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Discussant's Comments: Global Themes Stream

I really want to thank all the presenters for the quality of their work in the global themes. This was a room that was always full and there was always good discussion. I think it is important to recognize that through the week we too have, in fact, created community. We have danced together, sang, had good laughter, and now leave here with new friends and new perspectives. That is a great gift to have given each other.

I would also suggest that too often as trained professionals we indulge ourselves in a western view of "neutrality". We always need to remember the heart of our work. Its too seldom that we take advantage of the almost sacred opportunity to come to a conference, such as this, take time away from work, from our community, from e-mail and our voice mail and just take a moment to think about these big issues. Last night after the global themes presentation some of us stayed together for awhile and talked about the message we wanted to bring back. For all our new friends and those of you who will take home new insights we want to express our gratitude for working with us to think about these issues, and raising issues that help us all "cross boundaries" together in the future.

I was asked to pick up some themes that emerged during this Global session.

First, participants identified the need for the association itself to focus on the philosophical underpinnings or principles of operation for the study of common property. There is still the lack of clarity in the definitions, specifically the lack of a common definition of success for your work - not that we would always agree but for the value of the dialog. I was struck by one comment that perhaps once we start talking the same language its too often because some of us have stopped talking.

Second, it was noted that the association needs a clearer articulation of the discipline itself and common language. So those of us who are practitioners, not of the common property school, can at least decide whether we want to access your research.

I work in community education and frequently during these presentations I was thinking whether my community would be able to access this information, particularly in the way it is being presented. I want to challenge you to think about crossing another "barrier" and think of yourself as community educators as well as researchers. It is very important that you effectively present your research to people who are daily dealing with these difficult issues and need the benefit of your research but that can only happen if you deliberately make information more accessible.

Some of the themes in the presentations focused on the potential impact of technology, and a better calculation and delineation of success. There were good papers on the history of environmental regulation and how it reflects dominant cultural constructs, a paper on how transportation systems, even man made, can become a new form of common property. A very good paper suggested a rethinking of neoclassic economics and another paper on game theory questioned whether the literature of individual competition and benefit really bears out in our culture today. In addition, there was a good presentation looking at the role of common property and community leadership in India and the options that can be available when there is not strong leadership in a community, e.g. additional civic structures such as education or enforcement can be used to augment and even supplant rural leadership.

The room was filled Friday night with the World Bank panel. It is unfortunate that more Vancouver residents and members of the public did not attend. I want to congratulate the conference planners for trying to open conference sessions up to the larger community and the attempted innovation to try to make more sessions available to the local community. I think the prescience of UNESCO and of the World Bank demonstrate that there are people involved in issues of sustainable development of our economy, ecology, and community who want to access the research and expertise of this association. These World Bank representatives admit they too are isolated in their own organization. They point out the need for research to move from the micro to the macro analysis. For many it was frustrating that the World Bank representatives could not get their presentations approved for distribution since that raises some interesting issues of whether there is really an ongoing dialog within the World Bank about the importance of these issues. However, the dialog was very stimulating and controversial as often happens when someone with perceived "deep pockets" enters the room.

I was also asked to identify some of the most interesting papers. This is a difficult task since they were all presented in a cement room with no windows during possibly the only four nice days of summer in the Northwest. However, for me, the best papers were those which suggested a rethinking of neoclassic economics and game theory. The presenters were excited, passionate and enthusiastic. I would really encourage you to pursue within your organizations the difference between dispassionate professionalism and a lack of passion for your field. I work with decision makers every day who are looking for new insights. The best presentations for me were not so much because of the topics but because of the passion of the presentation and the excitement of uncovering a unique perspective or insight.

Why did we learn about boundaries? I wish I had an acetate view of earth. There are no longer any boundaries. One of my favorite quotes comes from the Director of the United States Smithsonian Museum who said that when we, as a species, saw earth from space we experienced

as big a change in our human consciousness as when Copernicus said the world may not be flat. With that one image we moved our culture from one of extraction and wilderness to stewardship and a space ship earth. In this world without boundaries we are all neighbors, what you do in your forests affect my watersheds. This week the sunsets here on the Pacific Coast of the United States have been golden due to large windstorms two weeks ago on the Gobi Desert. We are clearly all neighbors in the new globalism. No boundaries, only those we construct out of fear.

