

THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER SEVEN

Meadows, Forests, Fishing Grounds

Chapter Seven of The Pasture Was Never Empty

Ammanuel Santa Anna

Santa Anna, A. (2026). Meadows, Forests, Fishing Grounds. In The Pasture Was Never Empty (ch. 7). Luminous Prosperity Inc. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23989534
Luminous Library Licence 1.0 · business.hautelumiere.life/library/the-pasture-was-never-empty

THE LICENCE

Meadows, Forests, Fishing Grounds
Chapter Seven of The Pasture Was Never Empty

The Pasture Was Never Empty · Chapter Seven. The Haute Lumière edition, 2026. © 2026 Ammanuel Santa Anna.

Released under the Luminous Library Licence 1.0 (hautelumiere.life/library-licence): free to read, share, quote, translate and teach, non-commercially, for ever. The Author keeps every other right, including every commercial right.

Published by Luminous Prosperity Inc. for Haute Lumière. Author ORCID 0009-0008-3244-0306.

DOI 10.5281/zenodo.23989534 · this record's page: business.hautelumiere.life/library/the-pasture-was-never-empty/07-meadows-forests-fishing-grounds/

Please cite as: Santa Anna, A. (2026). Meadows, Forests, Fishing Grounds. In The Pasture Was Never Empty (ch. 7). Luminous Prosperity Inc. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23989534

Chapter Seven of The Pasture Was Never Empty. The whole book, with every chapter, is at business.hautelumiere.life/library/the-pasture-was-never-empty (DOI https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23989523).

A NOTE BEFORE YOU READ

This work is offered for education and leadership development. It is not legal, financial, accounting, investment, medical or psychological advice; take the advice of a qualified professional who knows your circumstances. Companies and events are described from the public record as the author understands it; characterisations are the author's analysis. Examples are illustrative, and no particular outcome is promised to any reader.

ABSTRACT

A leader with a cloud budget to govern may reasonably ask what a Swiss alp has to teach. The question deserves a straight answer before this chapter spends four thousand words on meadows, forests and fishing grounds. The answer is that the cases are where the principles came from, and a principle read without its cases is a slogan. Ostrom did not invent the eight; she read them off arrangements that ordinary people had built and kept working, some of them for longer than most nations have existed. Each case carries details that the list cannot hold: what the rule actually said, who wrote it, what happened when someone broke it, and what the place was like that made the rule fit. Those details are where the finer points of implementation live. They are also where the limits live, and a leader who knows a case well knows what not to copy from it.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Meadows, Forests, Fishing Grounds



Meadows, Forests, Fishing Grounds

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER SEVEN

Why read old cases at all

A leader with a cloud budget to govern may reasonably ask what a Swiss alp has to teach. The question deserves a straight answer before this chapter spends four thousand words on meadows, forests and fishing grounds.

The answer is that the cases are where the principles came from, and a principle read without its cases is a slogan. Ostrom did not invent the eight; she read them off arrangements that ordinary people had built and kept working, some of them for longer than most nations have existed. Each case carries details that the list cannot hold: what the rule actually said, who wrote it, what happened when someone broke it, and what the place was like that made the rule fit. Those details are where the finer points of implementation live. They are also where the limits live, and a leader who knows a case well knows what not to copy from it.

Santa Anna's *Ecstatic Economics* sets the standard this chapter tries to meet:

> *The test of any economic philosophy is not how beautifully it can be articulated but how it shows up in the design of a workplace, the structure of an enterprise, the architecture of a commons, and the felt experience of the people who inhabit these structures every day.*[48]

The claim of the chapter is this: each long-lived commons solved the same four problems, of membrane, sense, reflex and repair, in a form that fitted its own resource, and the form is what a reader must translate, not copy. Four cases follow, then a comparison that did not end well, then a method for reading any case, including one's own.



