

Lecture 9

1. This week we starting with the concept of the commons, first using the definition from Take Back the Economy (TBTE) (page 130) and then working through the [Commons Identi-kit](#) (page 135) with the example of the [Zanjera Commons](#) (in an earlier draft of TBTE we had included this example, but because of the word limit we dropped it from the final version; I used it with these students as some of them are interested in agriculture plus it links to the example of the Nam Chung Commons from Hong Kong, which we cover in the next step) ([Slides 1 to 9](#)).
2. Students then worked in small groups using the [Commons Identi-kit](#) to look at some different examples:
 - The Nam Chung Commons in Hong Kong, an initiative to take back the agri/cultural commons in an old farming area (which I had visited a few weeks before). I gave them some information on the Nam Chung Project and directed them to the [Nam Chung Project website](#) developed by students from Lingnan University a few years ago ([Slides 10 to 17](#)).
 - The planned 2017 elections in Hong Kong and the Basic Law, which of course was the basis for the Umbrella Revolution and the Occupy action that closed down parts of the city for 79 days in the latter part of 2014 (and which the students had been involved in). I asked the students to assess whether or not the planned 2017 elections were a commons (given that we identify political systems as a potential social commons in TBTE (page 130) ([Slide 18](#))).
 - The third option was open for students to decide what to look at ([Slide 19](#)). This group decided to look at YouTube (especially important for Jackie as her case study is about [One Letter Horse](#), a YouTube initiative by four young men that aims to raise the political and economic awareness of young people in Hong Kong, especially after the Umbrella Revolution. For example, one of their recent YouTube clips focuses on [the closure of small family-owned shops](#) and the expansion of chain stores You can also view [Jackie's powerpoint presentation about One Letter Horse](#), which includes an interview with one of the members).
 - Helen (our wonderful tutor) and I used the Commons Identi-kit to explore the commons features of usual university classes and the mobile classrooms run at the Occupy sites during the Umbrella Revolution.

We had terrific discussion about each of the examples and various issues arose in the discussion, including different systems of voting (e.g. that in Australia it is compulsory to vote and that there's the risk of fines if you do not vote); intellectual property rights and copyright (which we discuss in TBTE, pages 142-144); and the system of academic publishing.

From my perspective, the analysis of education through the Commons Identi-kit prompted an incredibly useful discussion about mobile phones in class—in a small class such as this it is very noticeable when students are looking at their mobile devices. So we discussed this in terms of community members assuming responsibility for and enacting care for what happens in the classroom commons. As a result, students agreed to “surrender” their phones in class (except when they needed them to research various topics). One student (who told us that she checks Facebook etc. on average every 10 minutes) thanked us for this enforced abstinence. We continued with this practice for the rest of the semester.

3. We then looked at the distinction between property and commons, drawing on the point in this chapter that property ownership is a legal issue and that commons can be created on any type of property, including private property. This of course led to discussion of the so-called tragedy of the commons, and the importance of the fact that Gerard Hardin recanted his thesis to state that it is the tragedy of the unmanaged commons (which then according to the Commons Identity kit means that if they are unmanaged they are no longer commons) (pages 130 to 131 of TBTE) ([Slides 21 to 24](#)).
4. And this got us to the topic for next week, commoning and uncommoning.