



Civil Commons in Practice

Comparative Cases in
Water, Health, Education, Ecology, and Governance

*Institutions that serve life before money, administration, or power—
learning, repair, and renewal in real-world contexts.*



*Comparative evidence. Critical reflection.
Toward institutions that protect life and enable shared flourishing.*

Author: Dr. Bichara Sahely

- Empirical and institutional case-study paper
- Evaluated through the Life-Coherence Dashboard
- From theory to practice, from data to life-capacity
- Learning, accountability, and repair in action

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Governance

Author: Dr. Bichara Sahely

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Function: To examine real-world institutions, policies, and commons arrangements through the Life-Coherent Peace framework and dashboard.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	4
<i>Executive Summary</i>	5
<i>1. Introduction: Why Civil Commons Need Empirical Cases</i>	6
<i>2. Method: Comparative Life-Coherence Case Analysis</i>	8
<i>3. Case 1 — Water: Paris and the Remunicipalization of Water</i>	9
3.1 Background.....	9
3.2 Life-good at stake.....	9
3.3 Money-sequence pressure	10
3.4 Civil commons mechanism	10
3.5 Life-capacity effects.....	10
3.6 Dashboard indicators	11
3.7 Failure modes	11
<i>4. Case 2 — Health: Costa Rica’s EBAIS Primary Health Care Model</i>	12
4.1 Background.....	12
4.2 Life-good at stake.....	12
4.3 Money-sequence pressure	13
4.4 Civil commons mechanism	13
4.5 Life-capacity effects.....	13

4.6 Dashboard indicators	13
4.7 Failure modes	14
5. <i>Case 3 — Education: Finland’s Comprehensive Public Education System</i>	15
5.1 Background.....	15
5.2 Life-good at stake.....	15
5.3 Money-sequence pressure	15
5.4 Civil commons mechanism	15
5.5 Dashboard indicators	16
5.6 Failure modes	16
6. <i>Case 4 — Ecology: Costa Rica’s Payments for Ecosystem Services</i>	17
6.1 Background.....	17
6.2 Life-good at stake.....	18
6.3 Money-sequence pressure	18
6.4 Civil commons mechanism	18
6.5 Life-capacity effects.....	18
6.6 Dashboard indicators	18
6.7 Failure modes	19
7. <i>Case 5 — Governance: Porto Alegre Participatory Budgeting</i>	20
7.1 Background.....	20
7.2 Life-good at stake.....	20
7.3 Money-sequence pressure	21
7.4 Civil commons mechanism	21
7.5 Life-capacity effects.....	21
7.6 Dashboard indicators	21
7.7 Failure modes	22
8. <i>Integrative Case — Te Awa Tupua / Whanganui River</i>	22
8.1 Background.....	23
8.2 Why this case matters.....	23
8.3 Life-good at stake.....	23
8.4 Civil commons mechanism	23

8.5 Dashboard indicators	23
8.6 Failure modes	24
9. <i>Cross-Case Comparison: What Makes a Civil Commons Life-Coherent?</i>	25
10. <i>Failure Modes: How Civil Commons Become Life-Blind</i>	26
10.1 Bureaucratic capture	26
10.2 Market capture	27
10.3 Elite capture	27
10.4 Data capture	27
10.5 Political reversal.....	27
10.6 Symbolic participation	27
10.7 Ecological abstraction	27
10.8 Repair failure.....	27
11. <i>Discussion: From Institutional Examples to Life-Coherent Design</i>	28
12. <i>Conclusion: Institutions That Serve Life Before Money</i>	29
<i>Appendix A. Case Analysis Template</i>	30
<i>Appendix B. Comparative Dashboard Matrix</i>	30
<i>Appendix C. Failure Modes and Safeguards</i>	31
<i>References</i>	31

Abstract

This paper develops the empirical and institutional extension of the *Life-Coherent Peace* project through comparative case studies in water, health, education, ecology, and governance. Building on the theoretical framework of Life-Coherent Peace, the tragic-choice methodology of the Life-Coherence Arbitration Protocol, and the non-reductionist Life-Coherence Dashboard, the paper asks how civil commons appear in practice and how they can be evaluated without romanticization. The central argument is that civil commons are not defined by public ownership alone, nor by service delivery alone, but by whether institutions secure means of life, expand life-capacities, prevent structural and cultural violence, protect ecological life-ground, enable participatory legitimacy, and remain accountable to repair.

The paper examines five primary cases: Paris water remunicipalization and Eau de Paris; Costa Rica's EBAIS primary health care model; Finland's comprehensive public education system;

Costa Rica's Payments for Ecosystem Services program; and Porto Alegre's participatory budgeting. It also includes Te Awa Tupua / Whanganui River as an integrative case of ecological, Indigenous, legal, and relational governance. Each case is treated as a partial, situated, imperfect approximation of life-coherent institutional design. The analysis asks: What life-good is at stake? What money-sequence or bureaucratic pressures threaten life-coherence? What civil commons mechanism has been built? What life-capacities are enabled? What risks of capture, exclusion, reversal, or reduction remain?

The paper concludes that Life-Coherent Peace does not require perfect institutions. It requires institutions that are organized to serve life before money, administration, or power; that can detect where they disable life; and that can be corrected through participation, accountability, ecological humility, and repair.

Keywords: civil commons, Life-Coherent Peace, water governance, primary health care, public education, ecological governance, participatory budgeting, Indigenous governance, structural violence, cultural violence, institutional design, repair, life-capacity

Executive Summary

Paper 1 of this sequence defined Life-Coherent Peace as the organized enablement of life-capacities across persons, communities, species, and planetary systems. It argued that peace is not mere non-war, but the social, ecological, economic, cultural, and relational organization of conditions that conserve and expand life-capacity. The framework integrates McMurtry's life-value criterion, Maturana's biology of autopoiesis and structural coupling, and Galtung's diagnosis of direct, structural, and cultural violence (Galtung, 1969, 1990, 1996; Maturana & Varela, 1980, 1992; McMurtry, 2011, 2013; Sahely, 2026a).

Paper 2 stress-tested the framework under tragic choice, asking whether life-coherent arbitration can guide judgment when genuine life-needs collide. Paper 3 developed a non-reductionist dashboard for evaluating life-coherence without reducing life to a single score. Paper 4 now turns to institutions.

Its central question is:

Are there real-world institutional arrangements that partially approximate Life-Coherent Peace?

The answer is yes—but only partially, historically, and imperfectly. The civil commons appears wherever a society organizes a means of life as shared life-support rather than as a commodity, privilege, revenue stream, or instrument of institutional self-protection. Yet no civil commons is automatically life-coherent. Public systems can become bureaucratic, humiliating, exclusionary, underfunded, captured by elites, or reversed by political change. The original *Life-Coherent Peace* manuscript is explicit that the civil commons cannot be reduced to bureaucracy: public

systems may secure life-goods, but they can also become cold, coercive, exclusionary, and self-protective if they lose relational accountability (Sahely, 2026a).

This paper therefore examines five cases as institutional experiments:

1. **Water:** Paris water remunicipalization / Eau de Paris
2. **Health:** Costa Rica's EBAIS primary health care model
3. **Education:** Finland's comprehensive public education system
4. **Ecology:** Costa Rica's Payments for Ecosystem Services program
5. **Governance:** Porto Alegre participatory budgeting

It also considers **Te Awa Tupua / Whanganui River** as an integrative case because it joins ecological life-ground, Indigenous law, legal personhood, relational identity, governance innovation, and repair.

The central claim is:

Civil commons become life-coherent not when they are merely public, efficient, or well-intentioned, but when they secure the means of life, expand life-capacities, protect ecological and cultural life-ground, enable affected communities to shape decisions, and remain accountable to repair where they disable life.

