



MINI CURRICULUM I: TALKING ABOUT TAXES

Exercise I: The Commons

Created originally by Kim Klein for the Building Movement Project
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The "Commons" is a generic term and is often used interchangeably with "common assets," "commonwealth," "common property," although each of these have slightly different meanings. It is also often called "public space" and it is this space that is increasingly privatized with little discussion.

The Romans made an easy set of distinctions to describe all forms of property:

- Things that are private property (*res privatae*): that which can be possessed by an individual, a family, a business, and passed on by them; these are not in the commons.
- Things built and set aside for public use (*res publicae*): roads, libraries, courthouses and other public buildings;
- Things of nature which belong to everyone and are protected by everyone (*res communes*): air, water, wild places, the ocean, and so on.

Some things cross more than one of these—a campground in a national park, or a swimming pool at a YMCA. In our time, some things that were *res communes* are increasingly *res privatae* (water, air).

In this exercise, you are asked to take an element of the commons and discuss its component parts, including how much in the "commons" each part should be.

POSSIBLE TOPICS: Health care, air waves, schools, parks, libraries, museums, transportation, plazas (including shopping malls), the internet, water.

Pick a subject and take ten minutes to discuss which parts of this should be:

FREE:

(either prevented from ever being in the market place, or being completely subsidized by taxes and protected from any privatization)

NOMINAL FEE:

(People should have to pay some small amount, but not more than \$15 for access to this. The true cost is then either held at that or subsidized by taxes.)

PARTIALLY SUBSIDIZED:

(People should have to pay at least half of the true cost of this, but the other portion is paid by tax revenues or tax exemptions.)

FULL FARE:

People should pay the true cost of this. (Note: this is not necessarily the same as what the market will bear, and you can still recommend that the cost be held down in some way.)

After the 10 minutes of discussion are up, share what you learned as a group.

EXAMPLE:

For example, looking at **health care**, here are three lists from one workshop:

1.

FREE: universal for children, all primary and preventive, free for uninsured

NOMINAL: smoking cessation classes, vision, dental, drug and alcohol recovery

PARTIALLY SUBSIDIZED: gym membership

FULL FARE: cosmetic surgery

2.

FREE: all forms, no exceptions, no one ever pays for any form of health care including that which keeps us healthy. Wages and capital gains are taxed to make this possible.

3.

FREE: universal primary and preventive, including abortion and birth control, vision, dental.

NOMINAL: gym membership, health education of any kind

PARTIALLY SUBSIDIZED: drug and alcohol recovery (can be worked off with labor in the community), cosmetic surgery, any and all illness related to behavioral choices, i.e. cancer caused by smoking, sexually transmitted diseases, weight loss.

FULL FARE: nothing