Where are we going now? Who are we talking to? What are the stories we are telling of common property? The parties of the global theme workshops are very pleased that the next common property conference to be held in Indiana will look further at the issues of globalization. This issue clearly involves arguably the most fundamental redesign of the planet's economic and cultural design since the industrial revolution, certainly arguably, the most important. (sic) There are less than 500 days to the next millennium. The last 500 years have been decades of colonialism. A key issue of globalism is whether there will be another 500 years of neo-colonialism or whether we can come together, theorists and practitioners and use our professional skills and expertise to help our communities vision another future.

To prepare for our next conversation at the Indiana conference we would recommend an association work group that would look at more cross themes on the impacts of globalization. We suggest that the topic requires more systems thinking, more ecologists and community practitioners. We would like to see more use of technology to help attendees visualize the bio-regional impact and management of these issues.

In conclusion, I work in a watershed where deliberation is too often delineated by the funding source with forestry issues managed separately from fisheries, agricultural management separate from urban issues. For the next conference we'd suggest it might be interesting to have sessions focused on bio-regional interaction of fisheries, forestry, community and economics. The conference could model a much more integrated, systemic and holistic way to analyze these interactions which are faced by our community cultures simultaneously. A third option is for the conference to pick a central, cross-cutting theme such as resiliency. Reliance is a way that individuals and communities respond to rapid change and globalization.

It was important for us at this conference to experience the Northwest Coast Tribal Dances. Not so much because it is their privilege to welcome us to this place but because we needed to experience their relationship with the natural world, their spirituality, their resilient ability to continue as a people of place in a high-technology world. We need to share and celebrate that resilience. To have them share with us what it is to be a community of place, a people with roots in a bio-region. We need communities of place to share with the rest of us what residual information they have from being a culture that does not separate economy, ecology and community. We need to dance and sing with communities of place much more than they need us. As we face these common issues of globalization we need to feel and share their expertise in balancing place, ecology, and economy

I would like to encourage you to do more research, more macro and less micro, not a scaling up but a desire to move from individual case studies to some stories about what these themes are

telling us. We who are making decisions every day need you to begin to ask "so what?" to your research. We need to hear less in your stories which feels like we are playing fiddles while Rome burns and what we have lost and more about how communities are learning to work together to pick up the buckets and acting, now, to protect this world. For example, tell us more research on the role of mediating institutions and leaders and how we can begin to articulate place specific, bio-regional performance standards that will effectively protect the village in the global culture.

I want to challenge each of you to think carefully of who is the audience to your research. This is a unique association, a good mix of theorists and practitioners, north and south. I work every day with people who are making decisions affecting this new global culture. Are these lawyers and businessmen your new audience? If so, I would suggest that you need to think about how to change your membership and format to involve those decision makers in your deliberations. I can read or access papers on the web or by mail. Let us spend more time at the conference with dialog and discussion. Improve the way that complex information is presented to be more graphic and distinct. Have fewer forums where one person is talking and thirty are listening. Recognize we all have expertise and circle the chairs so we can begin to signal that we are all co-creators searching to build a new global culture with a common future. We have to quit sending peace corps to third world countries and realize we have a lot to learn from indigenous people; that we have a lot to learn to put "village" back into "global village". We need to break down the hierarchical manner of professional presentations if we are really going to signal equity. We need more research on how to reconstitute cultures of place, ways to teach people local lore, of being place-bound. A real test is whether we will be able to balance a global economy with communities of place and ecology. In that challenge communities have as much to teach as researchers, we will truly be co-teachers and co-learners. We will come together to hear our stories and that is truly co-management.

When the 21st century dawns, will this association be able to say it has helped society define a new equity, a place of hope called home? A colleague once said before he died, "I worked on the hardest issues facing my generation with the best of people; I wish you no less". And that is my wish for this association and each of us who made new friends this week, as we move from a century of industrial colonialism to a new global culture of stewardship and hope. The choice will be up to organizations such as this. I wish you no less.