

**Back to the future: Commons from a Long-Term Perspective.**  
**Session Proposal for the 16<sup>th</sup> Biannual Conference of the IASC.**  
**Edmonton, Alberta – 25-29 May 2015.**

**Session organizers:** Miguel Laborda-Pemán and Tine de Moor (Utrecht University)

Commons face nowadays important challenges. Rapid developments associated with global economic integration, population growth, demand for agricultural land and climate change are putting increasing pressure on both the ability of common-pool resources to regenerate and the possibility of communities to sustainably manage them. As a consequence, studying the interaction between external shocks, change of governance regimes and institutional resilience lies now at the core of the efforts of both commons practitioners and scholars. Contrasting with this increasing focus on change and adaptation over time, surprisingly little is known about the evolution of commons. After thirty years of exciting research, a rather static view when approaching the study of commons is still predominant. Considerations about long-term change are absent of most studies. The historical approach, with its intrinsic attention to developments over the long run, allows, however, to bridge this gap between pressing concerns and current state of the art. In this session therefore we aim at bringing together historians and other social scientists approaching the study of the commons from a long-term perspective. Understanding how commons functioned in the past and evolved over time should provide us with novel, important insights about the future of commons and communities in a changing and highly complex world.

In particular, our session welcomes paper proposals related to three main interrelated topics:

1. **Emergence.** Which are the long-run drivers behind the establishment of community-based arrangements for the management of natural resources? Under which circumstances and in which socio-economic contexts could the establishment of commons be expected? Is it possible to find systematic differences across regions in the ability of individuals to develop communal arrangements?
2. **Governance.** Are Ostrom's design principles observed over time in commons? Do some design principles seem to have been historically more relevant than others? To what extent is Ostrom's scheme useful when approaching historical commons?
3. **Resilience.** How did commons and commoners adapt in face of external shocks such as plagues, wars or natural catastrophes? Is it possible to observe a change in the functions performed by commons over time? How is the ability to survive over time related to particular commons' institutional designs? Which external conditions and internal factors seem to better explain the ability of commons to satisfactorily perform their functions over long periods of time? Is the 'tragedy of the commons' also observable in historical, resource-abundant historical settings?
4. **Impact.** Are commons related to improved living standards over time? Which are the peculiarities that common-property regimes have introduced across

regions in the historical process of state building? Is it possible to identify distinctive trajectories in social capital cooperation in those regions with a high density of common-property regimes? Are there institutional continuities linking the past prevalence of common and more contemporary developments?

We invite scholars and practitioners to submit their work on historical commons. Historians as well as other social scientists are welcome to participate. Case studies of specific communal arrangements as well as comparative works are invited. Similarly, we are keen to receive both quantitative and qualitative papers. In any case, attention to developments over the long-run in common-property regimes is essential. With the selected papers a session proposal will be sent to the organisers of the 16<sup>th</sup> Biannual Conference of the IASC. Edmonton, Alberta – 25-29 May 2015. Whether the papers included in the session will be able to present is subject to the choices made by the scientific committee of the conference.

Paper abstracts (maximum 500 words) must be sent by **25<sup>th</sup> September 2014** to [M.LabordaPeman@uu.nl](mailto:M.LabordaPeman@uu.nl). They should contain a very basic overview of the proposed paper: preliminary title, debate and hypotheses, sources and methods, expected contribution. The authors of the selected proposals shall be contacted shortly afterwards.

**For more background information on historical commons, see [www.collective-action.info](http://www.collective-action.info)**