An alp above the Visp valley

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER SEVEN

An alp above the Visp valley

Törbel is a village in the Swiss canton of Valais, on a steep slope above the valley of the Vispa. Its families have long held their vineyards, gardens, grain fields and hay meadows privately, and their high summer pastures, forests and waste lands in common. The anthropologist Robert McC. Netting lived there and studied its records, and in 1976 he published "What Alpine Peasants Have in Common" in the journal *Human Ecology*.[49] Ostrom built one of her principal cases on his work.

The rule that everyone remembers is the winter rule. No citizen, as Netting and Ostrom report it, may send more cows to the summer alp than he can feed through the winter on hay from his own land. It is a remarkable piece of design, and it repays a slow reading. It ties the use of the commons (summer grazing) to a private resource each household holds and can see (its own winter hay), so that each household's share of the common grass is limited by something it cannot fake. It needs no central allocation and no annual negotiation. And it is self-monitoring: a family that has sent too many cows up will be visibly short of hay by February.

On the date of the village's governing articles, care is needed. Ostrom, following Netting, dates the articles by which Törbel's residents formally organised the use of the alp and the other commons to 1483. The *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz*, the standard Swiss historical dictionary, gives other dates for the village's institutions: a farmers' association recorded in 1463 and an ordinance for the alp and common land in 1507.[50] The honest summary is that Törbel's written rules for its commons are attested from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, and that the arrangement they describe has been in use, with amendments, ever since.

Netting also asked a question that a leader should ask of every commons: why is this resource held in common at all, when the village's other land is private? His answer, as Ostrom reports it, was that common tenure suited land where the value of production per unit of area was low, where use and yield were infrequent or undependable, where there was little room for improvement, where a large territory was needed for effective use, and where relatively large groups were needed to make the investments the land required. A high summer pasture meets every one of those conditions. A vineyard meets none of them.

That answer is worth carrying out of the mountains. Not everything in a firm should be held in common. A team's code repository, its on-call rota and its senior engineer's attention behave like the alp: shared use is natural, and dividing them would destroy their value. A salesperson's own client list, a writer's draft and a manager's one-to-one time behave more like the vineyard. The first act of governing a commons well is to know which of the two you are looking at.

What the case cannot show. Törbel is small, long-settled and unusually stable; its families have known each other's fathers. Its rights belonged to citizens of the village, so the arrangement is also a story about who was kept out. And Netting's evidence is historical and ethnographic, which is to say it shows a commons that lasted, not an experiment that tested why.

Three villages and their mountains

The second case is Japanese. During the Tokugawa period, from the early seventeenth century to the middle of the nineteenth, many Japanese villages held large areas of forest and mountain meadow in common. The villagers drew from them fodder, thatch, firewood, timber and fertiliser, and the land was essential to farming in the valleys below. Margaret McKean studied the records of three such villages, Hirano,

Nagaike and Yamanaka, and her account, summarised in Ostrom's book and set out at greater length in McKean's 1992 article "Success on the Commons" in the *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, is one of the clearest pictures of a commons governed by detailed rules over a long time.[51]

What strikes a reader first is how much was written down. The villages set the days on which the commons opened for particular harvests, how many people each household could send, what tools they could carry, and how much they could take. Some products were gathered by the whole village working together and then divided. Households took turns in the work of maintaining the commons, and took turns in watching it.

What strikes a reader second is the watching. The villages appointed people whose job was to patrol the commons, often as a duty that households took in turn. Patrols caught people taking more than their share or entering on the wrong day. The response was graduated. A first offender might lose what he had taken or the tool he had taken it with, or pay a fine; repeated or serious offences brought heavier penalties, and in the last resort exclusion. McKean's reading, which Ostrom follows, is that the sanctions were mostly small, and that their main work was to make an offence known: the information did the governing, and the fine was the receipt.

