

## Book Review

Bollier, D., 2010. *This Land is Our Land: The Fight to Reclaim the Commons (DVD)*, The Media Education Foundation.

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*This Land is Our Land* is a 46-minute documentary, written by David Bollier and Jeremy Earp, in which Bollier himself – one of the best known scholars and activists of the global movement to reclaim the commons – narrates the historical development of the process that has led to the market enclosure of a large part of the world common resources, from public lands to freshwater, airwaves, forests, oceans, genetic resources, knowledge and so on, and discusses its contemporary implications. The film takes the lead from the American historical and societal context to move on to a global perspective. It presents the extent to which free market ideology has translated itself into a generalised dominance of commercial interests over collective interests: the extension of copyright, patent and trademark law that restricts access to knowledge and diffusion of the benefits from innovation; extreme privatization even in fields such as education, health, water provision; huge profits made by private corporations (oil companies first of all) through the free exploitation of natural resources in public lands, and by private broadcasters thanks to free licenses conceded by governments over airwaves under a quickly forgotten condition that their use served the public interest.

Some countries have certainly gone further along this path than others, but the film concentrates on the extremes reached in the US and other serious cases at the international and global level. A 1952 TV interview in which the inventor of the polio vaccine Jonas Salk dismisses as absurd the idea that the vaccine could be privately patented, contrasted with the attempt by 39 major multinational pharmaceutical companies in 2001 to stop the South African government from allowing production and import of generic drugs for the treatment of HIV is perhaps the most striking example. Pharmaceutical companies are said in the film to have won, whereas they were actually forced to back down following a remarkable outcry from the international community and the European Parliament.

The fact that the film forgets to mention success cases – to stick to the HIV drugs example, the dramatic drop in price obtained in developing countries over the last decade thanks to competition from generic producers and exemptions from patent laws granted by several governments and the WTO – does not subtract from the severity of the issue: what in the 1950s appeared immediately obvious (public domain vaccines in the face of a severe health emergency) has today become the object of endless international controversies, negotiations and retaliations that have slowed down access to available life saving treatments for millions of people with dramatic consequences.

Following systems theorist Richard Buckminster Fuller (“You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete”), the film goes beyond reporting a list of severe misfunctionings, and offers an interesting account of the ongoing creation of robust commons aimed at sharing and managing resources and knowledge according to commonly shared norms, rather than in response to monetary incentives: community based initiatives to reclaim the commons and conserve natural resources; movements seeking to foster open business models, open science and open educational resources; campaigns to relocalise the economy and rebuild local food systems, and so on.

Offering an accessible and captivating presentation of these concepts and realities, this documentary can also represent a useful educational tool for teachers in undergraduate courses of environmental economics and natural resources management.