

A Community Chest by Simon Pelletier

A chest is place we store something of value that we want to protect. Either from those who may steal it or from the damage that could occur to it.

A community is a grouping of people, either geographically or by some shared characteristic.

A community chest is a safe place to share communal resources. But how exactly are these resources shared? And what exactly is stored away in the chest?

Through social connection humans typically end up sharing resources and information. In all cultures there are methods by which this sharing occurs. It may be structured around a hierarchical system, perhaps through a market system or it could be a kin system.

In our culture we tend to follow the markets lead. We trade goods by trading dollars. This is efficient in terms of trade, but the focus on dollars can remove us from the intangibles that exist in other ways of doing things. Sometimes one of the trading partners will make a trade that benefits one more than the other. And there is an implicit expectation of reciprocity. This reciprocity is an intangible.

The trading of labour for dollars and products for dollars also means that sharing of group resources is done through dollars as well. This is distinct from sharing actual resources. I can give someone ten dollars from the community chest or I can make a meal for that person. I would argue that there is a more powerful social connection binding those who made the meal and those whom received and ate that meal than those who gave dollars and received dollars. There seems to be a fundamental stripping of humanity, social connection, that occurs from this dollarization of all human interaction.

Another wrinkle in the puzzle that is shared resources is the concept of property and property rights. In our modern Canadian culture there are strong property rights at play. We expect to be able to own things, material objects, land, information, and for the government of Canada to help protect those rights we have over them. In many other cultures, in time and space, there has been a markedly different way of interfacing with these items.

Property is not an item, but the way in which humans relate between themselves about

things in the world. We tend to take it for granted that I can have something that is mine and not yours. However it has been a common trend in many other cultures to have items that aren't considered to be owned by individuals but by the group as a whole. Those whom don't understand this concept would think that people of the group were giving away a prized possession on a whim but actually they never owned it to begin with. It could have been a useful tool that the whole community owned and individuals passed it around the community to those who needed it most. Perhaps a chainsaw. Or a tractor. Or a bow.

In some cultures there isn't even a concept of owning objects. Those who found, or made, material objects that were useful used them when needed, or shared them to others when they had more than was required for themselves. A fluid concept of ownership that allows for the interconnected nature of humans to function in a rather organic way. Something that can happen easily in a small group of humans but perhaps breaks down in a larger group as city forms.