1. Introduction: Why Civil Commons Need Empirical Cases

The *Life-Coherent Peace* project begins with a theoretical dissatisfaction: modern societies may preserve order, markets, administration, and even formal peace while quietly disabling life. A society can avoid war while tolerating hunger, preventable disease, ecological contamination, educational exclusion, debt bondage, loneliness, humiliation, and cultural erasure. Life-Coherent Peace names the alternative: the organized enablement of life-capacities through relational, institutional, ecological, and cultural conditions that do not disable the life-ground of others (Sahely, 2026a).

But a framework cannot remain only conceptual. If Life-Coherent Peace is to become a practical social grammar, it must be tested against institutions. The question is not simply whether the framework is philosophically persuasive. The question is whether existing arrangements already show partial forms of life-coherent organization.

This paper therefore examines civil commons in practice.

McMurtry's concept of the civil commons refers to socially evolved institutions, infrastructures, legal arrangements, and practices that secure universal access to life-goods: water, health,

education, parks, libraries, ecological protection, social security, public knowledge, and life-protective law (McMurtry, 2013). In the *Life-Coherent Peace* framework, the civil commons reduces structural violence by ensuring that access to life necessities is not determined solely by private purchasing power. It also reduces cultural violence by affirming that persons have legitimate life-needs that society must recognize (Galtung, 1969, 1990; Sahely, 2026a).

Yet civil commons are not automatically life-coherent. Public ownership alone is not enough. Universal service alone is not enough. Good intentions are not enough. A public agency can humiliate the people it serves. A health system can treat disease while ignoring conditions that produce disease. A school system can expand enrollment while narrowing imagination. A conservation policy can protect ecosystems while dispossessing communities. A participatory process can invite people to meetings while leaving real power unchanged.

This paper therefore treats each case as a partial approximation, not a model to copy mechanically.

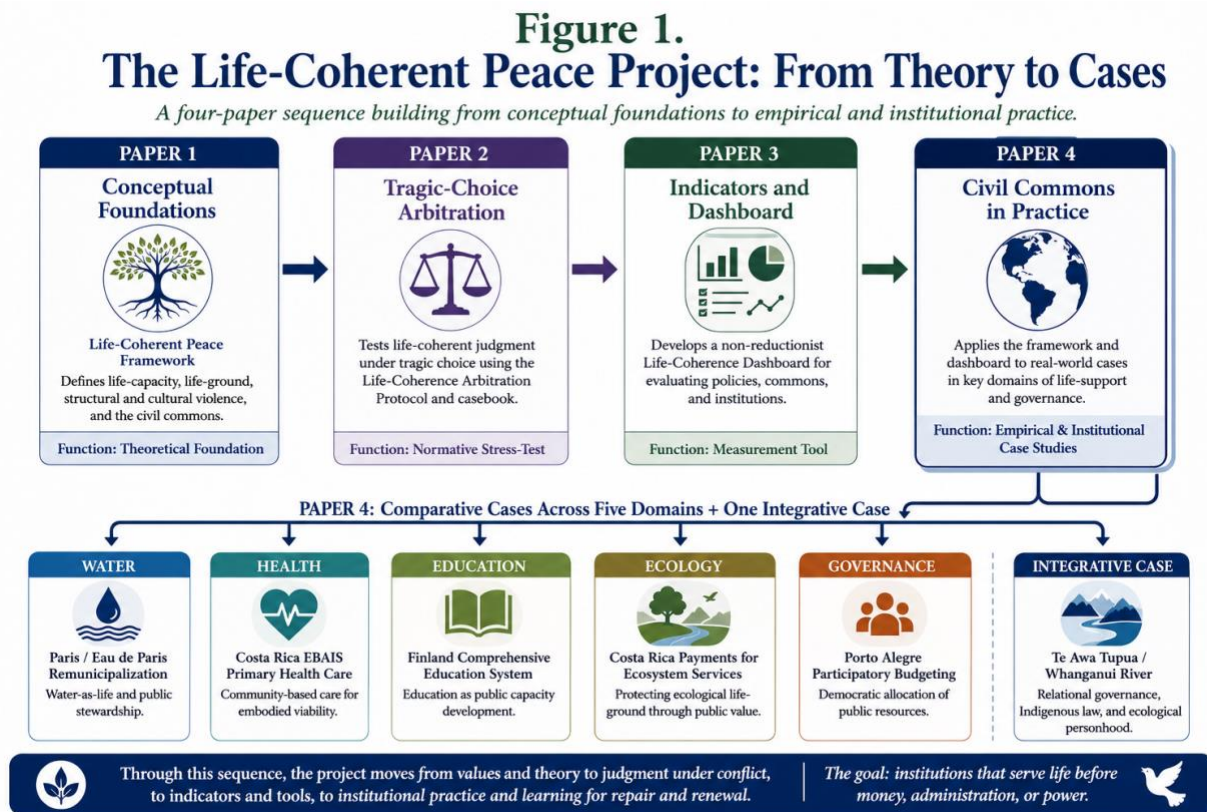


Figure 1. The Life-Coherent Peace Project: From Theory to Cases.

2. Method: Comparative Life-Coherence Case Analysis

This paper uses comparative case analysis. The purpose is not to produce a full historical or econometric evaluation of each case. The purpose is to read each case through the Life-Coherent Peace framework and ask what it reveals about institutional design.

The case analysis follows ten questions:

1. **What life-good is at stake?**
2. **What money-sequence or bureaucratic pressure threatens it?**
3. **What civil commons mechanism has been built?**
4. **Which life-capacities are enabled?**
5. **Which forms of structural or cultural violence are reduced?**
6. **Which dashboard indicators matter most?**
7. **What risks of capture, exclusion, reversal, or reduction remain?**
8. **What does the case teach about repair?**
9. **What is transferable without mechanical copying?**
10. **What is the life-coherence judgment?**

The method is deliberately non-romantic. A civil commons case may be life-coherent in one dimension and life-blind in another. It may begin as a transformative project and later become bureaucratic. It may secure universal access but fail participation. It may protect ecological value but reproduce market categories. It may expand agency for some while excluding others.

The comparative method therefore asks not “Is this a perfect model?” but:

What does this case teach us about how institutions can serve life before money, administration, or power?

Figure 2.
Comparative Case-Study Method for Life-Coherent Civil Commons
Applying a common analytic template across five domains of life-support and governance.

