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Post-Growth and Post-Extractivism: Two Sides of the Same Cultural Transformation

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Post-Growth and Post-Extractivism: Two Sides of the Same Cultural Transformation²

Marx said that revolutions are the locomotive of world history. But perhaps things are very different. It may be that revolutions are the act by which the human race travelling in the train applies the emergency brake.

Walter Benjamin (1892-1940)

Mainstream thinking – embedded within capitalist globalisation – leads us to accept the impossibility to imagine an economy that does not promote growth, as much as a world without oil, mining and agribusiness is impossible. Within this mainstream thinking, we can find people from every political stance, from neoliberals to socialists.

Reality, however, is that we must overcome such views, that is the great task of this moment. On the one hand, we must rethink the question of economic growth, and free ourselves from its shackles before we enter into a global socio-environmental debacle with unforeseeable consequences. On the other, it is increasingly urgent to move from an extractivist perspective focused on the demands of capital, towards a

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view that prioritises a dignified life to its fullest extent and enables the construction of structurally democratic societies. This task puts the capacity of critical thinking to test, as well as the capacities of our societies, states, and that of social and political organisations to engage in innovative and creative thinking.

Closing the door to this debate would entail closing the door on democracy itself.

Economic growth, a dead end

For much of the planet's human inhabitants it is very difficult to imagine an economy without growth. They are even unable to imagine a society without economic growth. Therefore, without going into further analysis of what really happens in each case, countries with high rates of growth are touted as successes, such as China or Peru. In these cases, they are successful only because they have had significant rates of economic growth for a substantial period of time. The Chinese case is particularly significant to the extent that China has already become the world's largest economy, measured in GDP terms. But it is important to question whether these countries have actually achieved development. This question can be extended to major industrialised countries, where we also find "mal-development" (Tortosa 2011).

Even some Marxist perspectives assert – without hesitation – that growth cannot be stopped. That would lead, they say, to stopping the evolution of productive forces which – from their point of view – are the basis for the development of civilisation. It is these same forces which, eventually, through adequate control and distribution schemes, will solve all our problems.

It is wearily repeated that we should grow – a concept that is often confused with accumulating money – to be able to address the issue of poverty, to technologically develop, and even to solve environmental problems caused by growth itself.

A true conceptual gibberish dominates the debate.

The environmental limits of economic growth

In environmental terms, the global emission limit of 400 parts per million of CO₂ has already been surpassed. The fact that we will never return to a lower figure, and its already detrimental effects are a clear warning of the dangers of continuing down the same path. Endless material growth could culminate in a collective suicide.

The environmental effects of economic growth, driven by the demands of capital, are obvious: it is sufficient to consider the impacts of increased atmosphere warming, the deterioration of the ozone layer, the loss of fresh water sources and wild biodiversity, agricultural erosion, the high level of nitrogen in the atmosphere, the soil degradation or the accelerated disappearance of the living spaces of local communities. Therefore, Eduardo Gudynas (2009) is right when he concludes that there is no future in the mechanistic and endless accumulation of material goods, ensconced in the indiscriminate and growing exploitation of Nature. Furthermore, this process has not led or will lead to development – quite the opposite.

Consequently, what do the economy and the society of growth represent should be urgently examined. There is a kind of obsession regarding economic growth, as Herman Daly (1989) stated in 1971. Earlier, this same economist, in line with the thinking of Nicholas Georgescu Roegen, of Romanian origin and the great pioneer of ecological economics, anticipated threats in the making. He therefore concluded on the need to contemplate an economic slowdown or de-growth, as growth constitutes a kind of *harakiri* for humanity. He said, "the most desirable state is not an unchanging state but a state in de-growth. Undoubtedly, this growth must cease or, indeed, change sign" (Daly 1971). Kenneth Boulding (1966), an economist who saw the Earth as a spaceship – also in line with Georgescu-Roegen – is credited for claiming that "anyone who believes that exponential growth can go on forever in a finite world is either a madman or an economist."

However, at certain times, to assume these biophysical limits, as warned by the Club of Rome Report in 1972 (Meadows 1972), was seen as part of an imperialist proposal. Its real intention, according to some critics, was to limit the possibility of

development for countries in the global South. Even the particular thesis of the right to development emerged then, which today is used, for example, by China.

