

The Commons, the Market, and the State

Historically, there have been three ways to manage resources and share wealth: the commons (managed collectively), the state (i.e., the government), and the market—with the last two being the dominant forms today.⁴

The organizations and businesses in our case studies are unique in the way they participate in the commons while still engaging with the market and/or state. The extent of engagement with market or state varies. Some operate primarily as a commons with minimal or no reliance on the market or state.⁵ Others are very much a part of the market or state, depending on them for financial sustainability. All operate as hybrids, blending the norms of the commons with those of the market or state.

Fig. 1. is a depiction of how an enterprise can have varying levels of engagement with commons, state, and market.

Some of our case studies are simply commons and market enterprises with little or no engagement with the state. A depiction of those case studies would show the state sphere as

tiny or even absent. Other case studies are primarily market-based with only a small engagement with the commons. A depiction of those case studies would show the market sphere as large and the commons sphere as small. The extent to which an enterprise sees itself as being primarily of one type or another affects the balance of norms by which they operate.

All our case studies generate money as a means of livelihood and sustainability. Money is primarily of the market. Finding ways to generate revenue while holding true to the core values of the commons (usually expressed in mission statements) is challenging. To manage interaction and engagement between the commons and the market requires a deft touch, a strong sense of values, and the ability to blend the best of both.

The state has an important role to play in fostering the use and adoption of the commons. State programs and funding can deliberately contribute to and build the commons. Beyond money, laws and regulations regarding property, copyright, business, and finance can all be designed to foster the commons.

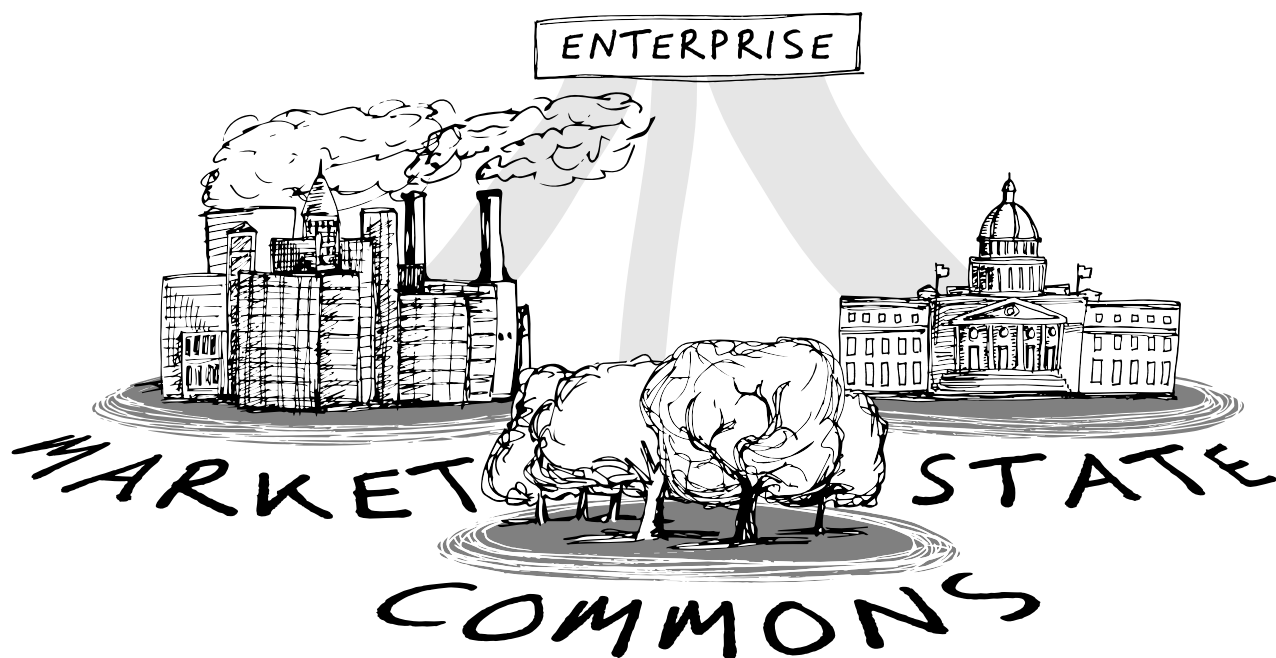


Fig. 1. Enterprise engagement with commons, state, and market.