Santa Anna's book draws the moral that the Japanese records illustrate, in a sentence about how this kind of watching differs from the other kind:

> *Trust, but verify. Not through surveillance and punishment, but through transparent, community-embedded observation.*[52]

The Japanese case adds one more thing the alp does not show so clearly: rotation of duty as a form of fairness. When every household takes its turn at the patrol and at the work, nobody becomes the permanent watcher, resented or feared, and everybody learns what the commons looks like from the watcher's side. A team that rotates the role of reviewing its shared spending, or of answering the support queue, borrows this directly.

What the case cannot show. These were hierarchical villages in a hierarchical society, and the commons rules sat inside a political order that nobody would choose today. McKean's evidence is documentary, from villages whose records survived, which is itself a kind of selection: a village whose commons collapsed may have kept fewer records. And the scale is small. A rule that works when every offender is a neighbour may not work when offenders are strangers.



A fishing ground off Alanya

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER SEVEN

A fishing ground off Alanya

The third case is younger and has the advantage of having been watched while it was built. Alanya is a town on the Mediterranean coast of Turkey. In the early 1970s its inshore fishery was in trouble: boats competed for the best spots, quarrels broke out over nets set in each other's way, and the cost of competing for position was eating into what fishing paid. Fikret Berkes studied the fishery in the following decade, and his 1986 article in *Marine Policy*, "Local-level management and the commons problem", compared it with

several other Turkish coastal fisheries.[53] Ostrom opens *Governing the Commons* with the Alanya case, and her summary of Berkes is the account most readers know.

As Ostrom summarises Berkes, the Alanya fishers worked out their arrangement by trial and error over about a decade. Each September a list was made of the fishers eligible to fish, whether or not they belonged to the local cooperative. The fishing area was divided into named locations, spaced so that the nets set at one would not block the fish from the next. The locations were allocated by lot. Then, through the season, each fisher moved each day to the next location along the coast, eastward in the first part of the season and westward in the second, so that every eligible fisher had an equal chance at the best spots as the fish migrated. The list of locations and the rules were written down and lodged with local authorities, and the arrangement was recognised by them.

Read slowly, the design solves every problem the loops in Chapter 4 describe, in a form that fits a migrating fish:

- Membrane. The September list says who is in. The named locations say what the resource is.
- Sense. Monitoring is free. A fisher assigned a good spot will be there at dawn, and will see anyone who has taken it; the person with the strongest interest in noticing a breach is the person standing at the place where it would happen.
- Reflex. A breach is visible and personal, and the response begins with the community's own pressure.
- Repair. Disputes are settled first among the fishers themselves; the rules, being written and simple, make most of them easy to settle.
- Proportion and fairness. Rotation turns a lottery of places into equality over a season. Nobody owns the best spot; everyone gets it in turn.

Santa Anna's book, writing about the principles in general, names what the Alanya fishers had built for themselves:

> *community self-governance of shared resources, based on trust, reciprocity, and the direct participation of the people whose lives depend on the resource's health.*[52]

What the case cannot show. Alanya is one small fishery, in one decade, with a particular fish and a particular coast. Rotation works because the best locations change predictably with the season; a resource whose best parts never move would need another rule. And the case is reported, at its most widely read, through Ostrom's summary of Berkes's article. A reader planning to borrow its design should read Berkes.