ANALYTIC QUESTIONS	WATER	HEALTH	EDUCATION	ECOLOGY	GOVERNANCE	INTEGRATIVE CASE
	 Paris / Eau de Paris Remunicipalization	 Costa Rica EBAIS Primary Health Care	 Finland Comprehensive Education System	 Costa Rica Payments for Ecosystem Services	 Porto Alegre Participatory Budgeting	 Te Awa Tupua / Whanganui River
1  What life-good is at stake?	Water-as-life: safe, affordable, reliable, ecologically sustained water.	Embodied viability: preventive care, treatment, and continuity.	Thought and formation: learning, imagination, discernment, agency.	Ecological life-ground: forests, water, biodiversity, climate, regeneration.	Agency and democratic voice in public resource allocation.	Ecological-cultural life-ground and relational identity of river and people.
2  What money-sequence or bureaucratic pressure threatens it?	Privatization, revenue focus, cost-cutting, infrastructure deferral.	Medicalization, fee-for-service, fragmentation, prevention underinvestment.	Marketization, testing, credentialism, inequality, defunding.	Commodification, extractive use, short-term profit, ecosystem externalization.	Elite control, debt, political cycles, opaque decision-making.	Resource extraction, development pressure, legal invisibility, colonization.
3  What civil commons mechanism has been built?	Public integrated water operator (source to tap); public accountability.	Community-based PHC teams (EBAIS); territorial, preventive, continuous care.	Public comprehensive education; equitable access; professional teachers.	Public PES program; pays for ecosystem services (carbon, water, biodiversity, scenic).	Participatory budgeting process; citizens deliberate, decide, and monitor.	Legal personhood and co-governance structures; recognition of Indigenous law and relationship.
4  Which life-capacities are enabled?	Bodily viability, health, security, dignity, daily functioning.	Health, prevention, trust, resilience, capacity to care and work.	Literacy, reasoning, creativity, self-confidence, civic participation.	Water security, biodiversity, climate resilience, livelihoods, stewardship.	Participation, voice, civic learning, collective efficacy, redistribution.	Cultural continuity, spiritual relation, ecological restoration, intergenerational responsibility.
5  Which structural or cultural violences are reduced?	Exclusion by price, unsafe water, service discontinuity, dignity violations.	Late treatment, preventable illness, geographic exclusion, stigmatization.	Educational exclusion, tracking, humiliation, cultural erasure.	Deforestation, pollution, water depletion, biodiversity loss, displacement.	Exclusion from decisions, resource bias toward elites, territorial neglect.	Cultural erasure, ecological degradation, legal denial, historical injustice.
6  Which dashboard indicators matter most?	Access, affordability, quality, reliability, leakage, watershed protection.	PHC access, prevention, chronic care, maternal-child, immunization, trust.	Learning, equity, inclusion, teacher quality, student well-being, agency.	Forest cover, water regulation, biodiversity, carbon, benefit distribution.	Participation rates, allocation equity, service coverage, follow-through.	River health, cultural practice, representation, restoration, intergenerational care.
7  What risks of capture, exclusion, reversal, or reduction remain?	Bureaucracy, underfunding, political interference, limited participation.	Workforce shortages, NCD burden, bureaucracy, measurement overload.	Performance pressure, inequality, mental health, standardization.	Payment dependency, unequal access, market reduction, leakage.	Political reversal, funding cuts, tokenism, participation fatigue.	Symbolic recognition, development override, under-resourcing.
8  What does the case teach about repair? copying?	Transparency, user voice, affordability policies, infrastructure renewal.	Community feedback, prevention investment, team support, flexibility.	Supportive environments, equity focus, curriculum review, student voice.	Adaptive design, long-term financing, monitoring, community stewardship.	Institutional protection, legalization, stable funding, responsive implementation.	Restoration funding, iwi authority, co-governance, legal enforcement.
9  What is the life-coherence judgment?	Water as public trust; integrated management and accountability.	Primary care close to people; prevention before crisis.	Public formation of capacity; trust in teachers and communities.	Value ecological functions publicly; align incentives with regeneration.	People can decide public priorities; require institutional support.	Recognize living relations; empower relational governance; repair historical harm.
10  Responal life-efdgence?	Partial Life-Coherence ★★★★☆ Strong public control, needs deeper participation.	Partial Life-Coherence ★★★★☆ Strong prevention model; watch capacity and burdens.	Partial Life-Coherence ★★★★☆ Strong equity tradition; monitor emerging pressures.	Partial Life-Coherence ★★★★☆ Innovative but vulnerable to commodification.	Partial Life-Coherence ★★★★☆ Transformative potential; fragile political support.	Emerging Life-Coherence ★★★★☆ Transformative legal shift; implementation critical.

Figure 2. Comparative Case-Study Method for Life-Coherent Civil Commons.

3. Case 1 — Water: Paris and the Remunicipalization of Water

3.1 Background

Paris provides a strong water commons case because it deliberately reversed private delegation and returned water management to a public operator. Since January 1, 2010, Eau de Paris has been responsible for the full chain of drinking-water service in Paris, including production, transport, distribution, monitoring, and public access infrastructure (Eau de Paris, n.d.-a; Ville de Paris, 2025). Eau de Paris presents the remunicipalization as a political and management decision grounded in the claim that water is an essential good that should be managed by public authorities (Eau de Paris, n.d.-b).

3.2 Life-good at stake

The life-good is water-as-life: safe, affordable, reliable, ecologically sustained drinking water. Water is not merely a commodity or municipal utility. It is a condition of biological viability, hygiene, care, food preparation, dignity, and social participation.

Through the Life-Coherent Peace lens, the key question is:

Does the water system secure water as a universal means of life, or does it subordinate water to revenue, contracts, and administrative convenience?

3.3 Money-sequence pressure

Water systems are vulnerable to money-sequence capture when water becomes primarily a revenue stream, when infrastructure investment is subordinated to shareholder return, when affordability is treated as a customer problem, or when quality and watershed protection are treated as costs rather than life-protection duties.

Remunicipalization does not automatically eliminate these pressures. Public utilities can also become bureaucratic, underfunded, opaque, politically manipulated, or inattentive to marginalized users. But Paris is significant because the public rationale explicitly named water as an essential good and sought to integrate the water service under a public operator (Eau de Paris, n.d.-b).

3.4 Civil commons mechanism

The civil commons mechanism is public integration of the water cycle from source to tap. Eau de Paris describes itself as a public company involved at every stage of the water cycle and committed to protecting water, biodiversity, climate, resources, and heritage; it also frames water as a precious common good to be preserved for present and future generations (Eau de Paris, n.d.-a).

This matters because a civil commons is not merely a service provider. It is an institution that treats a means of life as a shared social responsibility.

3.5 Life-capacity effects

A life-coherent water system enables:

- bodily viability through hydration and sanitation;
- health through quality control and disease prevention;
- felt being through reduced fear of exclusion;
- action through reliable access that supports work, education, care, and household life;
- relational legitimacy when users are treated as participants in a shared life-support system rather than only customers;
- ecological viability when source protection and watershed responsibility are built into governance.

3.6 Dashboard indicators

Dashboard domain	Water indicators
Basic life necessities	Safe water access; affordability; reliability; lifeline provision
Health	Water quality; waterborne illness; hygiene access
Civil commons	Public accountability; reinvestment; transparency
Ecological life-ground	Watershed protection; leakage; extraction rates; biodiversity protection
Value sequence	Whether finance serves water-as-life or water serves revenue
Relational legitimacy	User dignity, grievance access, inclusion of vulnerable households

3.7 Failure modes

Paris remains a partial case, not a perfect model. Public management may still fail if it becomes centralized without participation, if affordability gaps remain hidden, if marginalized users are not represented, if ecological concerns are subordinated to urban demand, or if the public operator becomes self-protective.

The transferable lesson is not “public equals life-coherent.” The lesson is:

A water commons becomes life-coherent when public authority, ecological stewardship, universal access, transparency, affordability, and repair are institutionally linked.

Figure 3.
Water Commons Case: Paris / Eau de Paris
From Water-as-Revenue to Water-as-Life: Public Stewardship for a Universal Right



Figure 3. Water Commons Case: Paris / Eau de Paris.

4. Case 2 — Health: Costa Rica’s EBAIS Primary Health Care Model

4.1 Background

Costa Rica’s EBAIS model is a strong health commons case because it organizes care around community-based, multiprofessional primary health care teams. WHO describes Costa Rica’s integrated primary health care model as based on *Equipos Básicos de Atención Integral de Salud* (EBAIS), which have been in place since the 1990s. These teams provide most primary care services, including public health, preventive, and curative services; they are integrated into communities, monitor patients’ health, and receive support from more experienced professionals when needed (World Health Organization, 2024).

4.2 Life-good at stake

The life-good is embodied viability: the capacity of persons and communities to remain healthy, prevent breakdown, receive care, and recover when harmed.

The life-coherent question is:

Does the health system protect embodied viability before breakdown, or does it wait until disease becomes acute, billable, or catastrophic?

4.3 Money-sequence pressure

Health systems are vulnerable to life-blindness when illness becomes a revenue source, when care is fragmented into procedures, when prevention is underfunded, when social determinants are externalized, or when access depends on purchasing power. The main *Life-Coherent Peace* paper argues that a life-blind health system treats disease primarily as individual biological malfunction to be repaired after breakdown, whereas a life-coherent system shifts toward prevention, care, community, ecological protection, and civil commons conditions that sustain life before disease appears (Sahely, 2026a).

