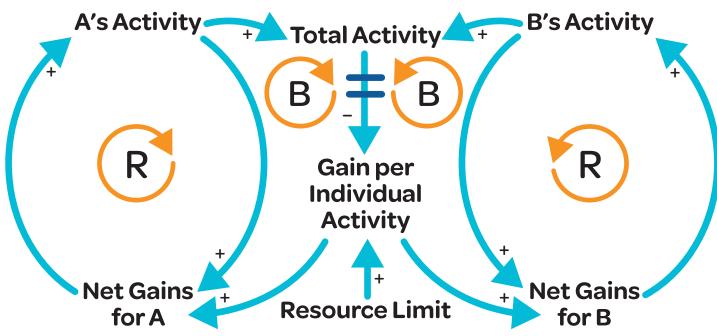


Tragedy of the Commons

When competing parties all access the same common resource and choose actions that result in the resource being used in an unsustainable manner



Description

In a tragedy of the commons scenario, many individuals or groups access the same common, limited resource. Often compared to use of a "commons" such as a national park or grassy area for grazing, the common resource can become used up or degraded over time when those using it are unaware of the big picture. In addition, even with an awareness of impacts, some individuals/groups may choose to maximize their own gain at the expense of using the resource in an unsustainable manner.

Examples

- Collapse of a natural resource, e.g., a fishery
- An individual's time as a limited resource

Ways out

Education of those who use a commons can help increase understanding of how individual actions impact the resource as a whole. In addition, creating a feedback link from the resource directly back to individuals using a particular section of the resource can help people see the impact they have.

As a tool for prevention

One method to prevent the resource from depleting is to regulate use of the commons in a way that is enforceable. In some situations, users of a commons choose to regulate themselves.

Questions to ask

- What is the commons (limited resource) being used?
- What individuals/groups are using the commons?
- How can we create structures to "divide" a resource in a way that people receive feedback about how they directly impact a particular section of the resource?
- What regulations might we establish to assure that the resource doesn't run out over time?