The canal diggers of Ilocos

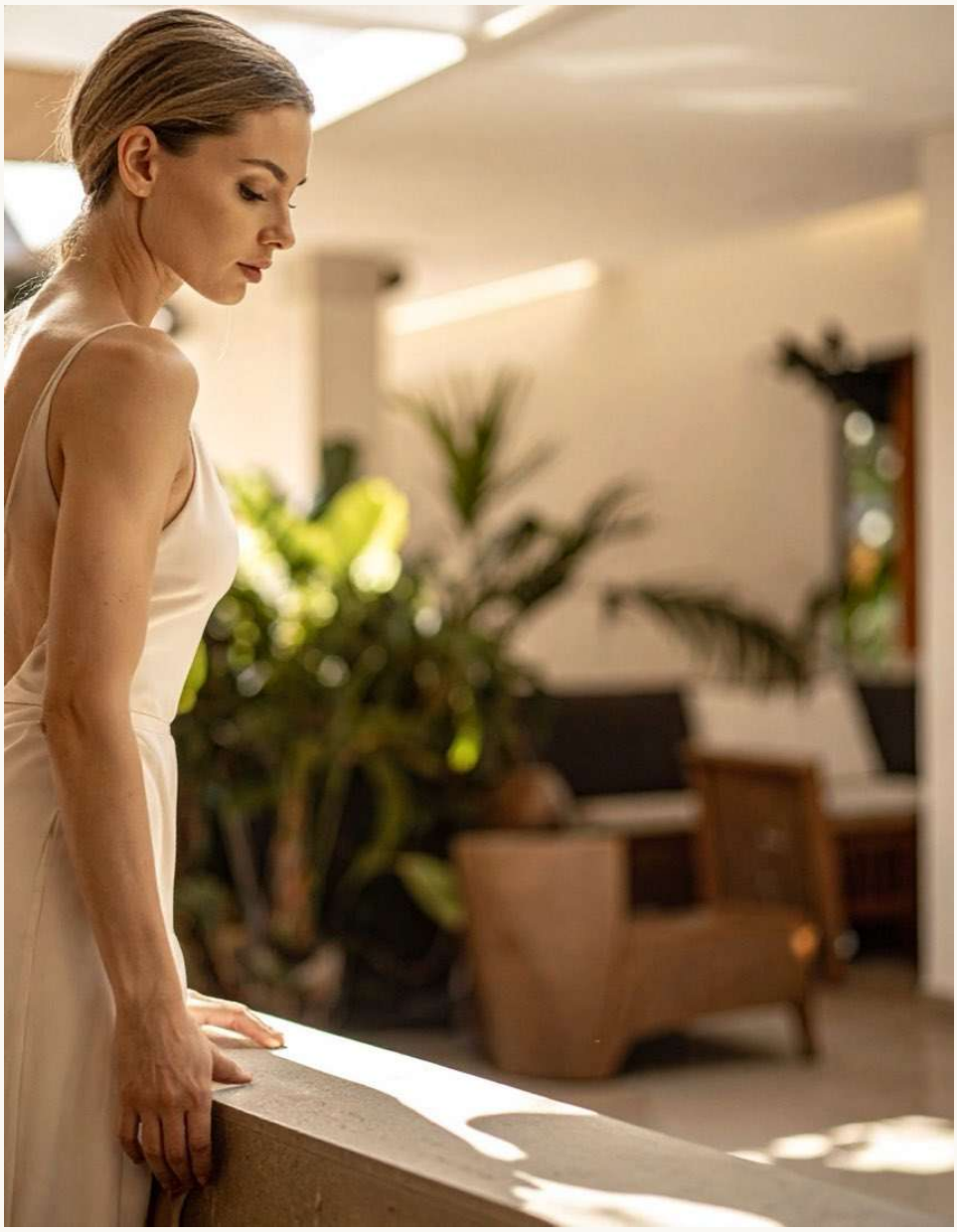
HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER SEVEN

The canal diggers of Ilocos

The fourth case is the shortest here, because the reader has met it twice already. The *zanjeras* of the Ilocos region in the northern Philippines are irrigation societies whose members build and maintain diversion dams and canals, often of bamboo, sticks and stones that rivers wash away in the rainy season and members rebuild. The case comes to Ostrom chiefly through Robert Siy's study of them, published in Manila in 1982.[54] Membership carries shares, and shares carry both a right to irrigated land and water and a duty of labour and materials in proportion. A member with more shares gives more days to the dam.

The *zanjera* is the clearest instance anywhere of principle 2B, proportion between what each takes and what each gives, made into the structure of an institution rather than an occasional correction. It also shows how much labour a commons can call on when the proportion is felt to be fair: rebuilding a dam after every season of floods is heavy work, and it is done.