4.4 Civil commons mechanism

The EBAIS mechanism is territorial, community-based primary care. Its life-coherent significance lies in three features:

1. **Proximity:** care is located close to daily life.
2. **Prevention:** public health and preventive services are central, not peripheral.
3. **Continuity:** teams monitor populations over time rather than waiting for episodic crises.

These features approximate a civil commons because they treat health not merely as medical repair, but as an ongoing social and biological condition.

4.5 Life-capacity effects

A community-based primary care system can enable:

- bodily viability through prevention and early care;
- thought and sense-making through health education;
- felt being through trust and continuity;
- action through improved capacity to work, care, learn, and participate;
- relational legitimacy when care is not conditioned solely by wealth;
- structural violence reduction when access is organized as social right rather than market privilege.

4.6 Dashboard indicators

Dashboard domain	Health indicators
Basic life necessities	Primary care access; medication continuity; maternal and child care

Health and embodied viability	Preventable mortality; chronic disease control; immunization; disability access
Felt being	Trust in care; fear, stigma, humiliation, continuity
Civil commons	Universal coverage; public financing; community health infrastructure
Value sequence	Prevention investment versus high-cost downstream repair
Relational legitimacy	Treatment of patients as rights-bearing persons, not revenue units

4.7 Failure modes

EBAIS should not be romanticized. Community health systems can be strained by demographic aging, chronic disease burdens, workforce shortages, underfunding, bureaucratic reporting requirements, and administrative standardization. Measurement can become a burden if it privileges forms, visits, and targets over relational care.

The transferable lesson is:

Health becomes a civil commons when prevention, proximity, continuity, community trust, and universal access are organized before disease is converted into crisis.

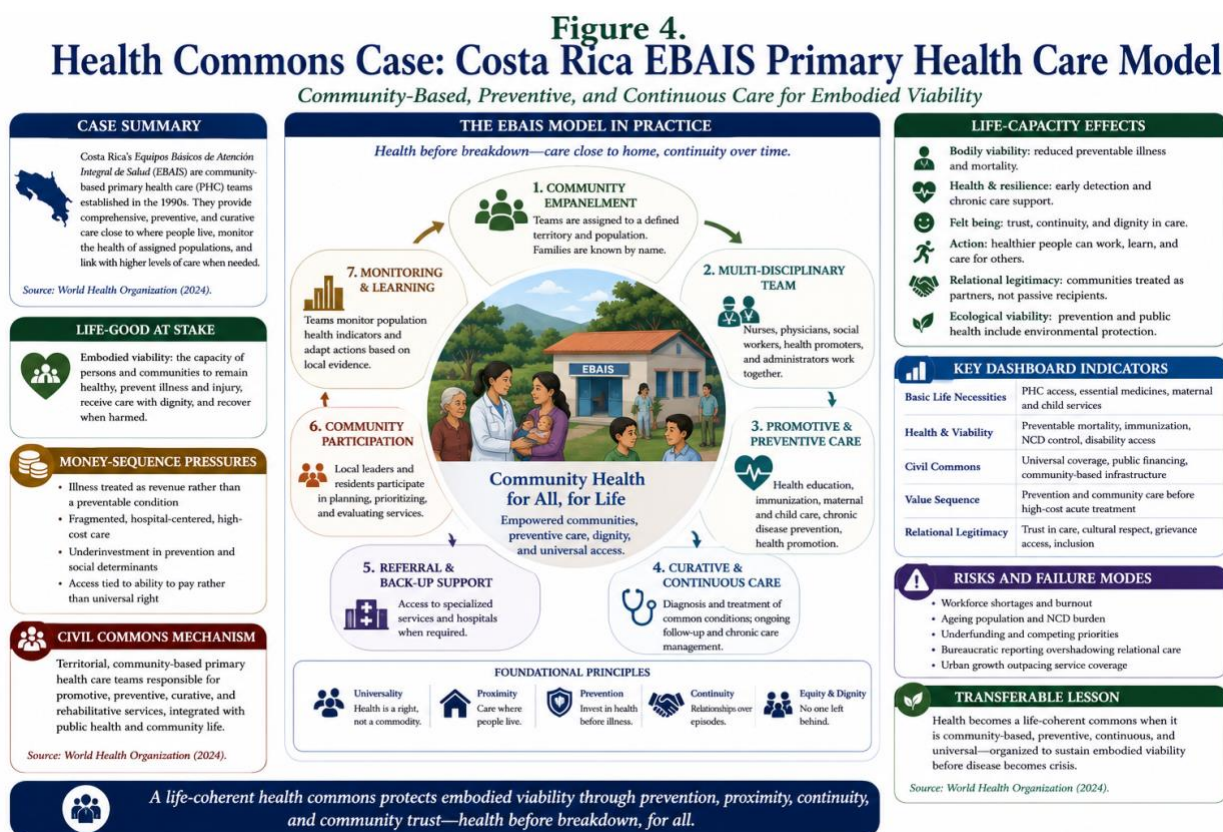


Figure 4. Health Commons Case: Costa Rica EBAIS.

5. Case 3 — Education: Finland’s Comprehensive Public Education System

5.1 Background

Finland is useful as an education commons case because its comprehensive public education model has long been associated with public provision, equity orientation, teacher professionalism, and broad formation rather than narrow competition. OECD’s *Education Policy Outlook in Finland* describes the Finnish system in terms of governance, funding, learning environments, access, participation, progression, and policy efforts, while also noting pressures such as declining PISA performance and growing equity concerns (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2020).

This case should not be presented as a flawless “Finnish miracle.” Its value lies in the question it raises: what does education look like when treated as a civil commons of capacity development rather than merely as labour-market preparation?

5.2 Life-good at stake

The life-good is thought: learning, imagination, discernment, language, civic participation, and the capacity to bring forth a shared world.

The main paper states that a life-blind education system reduces learning to competition, credentialing, labour-market preparation, and standardized performance, whereas a life-coherent education system cultivates thought, felt being, action, and relational responsibility. It describes education as a civil commons of world-disclosure (Sahely, 2026a).

5.3 Money-sequence pressure

Education is vulnerable to money-sequence capture when it becomes primarily human capital formation, labour-market sorting, private credential accumulation, competitive ranking, or debt-financed access. It is vulnerable to bureaucratic reduction when standardized measures replace curiosity, meaning, relational trust, culture, and agency.

5.4 Civil commons mechanism

The civil commons mechanism is comprehensive, publicly supported education oriented toward broad capacity formation. In life-coherent terms, education should enable:

- thought through literacy, inquiry, reasoning, imagination, and systems understanding;

- felt being through belonging, safety, dignity, and confidence;
- action through agency, skill, creativity, and civic participation;
- relation through cooperation, care, respect, and democratic responsibility;
- culture through language, memory, meaning, and plural world-disclosure.

5.5 Dashboard indicators

Dashboard domain	Education indicators
Thought and sense-making	Literacy, numeracy, critical thinking, media literacy, systems understanding
Felt being	Belonging, safety, trust, mental health, joy in learning
Agency	Student voice, teacher autonomy, civic participation
Relational legitimacy	Inclusion of migrants, disabled learners, linguistic minorities, Indigenous learners
Civil commons	Public access, equitable funding, school meals, libraries, support services
Value sequence	Education as life-capacity formation versus credential competition

5.6 Failure modes

Finland’s case should be treated dynamically. Equity-oriented systems may still face rising inequality, migrant inclusion challenges, mental health pressures, performance anxieties, digital distraction, or fiscal strain. OECD’s profile is especially helpful because it treats Finland as a system with strengths and pressures, not as a static ideal (OECD, 2020).

A life-coherent education commons must therefore ask not simply whether a country performs well internationally, but whether the system continues to expand thought, felt being, agency, relation, and cultural dignity for all learners.

The transferable lesson is:

Education becomes a civil commons when it forms persons and communities capable of learning, caring, judging, creating, and participating—not merely workers competing for credentials.

