

# COMMONS FORUM *RESPONSE*

Response to: The Name Change; or, What Happened to the “P”?, by Charlotte Hess and Ruth Meinzen-Dick

## **A Short Commentary on “The Name Change; or What Happened to the ‘P’?” authored by Charlotte Hess and Ruth Meinzen-Dick**

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Does the name change from “*The International Association for the Study of the Common Property*” to “*The International Association for the Study of the Commons*” mean anything? In the first place, the name of the Association is an expression of Association’s aspirations and its development agenda. The name is a source of identity, which also shapes members’ behaviour. *When is a name change necessary?* A name change may be necessary if there is a change in the ownership of an entity, or change in the products or services the entity produces. Some learning institutions have changed their names from a *college* to a *university* as an indication of improvement in the quality of education being offered....often in anticipation that a name change would influence enrolment of students.

*Does a name change of has a bearing?* A name change may have either positive or negative or no impact at all. A name change of an international airport may be costly as more resources have to be committed towards publicity, designing of new letterheads or official date stamps without necessarily changing the quality of services provided. In addition, a name change of an airport has negative externalities. For example, all the airlines and travel agents have to change the airport name coding in their systems to reflect the new name, a costly exercise. Not always does a name change stimulate demand for the services offered. A study comparing enrolment patterns at 140 colleges and universities five years before and five years after they changed their names, found that on average, the strategic name change did not affect enrolment, and only 7% of institutions surveyed experienced significant enrollment growth.

According to Charlotte Hess and Ruth Meinzen-Dick, a name change from “*The International Association for the Study of the Common Property*” to “*The International Association for the Study of the Commons*” reflect the evolution of the field as a result of research conducted over the past twenty years. It has been argued that the early focus on property rights was important to clarify Hardin’s (1968) metaphor of the “*Tragedy of the Commons*”. Well and good, but, a name change to “... *study of the commons*” brings with it many expectations and challenges as it entails widening research on understanding sustainable solutions for natural or environmental resources to cover a wide array of shared goods and services. The name change may strengthen the Association by extending research and information exchange among researchers working in a variety of resources over which other people—often from the neighbourhood—could exercise traditional rights, such as access and use rights which include *traditional commons* (i.e., natural and environmental resources) and “*non-traditional local commons*.”

While the argument that old name had limited scope as it focused on the governance of natural or environmental commons, however, the Association's integrity and identify was maintained. The word '*commons*' refers to resources for which people do not have to pay for to exercise their user and access rights within a confine of a set of institutions or rules to protect the resources from overuse by people who do not respect the resources' fragility or limits. However, some of the *local commons* (e.g., tourism, knowledge or information, scientific databases, the arts, open-source software, the electromagnetic spectrum, the atmosphere, education, city sidewalks, playgrounds) or *global commons* (e.g., deep seas, the atmosphere, and outer space) may not neatly fit into the definition of the "*commons*." As new types of commons are springing up, the Association has a mammoth task of accommodating and mentoring new research agenda these *non-traditional commons*." If not properly managed, the expended scope can lead to loss of Association's identify.

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