What the case cannot show. Its evidence comes chiefly from one study, reported through Ostrom; its labour demands are heavy in a way that suits a farming society and would not transfer to a firm without translation. The translation is the useful part. In a firm the labour is maintenance, documentation, mentoring and review, the work nobody is paid separately to do, and the *zanjera* says it should rise with what each person draws from the commons.



A comparison that did not end well

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER SEVEN

A comparison that did not end well

Ostrom gave a full chapter of *Governing the Commons* to failures and fragile cases, and it is the chapter readers skip. It should be read first. The successes are selected for having lasted; only the failures show what was missing.

Berkes's own design made the point. He did not study Alanya alone. He compared it with other Turkish coastal fisheries, and not all of them had arrived at working local arrangements. Where fishers had no agreed list, no allocation of places and no recognised rules, the problems Alanya had solved remained, and

in some cases grew: more effort for the same catch, quarrels without a place to settle them, and outsiders who could not be kept out. The comparison is what makes Alanya informative. A single success could be luck; a success beside failures in the same country, with the same fish and similar boats, points to the arrangement.

Ostrom drew a general lesson from her failures that every leader should hold. The cases that broke down tended to lack several principles at once, and especially to lack the capacity to change their own rules, the ability to keep outsiders out, or the protection of an outside authority that would recognise and back the local arrangement. A commons whose users can make rules but cannot enforce them against people outside the group, or cannot get the state to recognise them, is fragile in a way that no amount of internal goodwill can repair.

Santa Anna's book offers the counterweight a reader needs after a chapter of admiring cases:

> *The commons revival is not a nostalgic return to pre-modern arrangements.*[48]

The cases are not a museum to visit and copy. They are evidence about what any group needs, gathered in places where the evidence happened to survive.

How to read a case, including your own

The four cases share a pattern, and the pattern is the method. Each case solved the same problems in its own way:

	TÖRBEL	THE JAPANESE VILLAGES	ALANYA	THE ZANJERAS
Membrane	Citizens of the village; the alp and forests	Village households; named forests and meadows	The September list; named locations	Shareholders; the canal and its lands
Sense	Each family's own winter hay	Rotating patrols	The fisher at the spot at dawn	Members working side by side
Reflex	Village penalties under the articles	Graduated fines, confiscation, exclusion last	Community pressure first	Penalties for missed work
Repair	Village assembly	Village officials	Local settlement, written rules	The society's own meeting
Proportion	Cows limited by private hay	Work and watch in turn	Equal chances by rotation	Labour in proportion to shares

The useful question is never *which of these should we copy?* It is *what is our equivalent of the winter hay?* What private, visible thing could limit each person's draw on the shared thing? What is our September list? Who

is standing at the spot at dawn? What would rotation look like here? The answers are local, which is principle 2A, and they are the users' to find, which is principle 3.

The Luminous 100's reading of systems thinking supplies the question to bring to any case, including one's own:

> *Where are the virtuous cycles already alive in this system?*[55]

Each of the four cases is, among other things, an answer to that question asked of a particular place. A leader reading them should come away less with rules than with a sharper eye for the loops already working in the commons in front of them.

The sibling volumes of this lineage read other old arrangements with the same eye: the gift economies in the volume on gift and reciprocity, and the long-lived, purpose-held firms in the volume on patient capital.

The rule about the cows and the hay is five hundred years old, give or take a generation. Every February since, someone in Törbel has walked into a barn and looked at what was left.



The Tool: The Case Reading Card

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE PASTURE WAS NEVER EMPTY · CHAPTER SEVEN

The Tool: The Case Reading Card

A forty-five-minute exercise for reading any commons case, a historical one, a colleague's, or your own. Use it when you are tempted to copy an arrangement that worked somewhere else, and before you write a charter. Fill one card per case.

Part A · The resource (10 minutes).

What is shared?

Netting's five questions: Is the value per unit low or high? Is use frequent or occasional, dependable or not? Is there room to improve it? Does it need a large area or a large group to use well? Does it need investment that only a group can make? (A resource that answers *low, occasional, little, yes, yes* is a natural commons; one that answers the opposite may be better divided.)