Figure 5. Education Commons Case: Finland's Comprehensive Public Education System

Education as Public Capacity Development: Forming Thought, Agency, Relation, and World-Disclosure

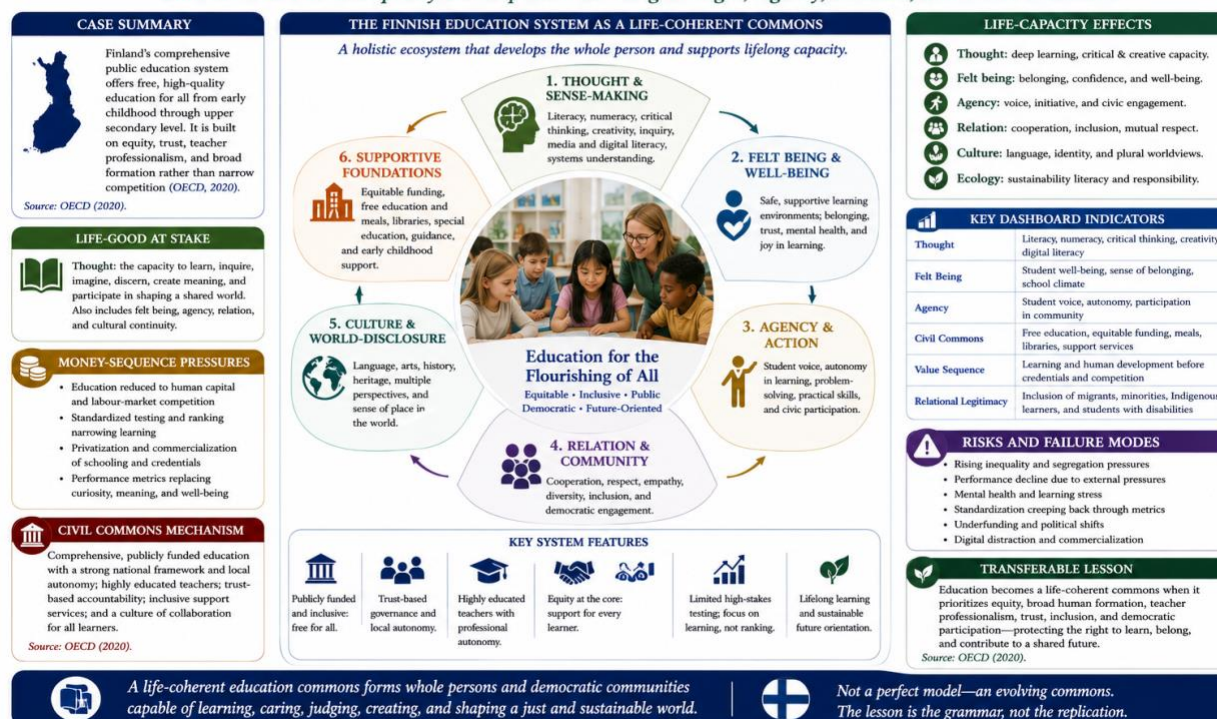


Figure 5. Education Commons Case: Finland.

6. Case 4 — Ecology: Costa Rica's Payments for Ecosystem Services

6.1 Background

Costa Rica's Payments for Ecosystem Services program is a strong ecological commons case because it attempts to make forest conservation and restoration institutionally valuable. The UN Forum on Forests describes Costa Rica as a global pioneer in PES. Since 1997, the program has paid landowners to conserve and restore forests, covering four services: carbon sequestration, water protection, biodiversity, and scenic beauty. It also notes a stable legal framework, financing from fuel and water taxes, partnerships with communities, Indigenous Peoples, and the private sector, and emerging financial risks as fossil-fuel tax revenues decline (United Nations Forum on Forests, 2025). UNFCCC similarly describes Costa Rica's PES program as a state financial mechanism through FONAFIFO that pays forest owners and holders for environmental services related to carbon sequestration, biodiversity protection, water regulation, and landscape beauty (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change [UNFCCC], n.d.).

6.2 Life-good at stake

The life-good is ecological life-ground: forests, water cycles, biodiversity, soil, climate regulation, and regeneration.

The main paper states that ecology is not one policy domain among others, but the life-ground of all domains. Human life cannot flourish by disabling the biospheric conditions that make human life possible (Sahely, 2026a).

6.3 Money-sequence pressure

Ecological systems are vulnerable to money-sequence reduction when forests are valued only as timber, land, carbon credits, tourism assets, or offsets. PES programs face a delicate tension. They can protect ecological life-ground by redirecting money toward conservation. But they can also risk translating ecological relations into market payments and treating living systems as service bundles.

This is precisely why Costa Rica's PES is analytically valuable. It is neither simply market capture nor pure civil commons. It is a hybrid institutional mechanism that uses financial incentives to protect ecological functions.

6.4 Civil commons mechanism

The civil commons mechanism is public recognition that forests generate shared life-support functions. Costa Rica's program recognizes forests not only as private property but as contributors to public ecological goods: carbon sequestration, biodiversity, hydrological protection, and scenic beauty (United Nations Forum on Forests, 2025; UNFCCC, n.d.).

6.5 Life-capacity effects

A life-coherent ecological commons can enable:

- bodily viability through water regulation, flood protection, climate moderation, and air quality;
- thought and culture through ecological knowledge and environmental education;
- felt being through place attachment and ecological security;
- action through stewardship and livelihoods;
- future generations through regeneration;
- ecological viability through biodiversity, soil, water, and habitat continuity.

6.6 Dashboard indicators

Dashboard domain	Ecology indicators
------------------	--------------------

Ecological life-ground	Forest cover, biodiversity, watershed function, soil health, habitat continuity
Basic life necessities	Water security, flood protection, food systems
Cultural-linguistic worlds	Indigenous stewardship, sacred land relations, ecological knowledge
Distribution	Who receives payments, who bears restrictions, who benefits from restoration
Value sequence	Whether finance serves forest life-ground or forest life-ground serves financial instruments
Repair	Restoration, monitoring, long-term financing, community participation

6.7 Failure modes

Costa Rica's PES program also shows the risks of ecological commons design:

- ecological value may be reduced to payment contracts;
- benefits may favor landowners with formal title;
- Indigenous and local communities may face unequal access;
- financing may depend on declining fossil-fuel tax revenues;
- conservation may become vulnerable to offset logic.

The transferable lesson is:

Ecological commons become life-coherent when financial mechanisms are subordinated to ecological regeneration, community equity, cultural recognition, and long-term repair—not when ecosystems are reduced to priced services.

Figure 6.
Ecological Commons Case: Costa Rica's Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES)
Protecting Ecological Life-Ground Through Public Value, Community Stewardship, and Long-Term Investment



Figure 6. Ecological Commons Case: Costa Rica PES.

7. Case 5 — Governance: Porto Alegre Participatory Budgeting

7.1 Background

Porto Alegre is one of the most important governance commons cases because participatory budgeting tests whether affected communities can shape public resource allocation. WRI's case study states that Porto Alegre pioneered participatory budgeting in the 1990s and that the model later spread widely, with more than 2,700 governments implementing some version. The same study reports that participatory budgeting mobilized communities, including poor communities, improved access to small-scale infrastructure and services, and transformed citizenship; however, political support declined over time, culminating in suspension in 2017 (Abers et al., 2018).

7.2 Life-good at stake

The life-good is agency: the capacity of people to shape the decisions that shape their lives. Governance is not life-coherent merely because it administers services. It becomes life-coherent when affected communities participate meaningfully in defining priorities, allocating resources, and correcting institutions.

7.3 Money-sequence pressure

Budgeting is vulnerable to capture by elites, technical experts, debt obligations, electoral cycles, growth agendas, and administrative inertia. Without participation, public budgets can reproduce structural violence by allocating resources away from communities most deprived of life-necessities.

