

# Extract from new book



**Extract from the book *Commonities* by Søren Hermansen and Tor Noerretranders, Energy Academy, 2013. First published in Danish with the title *Fælledskab* in 2011**

**From chapter nine “The children”:**

We brought it into being. We created it. It’s our own doing. The world community as it is today. We might as well get our acts together. We have no choice but to solve the problems Earth’s population is facing: energy; food; population growth; the climate; biodiversity; potable water.

It would be unethical not to. We will bequeath the world to our children and their children. We must make a good job of it. The shame of not doing so will be ours to bear individually. But we must solve the problems by working together. For our own sakes. And for our children’s.

The epoch of the headquarters is drawing to an end. Communities will gain ground again. The future is no longer in the hands of the royal palace, the government or the biggest corporations. It is growing everywhere, out there among the people, in the country, in small businesses, on the Internet, locally, in the communities. Nobody has a central overview anymore; everyone is doing what he can wherever he happens to be. Society is doing the job.

But who can ensure that the job is being done well? Is there really no planning, no foresight, no leviathan making sure the story has a happy ending? Who holds the key? How can we be sure the world won’t end, the communities won’t degrade, and that our children won’t all become spoilt, sloth-like screen junkies?

Who has the overview?

Nobody does. No God, no government, no capital, no professor, no business leader, no television presenter. Nobody can comprehend everything. Everyone depends on each other. Everyone must listen to each other. But how can I be certain? How can I believe that everything will work out?

Because you are here. You are the latest link in an unbroken chain of survivors, or the second latest if you have children, and the third latest if you have grandchildren. They are the descendants of an unbroken line of survivors who have been passing on life’s torch from generation to generation for billions of years. Life arose on Earth about 3.8 billion years ago. It has been living here ever since: living creatures have kept themselves alive and passed on their genes to the next generation.

### From example “The Cannery”:

It stank of vinegar and dill. The noise was deafening, and most of the people I could see from my position were wearing ear muffs and hair nets.

My first real job with real wages was at a cannery. I was sixteen and I had to put two sprigs of dill and a chilli pepper into each jar as it passed me on the line.

It was at my dad’s cannery. Well, not only his, but owned by twenty farmers from Samsø and FDB, “United Danish Cooperative Associations”. The two parties each owned a fifty per cent share and thus also shared responsibility for the running of Samsø Konservesfabrik.

The cannery was housed in a former cooperative dairy, the Trolleborg Dairy. The dairyman had tried all kinds of things to keep the place alive since the dairy had been shut down. In one attempt to keep the place alive and retain local jobs Arne Lind, the dairyman, had experimented on canning asparagus and other vegetables. The farmers supplied the produce but it was hard to find a stable market for such modest output.

A small group of farmers, including my father, spied an opportunity to develop a strong common platform where both production and sales were assured. A cooperative was one obvious model but it would not guarantee sales. With a customer as co-owner sales would be more secure and thereby ensure stable. Long-term production both on the farms and at the cannery.

So they chose to set up an Amba. With FDB as an equal partner the farmers now had guaranteed sales for the high quality vegetables they grew. To start an Amba you need half a million Danish kroner at venture capital. This is a statutory requirement and without it the Amba cannot obtain a VAT registration number. FDB agreed to put up half the sum. At the first farmer’s meeting fifteen or sixteen people expressed definite interest. Each would put up 12,500 Danish kroner but there would have to be at least 20 members, partly to ensure a robust circle of owners but also to ensure that the owners could supply the agreed quantities to FDB.

It proved difficult to rustle up the remaining members required. People felt “I know what I’ve got”. And there was a great deal at stake for the farmers who already had contracts with Københavns Grønttorv, Gartnernes Salgsforening and other professional buyers of vegetables already exported by Samsø. But others felt that an independent farmer held the strongest cards and that the market was a harsh place to be: anyone could win or lose. Samsø was also famous for its potatoes in those days, and the very early potatoes could fetch huge prices for skilful, lucky farmers who chose exactly the right day to send his produce to Copenhagen. But there was also the risk that many other farmers would be ready that day and Samsø’s

potato growers would be pitched against each other in the fight for the market. A bad thing for Samsø but great for the wholesalers, who could just sit back and wait while the farmers undercut each other.

The establishment of the Trolleborg cannery was a new opportunity to control this so-called free market. Working with FDB the farmers could agree on next year’s contracts and the prices to be charged for the produce they needed to include in next year’s field plan. This gave them peace of mind and overview, but of course it also made life a bit predictable. For the cautious this is no bad thing, but for bolder spirits it was a slightly boring approach, because there was no longer the chance of a windfall if you were first to market.

With a couple of bad years in mind the consortium finally found nineteen active farmers who wanted to join in. The last member was a gardener with faith in the idea but who didn’t initially intend to be a supplier. Per Kampe joined in simply because it was a good idea: pure idealism, and perhaps typical of the mood that persuaded the last few members required to sign up. Progress can only take place when things happen, and when everyone takes responsibility for making sure they do. It is up to the individual to decide whether a community is the appropriate model.

The Trolleborg Konservesfabrik proved to be a very good idea indeed and the nineteen active suppliers gained a reputation as far-sighted, accomplished farmers who had invested in a community and gained personally from the community they’d created. Lots of new jobs were created, and with a qualified canner as its CEO the cannery was soon one of the biggest companies on Samsø.

Many years later, in 1998, I phoned the Aarhus County Department of Technical and Environmental Services to talk to chief planning officer Vilhelm B. Michelsen. He was responsible for drawing up a regional plan that stated that there was no room for a wind farm on Samsø: having consulted the municipalities in the county, the county published a regional plan which took no account of the prospects for wind turbines on the island. On the contrary: it emphasised that the island could not sustain wind farms. The report made it sound as if the island would simply tip over because of the tall towers. And if not it would surely be blown right across the Great Belt by the mighty westerlies.

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