Does the resource move or change through the year (like Alanya's fish), or stay put (like Törbel's alp)?

Part B · The four solutions (15 minutes). For the case, write how it solves each:

PROBLEM	HOW THIS CASE SOLVES IT	OUR EQUIVALENT, IF ANY
Membrane: who is in, what is included, where is the door?		
Sense: who notices overuse, at what cost, how fast?		
Reflex: what is the first response, and what follows?		
Repair: where are disputes settled, how fast?		
Proportion: what limits each person's draw, and what does each give back?		
Learning: how are rules changed, and by whom?		

Part C · What the case cannot show (10 minutes). Write at least three sentences:

- Why might this case have survived for reasons other than its rules? (Size, stability, culture, selection.)
- Who did the arrangement exclude, and what did that cost them?
- What is the evidence: a study, a summary of a study, a story, a memory?

Part D · The translation (10 minutes). Complete these sentences:

Our equivalent of the winter hay (a private, visible limit on each person's draw) is

Our equivalent of the September list (who is in this season) is

Our equivalent of the fisher at dawn (the person most interested in noticing) is

The one thing from this case we will try, at the smallest scale, for four weeks, is

Keep the cards with the charter. Chapter 8 uses them in its third week.

References

1. Santa Anna, A. *Ecstatic Economics*. Developmental Canon, Luminous Prosperity Inc., 2026, "The Commons Revival: Shared Stewardship of Shared Wealth," and the chapter's opening epigraph.
2. Netting, R. McC. (1976). What alpine peasants have in common: Observations on communal tenure in a Swiss village. *Human Ecology*, 4(2), 135–146. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01531217. Historical and ethnographic; it shows a commons that lasted and argues why common tenure suits alpine land, without a controlled comparison. Netting's five conditions are given here as Ostrom reports them in *Governing the Commons*, chapter 3.
3. *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz*, "Törbel," https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/articles/002818 (read 19 October 2026). The 1483 date is Ostrom's, following Netting; the dictionary's dates are given here so the reader can weigh the two.
4. McKean, M. A. (1992). Success on the commons: A comparative examination of institutions for common property resource management. *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 4(3), 247–281. https://doi.org/10.1177/0951692892004003002. Documentary and comparative; it rests on village records that survived, which may favour villages whose commons did. The details of rules and patrols here follow Ostrom's summary in *Governing the Commons* (1990), chapter 3, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511807763, and are kept general for that reason.
5. Santa Anna, *Ecstatic Economics*, "The Revived Commons: Collective Stewardship of Shared Wealth."
6. Berkes, F. (1986). Local-level management and the commons problem: A comparative study of Turkish coastal fisheries. *Marine Policy*, 10(3), 215–229. https://doi.org/10.1016/0308-597X(86)90054-0. A comparative field study of a small number of fisheries; it shows which arrangements accompanied better outcomes, not that the arrangements caused them. The details of the Alanya rules here follow Ostrom's summary in *Governing the Commons*, chapter 1.
7. Siy, R. Y., Jr. (1982). *Community resource management: Lessons from the zanjera*. University of the Philippines Press. No DOI; cited as Ostrom cites it in *Governing the Commons*, chapter 3. Not read in full for this chapter.
8. Santa Anna, A. *The Luminous 100*, No. 91, "Systems Thinking / Causal Loop Diagrams (Senge)," Luminous Upgrade. Luminous Prosperity Inc.

Meadows, Forests, Fishing Grounds

Ammanuel Santa Anna · Luminous Prosperity Inc. · Haute Lumière

Set in Cormorant Garamond and Manrope.

Read the Business Library at business.hautelumiere.life/library.

Luminous Library Licence 1.0 · hautelumiere.life/library-licence

REQUEST A CONVERSATION

business.hautelumiere.life/book/?kind=gainshare

The Business Library

business.hautelumiere.life/library/

The packages

hautelumiere.life/pricing/