The key point to question the continued growth of the economy focuses on the fact that Nature has limits economies must not exceed. Climate change, especially due to the overconsumption of energy and the transformation of land use, provides undeniable evidence. Meanwhile, mainstream thinking, functional to capital accumulation, limits itself to reflect and propose the transformation of "environmental goods and services" into tradable commodities, through the endowment of property rights over these functions. Others rely with blind faith on technological progress. This situation can be understood as the generalisation of a selfish and short-sighted behaviour, unable to recognise that a resource has a limit or threshold before collapsing, while also ignoring the inherent constraints of technologies.

The critical position expressed here does not reflect a conservative view on the idea of progress, but questions its meaning. Modern technology is subsumed to the process of valuation, which makes it harmful in many ways. But perhaps the problem is deeper and involves questioning the meaning of what is human at a time when barbarism appears to be approaching, as Rosa Luxemburg warned. From that perspective, in order to have a different kind of technique, it is necessary to transform the conditions of social production. At the same time, it is necessary to pay attention to the so-called "rebound effect", which is reflected in the increase in consumption as a result of efficiency gains.

Now, when the limits of the world's sustainability are literally being surpassed, it is essential to build environmental solutions seen as a universal task. A reference framework could be established, in conjunction with the proposal for a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Nature, to give depth to this task that falls to all humankind.

The economic and social limits of economic growth

It is imperative to rescue the classic reflections of development thinkers such as Albert Hirschman, who in the late fifties stated that development economics must avoid borrowing from growth economics. As we have seen, this recommendation has not been adequately followed. People have continued to believe for decades that growth was synonymous with development. Somehow, that vision still prevails in broad sectors of society and in almost every government.[i]

However, the fact that economic growth is only a means, not an end, has been gradually making its way. Amartya Sen (1985), the only Nobel prize in economics that comes from an "underdeveloped" country, was very clear on this matter:

I believe the real limitations of traditional development economics arose not from the choice of means to the end of economic growth, but in the insufficient recognition that economic growth was no more than a means to some other objectives. (...) Not merely is it the case that economic growth is a means rather than an end, it is also the case that for some important ends it is not a very efficient means either. (Sen 1985).

We could go a bit further down this path and remember an economist and professor at Columbia University, Jagdish Bhagwati, who already in 1958 argued that growth could even be impoverishing growth (Bhagwati 1958). This has occurred in several occasions. When the rate of natural resource extraction and their export increases, looking to maximise income, the economy might grow, but the country can receive less income added to the loss in reserve of such resources.

This indicates that it is possible to grow and not achieve development, and that it is even possible to grow and to under-develop – a common experience in the impoverished world. How many countries have managed to sustain significant economic growth rates for relatively long periods? – only a few. And of those few, how many have actually developed? – even fewer. Moreover, to complicate things, it is well known that actually “mal-development” prevails even among those considered developed countries.

However, some argue that growth may be necessary in certain circumstances, especially to overcome critical gaps, for example in education and health. But that does not justify any type of growth. Manfred Max Neef was very clear on this. In an open letter to the Chilean Minister of Economy, in December 4, 2001, he wrote:

If for example, I dedicate myself to fully plunder a natural resource, my economy may grow, but at the expense of ending up poorer. In reality people do not realise the aberration of mainstream macroeconomics, which counts the loss of heritage as an increase in income. Behind all growth figures there is a human history and a natural history. If these stories are positive, growth is welcome, because it is preferable to grow poorly but to grow well, rather than to grow a lot but in bad conditions. [ii]

In rich countries, for example, having more and more material goods does not mean that there is greater happiness. Studies show how the growth of GDP per capita in the United States, for example, has been sustained in the past six decades, but happiness levels have not, rather, they have remained stable. The contributions of Jürgen Shuldt (2004), especially his book *Bonanza macroeconómica, malestar microeconómico*, explain well this line of thought.

Thus, we can state that economic growth, caused by the greed of capital, which engages in accumulation by production and speculation, occurs on the basis of growing structural inequality. Perhaps this also explains the high levels of frustration and unhappiness that exist in affluent societies. Widening the horizon, we observe the social inequality of the planet, so characteristic of capitalism. In this regard, the civilisation of inequality is a matter that occurs globally and even in economies considered to be successful.

It suffices to look at some of the figures on the unequal distribution of wealth in the world: the 85 richest people in the world have as much as the poorest half of the world population – 1.7 billion people according to a report by Oxfam (2014). This report also shows that 1% of the richest population owns almost half of the global wealth. Reviewing inequality figures in Germany, the country of the "inventors" of the much-touted social market economy, is equally sobering: in 2008, the richest

10% of the German population owned 53% of assets, while half of the population owned 1% (Der Spiegel 2014).