7.4 Civil commons mechanism

Participatory budgeting converts budgeting from expert-controlled allocation into a public learning and decision process. It treats public money not merely as a fiscal object, but as a means of life-capacity allocation.

Through the Life-Coherent Peace lens, Porto Alegre's significance lies in its attempt to align public spending with lived need, especially among historically excluded communities.

7.5 Life-capacity effects

Participatory budgeting can enable:

- action through direct participation;
- thought through public deliberation and civic learning;
- felt being through dignity, recognition, and collective efficacy;
- relation through democratic trust and solidarity;
- civil commons access through redistribution of infrastructure and services;
- structural violence reduction by shifting resources toward underserved communities.

7.6 Dashboard indicators

Dashboard domain	Governance indicators
Action and agency	Participation rates, decision influence, community proposals adopted
Relational legitimacy	Inclusion of poor, marginalized, and peripheral communities
Civil commons	Allocation to water, sanitation, schools, roads, health, housing
Distribution	Budget share by neighborhood, class, race, gender, and need
Value sequence	Whether public budgets serve life-needs or elite priorities
Repair	Follow-through, grievance processes, accountability for non-implementation

7.7 Failure modes

Porto Alegre's case is especially useful because it shows both promise and fragility. WRI identifies several conditions for participatory budgeting to support transformative urban change: well-structured participatory arrangements, adequate financial resources, political commitment and flexibility, and government commitment to implement proposals generated through the process. It also notes that declining political support and reduced funding undermined the process (Abers et al., 2018).

The transferable lesson is:

Governance becomes a civil commons when affected communities have real influence over public priorities, resources, implementation, and repair—but participatory institutions require legal protection, funding, political commitment, and adaptive renewal.

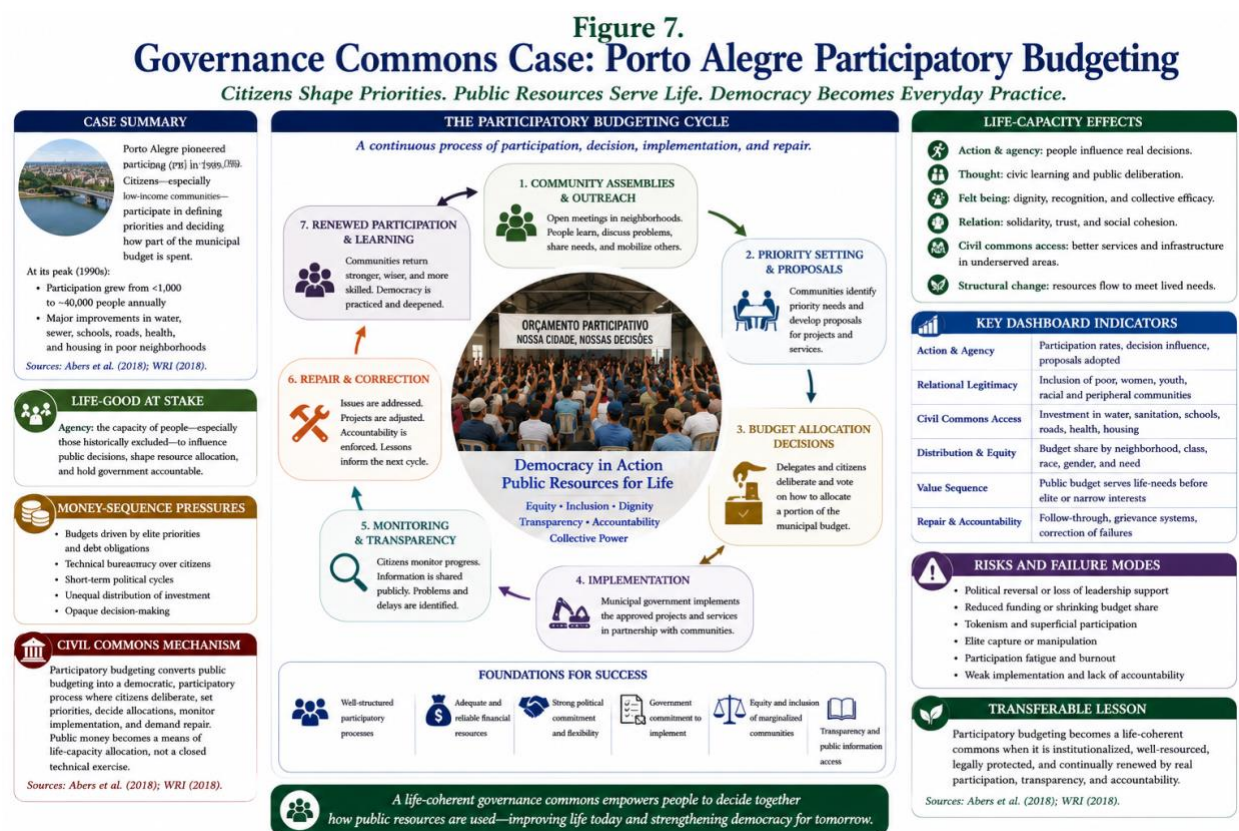


Figure 7. Governance Commons Case: Porto Alegre Participatory Budgeting.

8. Integrative Case — Te Awa Tupua / Whanganui River

8.1 Background

Te Awa Tupua is included as an integrative case because it joins ecology, Indigenous law, legal personhood, relational identity, governance innovation, and historical repair. The Te Awa Tupua (Whanganui River Claims Settlement) Act 2017 recognizes Te Awa Tupua as an indivisible and living whole from the mountains to the sea, incorporating both physical and metaphysical elements. The Act declares Te Awa Tupua to be a legal person with all the rights, powers, duties, and liabilities of a legal person (Te Awa Tupua [Whanganui River Claims Settlement] Act 2017).

The Act also expresses the principle “Ko au te Awa, ko te Awa ko au”—“I am the River and the River is me”—recognizing the inalienable connection and responsibility of the iwi and hapū of the Whanganui River to Te Awa Tupua and its health and well-being (Te Awa Tupua [Whanganui River Claims Settlement] Act 2017). Whanganui District Council describes the settlement as recognizing the special relationship between the Whanganui River and Whanganui iwi, providing for long-term protection and restoration, and acknowledging historical Crown actions that degraded the river’s ecological, cultural, and spiritual value (Whanganui District Council, n.d.).

8.2 Why this case matters

This case is not simply a “rights of nature” case. It is a relational governance case. It challenges the modern separation between person and ecosystem, culture and nature, law and life-ground. It makes visible what Life-Coherent Peace calls structural coupling: the viability of a people and the viability of the river are mutually implicated.

8.3 Life-good at stake

The life-good is ecological-cultural life-ground: river health, Indigenous identity, legal recognition, cultural continuity, freshwater governance, and historical repair.

8.4 Civil commons mechanism

The mechanism is legal and institutional recognition of the river as a living whole and legal person, with governance structures intended to represent and protect Te Awa Tupua. This reframes the river from resource to relation.

8.5 Dashboard indicators

Dashboard domain	Te Awa Tupua indicators
Ecological life-ground	River health, water quality, fisheries, habitat, catchment integrity
Cultural-linguistic worlds	Iwi relationship, language, law, ceremony, ancestral responsibility
Relational legitimacy	Recognition of Indigenous law and relationship
Governance	Collaborative institutions, representation, accountability

Repair	Historical redress, restoration funds, legal protection, monitoring
Value sequence	River as living whole versus river as extractive resource

8.6 Failure modes

Legal personhood does not automatically restore ecological health. It can be symbolic if underfunded, administratively weakened, or subordinated to competing development pressures. It can also be misread internationally as a simple legal innovation while neglecting the specific Indigenous, treaty, historical, and relational context that made it possible.

The transferable lesson is:

Ecological governance becomes life-coherent when law recognizes living relations, not merely resource interests, and when recognition is paired with governance authority, restoration, and historical repair.

