



New commons are springing up in the **fertile ground** of “**in-between**” **spaces**—
between private and public, social and economic, digital and physical, individual and group, tangible and intangible—creating a new cultural platform for defining our relationships to each other, to resources, and to our collective long-term future. What makes a new commons? Dispersed communities use new digital tools for identity creation and affiliation to create and protect new kinds of value from the bottomup.



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NEW SECTOR: AN ALTERNATIVE TO MARKETS AND GOVERNMENTS

Over the past century, civic debates and market strategies have focused on the balance of power between the public and private sectors. Peter Barnes describes the new commons as a third economic sector in *Capitalism 3.0*. Yochai Benkler proposes a new production commons as a mode of bottom-up, peer-based value creation. And David Bollier suggests a new commons movement as an emerging “vocabulary” to help communities align their economic, social, and ethical concerns in the 21st century. Five key trends drive these new commons:

- The enclosure of public resources has triggered the formation of new commons to address inequalities of access.
- The success of self-organized open systems provides new models for managing large-scale commons and architecting systems of increasing returns.
- Worldwide market expansion tends to commoditize resources that aren't owned, managed, or protected driving explicit new alternatives for managing them as commons.
- Growing system failures have inspired commons as more flexible and robust alternatives for meeting diverse needs.
- The rise of intangibles such as social, natural, and intellectual capitals, have created new categories and measures of value from existing commons—and offer important mechanisms for governing and sustaining them.

NEW PRINCIPLES: GEOGRAPHICALLY AGNOSTIC, DIGITALLY SUPPORTED, SUSTAINABLE, AND GENERATIVE

Commons are traditionally defined as shared resources managed by those who use them and vulnerable to social dilemmas in which the tension between the individual and the group can lead to destruction or dysfunction. These traditional commons are often geographically defined—waterways or forests that serve a region, for example. Finally, they are typically material resources that can be depleted.

New commons differ in significant ways. Like traditional commons they are shared resources that are managed by those who use them and can fall prey to the destructive forces of short-term self-interest. But they are often built on intangible, more than material value, so they need not be limited to a particular geography or a geographically bounded community. Also, many new commons are non-depletable: using them doesn't use them up but instead creates additional value. And finally, most new commons take advantage of global digital communications infrastructures to both create and manage value.

Examples of such new commons range from open-source curricula in learning commons to open ID protocols in so-called identity commons. The most successful of these integrate commons with public and private platforms to create the greatest value potential. They use rapid prototyping of structures and practices to keep commons from being enclosed. And they build local value on geographically dispersed commons to strengthen communities with shared value.