It follows then that the very organisation of the economy must change in profound ways. This is perhaps one of the biggest challenges. Economic growth, transformed into a fetish to which the world powers and large segments of the population pay homage, must be unmasked and disarmed. Something easy to say but hard to do without consensus and popular participation.

From that perspective, we must take into consideration all that is derived from these readings to realise the geophysical and socioeconomic boundaries of today's economy, and its engine, growth. It is alarming that, rather than seeking radical and profound solutions to the runaway train in which humanity travels, the deepening of essentially predatory practices continues. We will have to see if the redoubled effort to deepen the mercantilist logic of the so-called green economy – which continues to expand the frontier of colonisation on the planet, for example, with the carbon market – is the commercial response to environmental problems.

The post-growth debates

Many renowned economists like Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, Kenneth Boulding, Herman Daly, Roefie Hueting, Enrique Leff, José Manuel Naredo and Joan Martínez Alier have demonstrated the limits of economic growth. Even Amartya Sen, who does not question the market or capitalism, speaks against economic growth when it is understood as synonymous to development.

Currently, there are increasing calls, especially in industrialised countries, for an economy that promotes not only a steady growth, but also *de-growth*.^[iii]

It is appropriate to bring up again the ideas of Herman Daly, an economist who worked at the World Bank, and was categorically clear: the economy must be understood as a subset of the ecosystem. As things stand now, he argues that the economy works as an “idiotic machine”; that is, a machine that metabolises natural resources, processes them to exhaustion, and discards them by polluting. It must do this in order to operate. That is the logic of capitalist accumulation.

Therefore, Daly argues there are two clearly identified limits: the ecological catastrophe and the absolute saturation point. The first has already been discussed earlier in this paper. We should reflect on the second point and ask, why should we continue growing? There is no doubt that there are already many people, especially in the global North, which have saturated their ability to meet their needs with ever more material goods. Is there a future for this nonsense? These are fundamental questions.

Another notable economist, John Maynard Keynes (1930) addressed this issue. He posited that the absolute limit of saturation in terms of consumption would be reached by 2030.[iv] These and other considerations have raised, particularly in the global North, the urge to make way for a steady economic growth and, as soon as possible, a de-growth.

All these considerations about *de-growth* somehow find a precedent in the work of John Stuart Mill. The English economist anticipated in 1848, the year in which the Communist Manifesto of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels was published, some foundational thoughts of what is now known as a stationary economy. Mill said:

While minds are coarse they require coarse stimuli, and let them have them. In the meantime, those who do not accept the present very early stage of human improvement as its ultimate type, may be excused for being comparatively indifferent to the kind of economical progress which excites the congratulations of ordinary politicians; the mere increase of production and accumulation. (...) I know not why it should be matter of congratulation that persons who are already richer than any one needs to be, should have doubled their means of consuming things which give little or no pleasure except as representative of wealth (...) It is only in the backward countries of the world that increased production is still an important object: in those most advanced, what is economically needed is a better distribution, of which one indispensable means is a stricter restraint on population. (...)

I cannot, therefore, regard the stationary state of capital and wealth with the unaffected aversion so generally manifested towards it by political economists of the old school. I am inclined to believe that it would be, on the whole, a very considerable

improvement on our present condition. I confess I am not charmed with the ideal of life held out by those who think that the normal state of human beings is that of struggling to get on; that the trampling, crushing, elbowing, and treading on each other's heels, which form the existing type of social life, are the most desirable lot of human kind, or anything but the disagreeable symptoms of one of the phases of industrial progress. (...) the best state for human nature is that in which, while no one is poor, no one desires to be richer, nor has any reason to fear being thrust back by the efforts of others to push themselves forward. (Mill 1848).

Today, one of the most renowned Latin American thinkers, Enrique Leff, recommends transitioning to another form of organisation for production and society. Assuming these challenges, he questions and proposes:

How to deactivate the growth of a process that has embedded in its original structure and in its genetic code an engine that drives it to grow or die? How to carry out this purpose without generating an economic recession with social and environmental impacts of a global and planetary scope? [...]. This leads to a strategy of deconstruction and reconstruction, not to blow up the system, but to re-organise production, to disengage the gears of market mechanisms, to restore the threshed material for recycling and rearrange new ecological cycles. In this sense, the construction of an environmental rationality capable to deconstruct the economic rationality implies processes of re-appropriation of Nature and re-territorialisation of cultures (Leff 2008).

