

# FIFTY-ONE WAYS TO SPARK A COMMONS REVOLUTION<sup>1</sup>

Jay Walljasper<sup>©</sup>

## Personal Life

- (1) Challenge the myth that all problems have private, individual solutions.
- (2) Notice how many of life's pleasures exist outside the marketplace—gardening, fishing, conversing, playing music, playing ball, making love, watching sunsets, and much more.
- (3) Take time to enjoy what the commons offers. As the radical Brazilian educator Paulo Freire said, "We are bigger than our schedules."
- (4) Introduce the children in your life to the commons. Let them see you enjoying it, and working with others to sustain it.
- (5) Keep in mind that security and satisfaction are more easily acquired from friends than from money.
- (6) Become a mentor—officially or informally—to people of all ages. Be prepared to learn as much as you teach.
- (7) Think about living cooperatively with housemates.
- (8) Don't be afraid to ask for help.
- (9) Have some fun. The best reason to restore the commons is to enrich our lives.

## Community Life

- (10) Put on a potluck. Throw a block party. Form a community choir, slow-food club, Friday night poker game, May Day festival, or any other excuse for socializing.
- (11) Walk, bike, or take transit when you can. It's good for the environment, and for you. You meet very few people while driving your car.
- (12) Treat commons spaces as if you own them (which, actually, you do). Keep an eye on the place. Tidy things up. Report problems or repair things yourself. Initiate improvement campaigns.
- (13) Offer a smile or greeting to people you pass. The commons begins with connecting—even in brief, spontaneous ways.
- (14) Get out of the house and spend some time on the stoop, the front yard, the street—anywhere you can join the river of life.
- (15) Create or designate a "town square" for your neighborhood—a park, playground, vacant lot, community center, coffee shop, or even a street corner—anywhere folks naturally want to gather.
- (16) Lobby for more public benches, water fountains, plazas, parks, sidewalks, bike trails, playgrounds, and other crucial commons infrastructure.
- (17) Conduct an inventory of local commons. Publicize your findings and suggest ways to celebrate and improve these community assets.
- (18) Organize your neighbors to stop crime and to defuse fear of crime, which can dampen community spirits more than crime itself.
- (19) Remember streets belong to people, not just automobiles. Drive cautiously and push for traffic calming and other improvements that remind motorists they are not kings of the road.

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<sup>1</sup> Yes! Magazine, October 21, 2010

## Money & the Economy

- (20) Buy from local, independent businesses when possible. ([amiba.net](http://amiba.net), [livingeconomies.org](http://livingeconomies.org)).
- (21) Before buying something online, see if you can find it or order it locally. That keeps some of your money in the community.
- (22) Investigate how many things you now pay for you could get in more cooperative ways—check out DVDs at the library, quit the health club and form a morning jogging club, etc.
- (23) Start a neighborhood exchange to share everything from lawn mowers to child care and home repairs to vehicles.
- (24) Barter. Trade your skill in baking pies with someone who will fix your computer.
- (25) Look into creating a Time Dollars system ([timebanks.org](http://timebanks.org)) or locally-based currency. ([smallisbeautiful.org](http://smallisbeautiful.org)).
- (26) Organize a common security club. You are not on your own when it comes to economic woes. ([commonsecurityclubs.org](http://commonsecurityclubs.org))
- (27) Watch where your money goes. How do the businesses you patronize harm or help the commons?
- (28) Purchase fair trade, organic, and locally made goods from small producers as much as you can.

## Social Change

- (29) Oppose cutbacks in public assets like transit, schools, libraries, parks, social services, police and fire, and arts programs.
- (30) Support activists around the globe working for debt relief, environmental protection, human rights, worker rights, sustainable development, rights of indigenous people, and action on climate change.
- (31) Take every opportunity to talk with elected officials and local activists about the importance of protecting the commons. Do the same with citizens groups, nonprofit organizations, labor unions, professional societies, and business leaders.
- (32) Protest private profit from products created with research paid for by taxpayers. Demand that publicly-funded research data be available to everyone on the Internet.
- (33) Write letters to the editor about the commons, post on local websites, call in to talk radio, tell your friends.
- (34) Learn from everywhere. What can Germany teach us about health care? India about wellness? Africa about community solidarity? Indigenous nations about the commons itself? What bright ideas can we borrow from a nearby neighborhood or town?

## Environment

- (35) Pick up litter that is not yours.
- (36) Avoid bottled water. Tap water is generally safer. If you have concerns about your water supply, get a filter, then pressure local officials to clean it up.
- (37) Become a guerrilla gardener, planting flowers and vegetables on neglected land in your neighborhood.
- (38) Organize a community garden ([communitygarden.org](http://communitygarden.org)) or local farmers market.
- (39) Roll up your sleeves to restore a creek, wetland, woods, or grassland, or beautify a vacant lot.

- (40) Remember that everything that goes down your drain, on your lawn, in your garbage, or into your storm sewer eventually winds up in our water or air.
- (41) Seek new ways to use less energy and create less waste at home and work.
- (42) Form a study group to explore what can be done to promote sustainability in your community.
- (43) Purchase goods—beer to clothing to hardware—made as close to home as possible. Shipping goods long distances stresses the environment.

### **Information & Culture**

- (44) Patronize and support your public library.
- (45) Demand that schoolchildren not become a captive audience for marketing campaigns.
- (46) Contribute your knowledge to online commons such as Wikipedia, open education projects, and open-access journals. Form your own online community to explore commons issues.
- (47) Use Creative Commons licenses for your own writing, music, videos, and other creative pursuits.
- (48) Conceive a public art project for your community.

### **Commons Consciousness**

- (49) Think of yourself as a commoner and share your enthusiasm. Raise the subject in conversation, art, professional circles, and organizations with which you are involved.
- (50) Launch a commons discussion group or book club with your neighbors and colleagues, or at your church, synagogue, or temple. ([onthecommons.org](http://onthecommons.org))
- (51) Spread some hope around. Explain how commons-based solutions can remedy today's pressing problems.