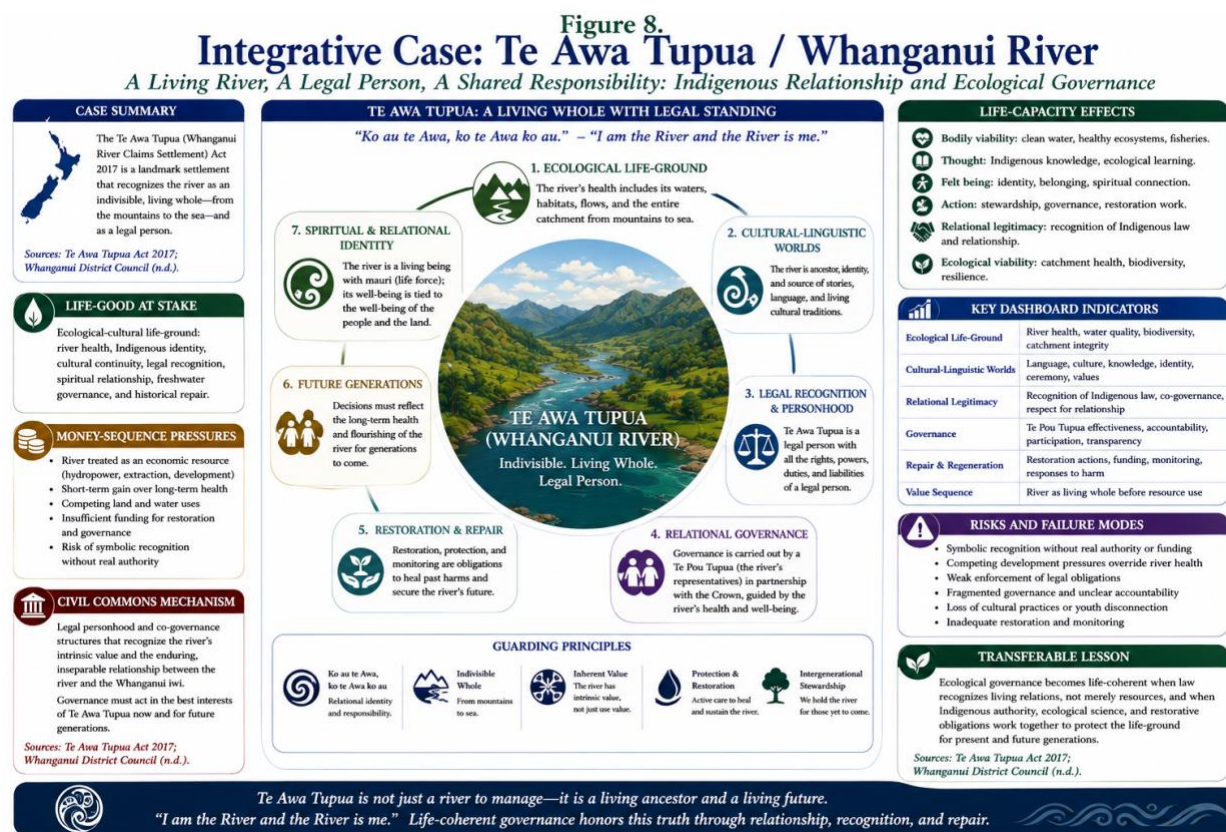


Figure 8. Integrative Case: Te Awa Tupua / Whanganui River.

9. Cross-Case Comparison: What Makes a Civil Commons Life-Coherent?

The cases differ substantially. Paris concerns water remunicipalization. Costa Rica's EBAIS concerns community health. Finland concerns education. Costa Rica's PES concerns ecological incentives. Porto Alegre concerns participatory budgeting. Te Awa Tupua concerns ecological-Indigenous legal recognition. Yet a shared civil commons grammar emerges.

Case	Life-good	Civil commons mechanism	Main life-coherent strength	Main risk
Paris water	Water-as-life	Public integrated operator	Water treated as essential good and common resource	Bureaucratic centralization; weak participation
Costa Rica EBAIS	Embodied viability	Community-based PHC teams	Prevention, proximity, continuity	Workforce strain; target-based bureaucracy
Finland education	Thought and formation	Public comprehensive education	Equity-oriented capacity development	Standardization, inequity, mental health pressures
Costa Rica PES	Ecological life-ground	Public payments for ecosystem services	Forest functions recognized as public value	Commodification, unequal access, financing fragility
Porto Alegre PB	Democratic agency	Participatory budget allocation	Poor communities influence resource allocation	Political reversal, reduced funding, tokenism
Te Awa Tupua	Ecological-cultural relation	Legal personhood and relational governance	River recognized as living whole	Symbolism without ecological restoration

Across the cases, a civil commons becomes life-coherent when six conditions are present:

1. **A life-good is named as non-substitutable.**
2. **Access or protection is organized institutionally.**
3. **Money and administration are subordinated to life.**
4. **Affected people participate in meaning and decision.**
5. **Ecological and cultural life-ground are not treated as externalities.**
6. **The institution can monitor, repair, and revise itself.**

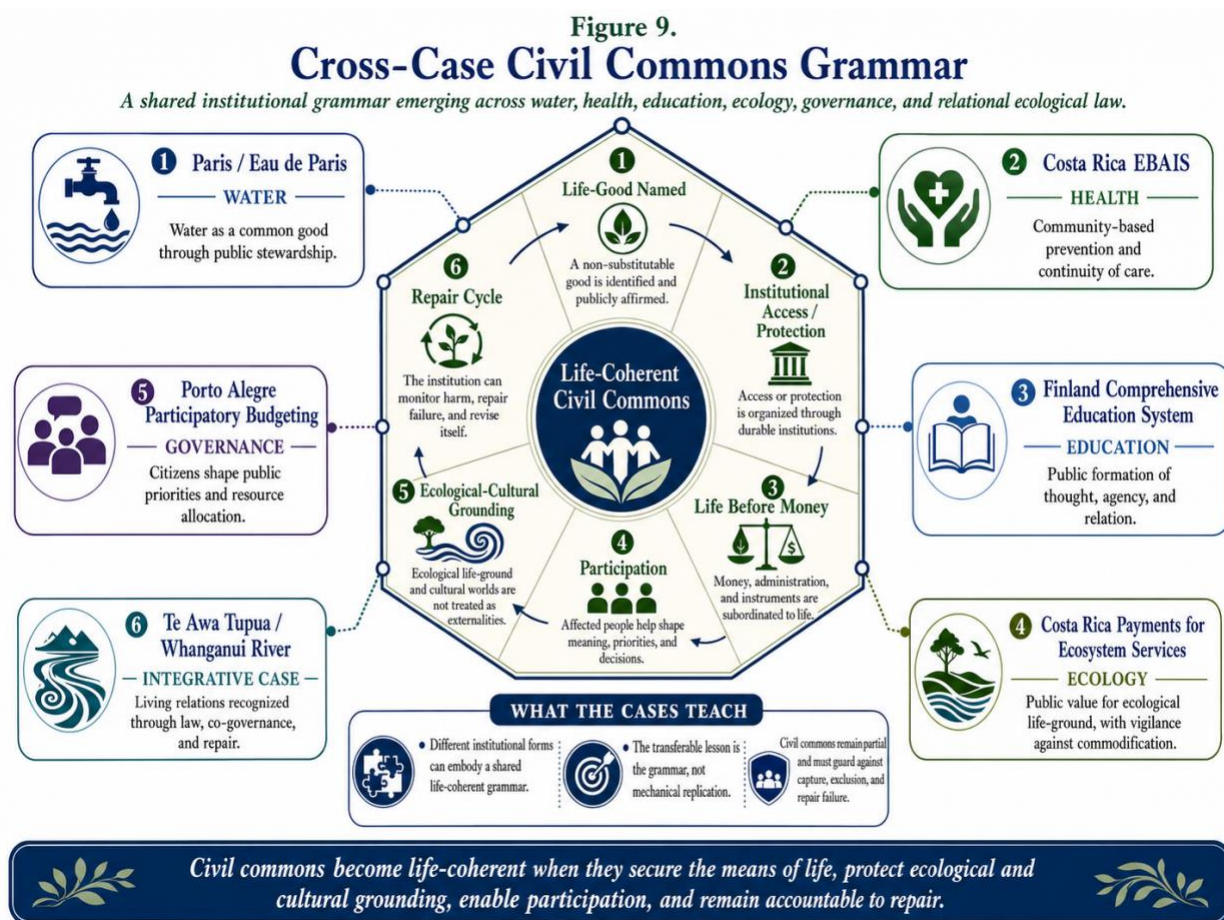


Figure 9. Cross-Case Civil Commons Grammar.

