone knows everyone, everyone is a gossip and everyone knows everyone’s business. It’s always the weakest part because anyone that wanted to speak out about the struggles they were facing, anyone that felt like they needed help felt they couldn’t. They would go to the town over to see a GP to talk to them or something like that because they felt so whakamā about something that they couldn’t control. Now that’s not great either so how do we create strong communities for the good and the bad sort of thing, how do we deal with the stuff that goes well and the stuff that doesn’t go so well. |
| Michael | So one of the things that we’re toying with around time banking at the moment. The traditional way that time banking works is if you need something, say three hours of work, someone does the work for you and you give three hours of time credits from your account to the person who does the work so it’s again, quite transactional which goes against what I believe time banking to kind of stand for. But one of the ideas that we’re toying with is how do we actually reward both parts of this, how do we reward the people for actually asking for what they need as well as the people who are willing to stand up and support that person with what they need because both are needed in community.If you have people who are so isolated within community that they can’t, or the community is so hyper connected, that they can’t ask for what they need then you’re not going to get that relationship, those relationships being built. So we actually need to reward both sides, we need to reward and hold up and value the people that actually stand up and ask for what they need.  |
| Sally | I’m going to jump in there and see, is there another question from the audience?  |
| Audience | I’m interested in… |
| Sally | So two questions. The first question was around the broader commons, if that’s the right term for it, water and air as opposed to just land. We’ve been talking primarily around physical space at the moment. And the second question was around the idea of community and community being not just our neighbourhood but also non-physical… |
| Audience | Non-geographical.  |
| Ekant | I’ll be selfish and extend the air and the water to include space as well. I love spending time out under the stars and then seeing satellites fly over just doesn’t enrich my experience, when you see those 50, 60 satellites and many times I’ve got photos of the damn things across my star photos and there’s really no control over what you can and can’t put into space at the moment, that’s becoming problematic as well. So I completely agree with you. I would also say that I don’t think you can disentangle land from water from air, they all do need to, from my perspective, come together and so yes, we need to protect all things in all things that we do because affecting one will affect the others in my mind. With regards to the geographic neighbourhood – absolutely. For me, I’ve been struggling with this more in the last couple of years as I get into my 40s. My heritage is Indian, I had to get a DNA test… I didn’t have to get a DNA test but I had so many people saying are you sure you’re Indian that I finally got a DNA test. 99.7% Indian. I have 0.3% Eastern European so a spice trader dropped a little present off many years ago for someone, I think, in my family line. But I grew up in the UK, moved to New Zealand when I’m 15, I’ve been told many times that you live in Canterbury but you won’t be Cantabrian because you must fit into these sorts of things. So you might be in a space but do you feel like you belong, do you feel like you’re connected, do you feel like you have a sense of turangawaewae? And I’m in that space now. If I don’t know where the land I’m from, maybe I should start to learn the land I’m on and understand how to respect that and I think that’s super important for all of us, especially as we become more eclectic as a culture, as we start to diversify. We have 25% of all New Zealanders were born overseas, that’s a high number which I didn’t realise it was that high. But we have a very, very high number of people who were born overseas that now live in New Zealand. What does it mean to be in this space, how do we feel like we belong, do we feel we belong and how do we make sure people are welcomed in that space? And that’s super, super important for me going forward in this city, in this region in particular.  |
| Michael | I would say that comes back to, I guess, the values and the principles and the practices that are set up within maybe a group or a project. So I would say that most of the volunteers that we get at Roimata are not from Roimata or from Woolston. We have people from all over the city that come to participate because what they see is there’s a values alignment between themselves and what the project is trying to achieve. I think that’s necessary. Referring back to the time banking, the communities of interest and looking at the role that community organisations can play in that. So what we envisage around that is say an organisation like Extinction Rebellion could act as an entity within time banking and use that framework to allow energy to flow both within their group, but also between other groups and other people who are operating in that - I hate to use the word ‘economy’ - but that time banking economy. So I think, yeah, it doesn’t have to be geographically based and I think actually if you put those boundaries around it, you’re actually short-changing yourself. The air, water, land thing is a huge political debate, probably not something we can effectively talk about in this space and I’m sure that Te Maire has some pretty important things to say about that.  |
| Te Maire | I’ve got my lawyer over my ear at the moment saying you’re not saying anything.  |
| Michael | That might be a bit of a rabbit hole.  |
| Ekant | I do want to add that the more we spend time on the internet, the less important geographic space becomes as well. There are so many communities that are formed and strong as a result of building digital connections. Michael and I were just talking earlier that we have a mutual friend and a mutual friend my wife met while we were living in England because we knew we were moving to Christchurch and she wanted to meet other mums and this person said I’ve got a kid the same age as your kid, let’s hang out when you get here and she helped her. So we built a bond with that family even though we were on the other side of the world and we are still close now.  |
| Te Maire | I’m just thinking and listening to Ekant and the chuck wagons, the satellites in space. I think the thing I find interesting about this is the tragedy of the commons. I was on the islands, it was a perfect night and I saw these satellites coming across like chuck wagons, it was fascinating to watch, and it dawned on me that’s really an attempt to gain property rights in space. So what will happen eventually is space will become a property because it’s no different from gold mining along the rivers. The miners staked their claim, they got a property right, it became a political right entrenched in law and a whole bunch of things. The same really with irrigation, you’re staking your right, really a property right. Really I think we need to come up with a new language of rights because a property right is a very small part of a right. We need to dig deep into finding out what is the right really wanted and we go between these swinging things of user rights, property rights but there’s a whole range of rights in between. I sometimes wonder what’s really there because you could say it’s for water but actually what it is, it’s a need to go to the bank to get a loan. So that’s a commercial, monetary…but I can’t get my head around the right. I think if you figure out the rights, you’ll figure out the stakeholder interest.  |
| Ekant | And again not a lawyer, none of us are lawyers, we’ve probably got lawyers listening to us and making sure we say the right thing but rights does imply ownership and this is why we are trying to err away from that in a lot of the rhetoric but at the same time, there are people bottling New Zealand air and selling them in Hong Kong and in China because people want to sniff New Zealand air and smell what it smells like. There are bars set up that you can pump different air from different parts of the world and you sit there and you can suck on the air from different parts of the world to see what it smells like. No one is charging them because no one owns the air, no one owns that sort of thing and that gets into that next level of debate as to what that means.  |
| Michael | And also trying to bite off some of these issues in big chunks, I think it probably comes back to the scale sort of argument. How effective can you be in creating change within a community or a neighbourhood context versus how effective can you be trying to create change within property rights conversations that span a whole nation. I know that I only have the capacity really to work within my own geographical community of interest conversations and commons, I’ll leave those other big scale conversations to someone else and maybe actually, if we do enough on a smaller scale right across the country, it actually all adds up into making that change at that larger scale because we actually already know what we’re doing.  |
| Sally | I’m going to jump in there. Sorry guys, you didn’t get many questions. Was there anything super burning that anyone really wants to ask? In that case I’d like to say thank you so much for coming in and sharing your wisdom. We had a whole bunch of topics here that we actually covered really well - so we were thinking of talking about things like: the commons in post-earthquake Christchurch, the place of the commons in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand, so in our capitalist system and bicultural framework; the commons in the time of Covid as well, we also kind of bandied around - so we did touch on pretty much all the themes we had planned to. So yeah, well done guys, you were super wide ranging in that respect. So I’d just like to say thank you so much to all of you, I’ve really enjoyed it and I hope you guys have as well.  |