10. Failure Modes: How Civil Commons Become Life-Blind

The central danger of Paper 4 is romanticization. Civil commons can fail. They can become life-blind in predictable ways.

10.1 Bureaucratic capture

A public system may become rigid, rule-bound, humiliating, or self-protective. It may preserve its procedures while losing contact with life-capacity. This risk is already identified in the main framework's warning that civil commons must remain accountable to the living beings they serve (Sahely, 2026a).

10.2 Market capture

A commons mechanism may be converted into a revenue model, public-private contract, offset market, or investment vehicle that subordinates life to returns.

10.3 Elite capture

Participation may be dominated by better-resourced groups. Public benefits may flow toward those already powerful.

10.4 Data capture

Indicators may become instruments of control. Institutions may count what is easy while ignoring felt being, cultural continuity, relational legitimacy, and ecological thresholds.

10.5 Political reversal

Participatory or life-serving institutions may depend too heavily on one administration, party, or leader. Porto Alegre's suspension demonstrates this danger clearly (Abers et al., 2018).

10.6 Symbolic participation

Communities may be consulted without actual decision influence. The framework then becomes language without power.

10.7 Ecological abstraction

Ecology may be recognized in name but reduced to services, credits, offsets, or compliance measures without real regeneration.

10.8 Repair failure

Institutions may acknowledge harm but fail to fund restoration, compensation, redesign, or accountability.

The NotebookLM debate transcript identified the deepest version of this danger: life-value language can become a new technocratic vocabulary through which states or institutions justify power over communities. The answer is not to abandon civil commons, but to design them with anti-capture safeguards.



Figure 10. Failure Modes of Civil Commons.

11. Discussion: From Institutional Examples to Life-Coherent Design

The cases examined here do not prove that Life-Coherent Peace has already been achieved. They show that fragments of life-coherent institutional design already exist.

Paris shows that water can be reclaimed as an essential public good rather than left to fragmented private delegation. Costa Rica's EBAIS model shows that health can be organized around community-based prevention and continuity rather than only downstream repair. Finland shows that education can be understood as broad public formation rather than narrow credential competition. Costa Rica's PES shows that ecological functions can be made visible in public policy, though not without risks of commodification. Porto Alegre shows that budgeting can become participatory life-capacity allocation, but also that political support and institutional

protection are essential. Te Awa Tupua shows that ecological governance can recognize living relational identity, Indigenous law, and historical repair.

The cross-case lesson is not that any one model should be copied. Institutions are historically situated. What works in Paris cannot simply be transferred to another city. Costa Rica's health system arises from its own institutional history. Finland's education system depends on particular social, political, and cultural conditions. Porto Alegre's participatory budgeting depended on political commitment that later weakened. Te Awa Tupua is inseparable from Whanganui iwi, treaty history, and Aotearoa New Zealand's legal context.

The transferable element is not the form. It is the grammar.

A life-coherent civil commons must ask:

- What means of life must be secured?
- What life-capacities are being expanded or contracted?
- What structural violence is being prevented?
- What cultural violence is being challenged?
- Who participates in defining the problem?
- What ecological life-ground is being protected?
- What money-sequence pressures are present?
- How does the institution detect and repair its own harms?

These questions turn institutions into learning systems. Without them, even public systems can become life-blind.

12. Conclusion: Institutions That Serve Life Before Money

Life-Coherent Peace cannot remain a theory of value, biology, and violence alone. It must be tested in institutions. This paper has examined civil commons in practice across water, health, education, ecology, governance, and relational ecological law.

The cases show that Life-Coherent Peace is not utopian in the sense of having no institutional approximations. Societies already build arrangements that secure life-goods, reduce structural violence, protect commons, and expand capacity. But these arrangements remain partial and fragile. They require maintenance, participation, funding, legitimacy, ecological grounding, and repair.

The central conclusion is therefore neither celebratory nor pessimistic.

Civil commons exist. They can serve life. They can also fail.

They become life-coherent only when they are organized around the primacy of life-capacity, not money-sequence expansion; when they treat persons and communities as legitimate participants, not passive recipients; when they protect ecological and cultural life-ground, not merely service outputs; and when they remain accountable to repair the harms they produce.

The governing sentence of this paper is:

Civil commons become life-coherent not when they are merely public, efficient, or well-intentioned, but when they secure the means of life, expand life-capacities, protect ecological and cultural life-ground, enable affected communities to shape decisions, and remain accountable to repair where they disable life.

That is the empirical challenge of Life-Coherent Peace: to build institutions that serve life before money, administration, or power—and to correct them when they do not.

Appendix A. Case Analysis Template

Analytic question	Case response
What life-good is at stake?	
What money-sequence or bureaucratic pressure threatens it?	
What civil commons mechanism has been built?	
Which life-capacities are enabled?	
Which forms of structural or cultural violence are reduced?	
Which dashboard indicators matter most?	
What risks of capture, exclusion, reversal, or reduction remain?	
What does the case teach about repair?	
What is transferable without mechanical copying?	
What is the life-coherence judgment?	

Appendix B. Comparative Dashboard Matrix

Domain	Water	Health	Education	Ecology	Governance	Relational ecological law
Basic life necessities	Water access	Primary care	School access	Water/food/ecological support	Public services	River health
Health	Hygiene, disease prevention	Embodied viability	Mental health, child development	Pollution, climate resilience	Social determinants	Freshwater health
Thought	Public water literacy	Health education	Learning and inquiry	Ecological knowledge	Civic learning	Indigenous knowledge
Felt being	Dignity, reduced fear	Trust in care	Belonging	Place attachment	Collective efficacy	Spiritual relation

Agency	User voice	Community health participation	Student/teacher voice	Stewardship	Budget participation	Iwi authority
Relational legitimacy	Users as rights-bearing participants	Patients as persons	Learners as whole persons	Communities as stewards	Citizens as co-governors	River and iwi as relational whole
Civil commons	Public water	PHC system	Public education	PES mechanism	Participatory budgeting	Legal personhood and governance
Ecology	Watershed	Environmental health	Ecological literacy	Forests, biodiversity	Urban ecology	River catchment
Culture	Water meanings	Health beliefs	Language and memory	Indigenous stewardship	Civic culture	"I am the River"
Value sequence	Water before revenue	Health before billing	Learning before credentials	Ecology before extraction	Budget before elites	River before resource

Appendix C. Failure Modes and Safeguards

Failure mode	Risk	Safeguard
Bureaucratic capture	Public system becomes rigid and humiliating	Participatory oversight, grievance systems, dignity indicators
Market capture	Commons becomes revenue stream	Public accountability, anti-privatization safeguards, value-sequence audit
Elite capture	Benefits flow to powerful groups	Distribution indicators, inclusion rules, equity weighting
Data capture	Metrics replace life	Narrative evidence, threshold indicators, community interpretation
Political reversal	Reform collapses after elections	Legal protection, institutionalization, independent funding
Symbolic participation	Consultation without power	Decision influence, participatory budgeting, co-governance
Ecological abstraction	Nature reduced to services or offsets	Regeneration thresholds, Indigenous knowledge, ecological audits
Repair failure	Harms acknowledged but not corrected	Funded repair obligations, timelines, public accountability

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