Rising to this challenge is an increasingly pressing issue in industrialised countries, the main parties responsible for the global environmental debacle. It is not that poor countries should maintain their poverty and misery for the rich countries to keep their unsustainable living standards. Absolutely not. Instead, what should be noted in the South is to not attempt to replicate lifestyles that are socially and ecologically unsustainable.

It is, therefore, equally urgent to responsibly address the issue of economic growth in "underdeveloped" countries; thus, initially, it is at least appropriate to distinguish "good" growth from the "bad" one. Growth that, as previously referred to in the

letter from Max Neef, is defined by the corresponding natural and social histories left behind, as well as for the future that this growth can anticipate.

On the one hand, structurally impoverished and excluded countries should seek options for a dignified and sustainable life, one that does not constitute a caricatured reproduction of the Western lifestyle. While on the other hand, "developed" countries will have to resolve the growing problems of international inequality they have caused and, in particular, will have to incorporate criteria of sufficiency in their societies rather than trying to argue at the expense of the rest of Humanity the logic of efficiency understood as a process of permanent material accumulation.

Rich countries must, in sum, change their lifestyle, which threatens the world's ecological balance, because, from this perspective they also are, somehow, underdeveloped or "mal-developed" (Tortosa 2011). To achieve this change, they will have to retrace much of the journey, backtracking on a growth that cannot be replicated at a global level. At the same time, they must assume their responsibility to make way for a global restoration of the social and environmental damage caused; in other words, they must pay their ecological and historical debts.

To revisit the essence of economic growth appears, then, as an indispensable task. What should be asked is whether there are ways of developing productive forces that can move in another direction. For now, what is clear is that the destruction that produces economic growth in the form of capitalist accumulation is effectively leading to a dead end. An alternative development should involve, undoubtedly, a different economic logic. This new economy must be rethought by designing and implementing alternatives with a holistic and systemic vision, in line with Human Rights and the Rights of Nature.

The conclusion reached is that growth cannot be the engine of the economy, much less its ultimate goal. It is urgent to discuss de-growth in a serious and responsible manner in the global North (stationary growth is not enough), while simultaneously pursuing post-extractivism in the global South.

Overcoming the colonial boundaries of extractivism

Extractivism is a form of accumulation that began to emerge five hundred years ago. It is a category that allows us to explain the colonial and post-colonial looting, accumulation, concentration, destruction and devastation, as well as the evolution of capitalism to its current form. Development and underdevelopment are items to be understood within this context.

With the conquest and colonisation of America, Africa and Asia, the world's economy began to gain a capitalist structure. As one of the foundational elements of capitalist civilisation, extractive accumulation was developed and consolidated, driven by the demands of the metropolitan centres of this nascent capitalism. Some regions specialised in the extraction and production of raw materials (i.e. primary goods) while others assumed the role of producers of manufactured goods, generally using the natural resources of poor or impoverished countries. The first export Nature; the latter, mostly, transform it to export finished goods.

Extractivism[v], since then, has been a constant in many countries of the global South. With varying degrees of intensity, extractivist practices pervade all Latin American countries. Talking about extractivism has become common in everyday discussions in these countries, following an increasingly brutal intervention by businesses driven by transnational interests. Extractivism is at the heart of the political discourse of various political tendencies, not only among those who ascribe to neo-liberalism, but also including those that distance themselves from it. A critical reading of these discourses and of their arguments is necessary to develop any alternative proposal.

It is, therefore, essential to know the meaning and scope of extractivism, its basis, foundations, and history. It is a complex endeavour because it is a practice that, in Latin America, has been the basis of the economy for hundreds of years and it has percolated its societies, which seem trapped within an extractive DNA.[vi]

The extractive visions of neoliberal governments should thus be debated, as well as those of progressive governments, which in practice deepen this mode of accumulation even if in their rhetoric they recognise the need for a transition. The

neo-extractivism of progressive governments puts forwards some valid points, such as a better state control over extractive activities and an increased participation in the mining or oil revenues. Yet it remains too close to a logic of accumulation deepening the dependent and underdeveloping dynamics of its colonial roots.

Overcoming extractivism and its colonial shackles is a fundamental condition to overcome underdevelopment. However, on the way out of an extractive economy, it will be necessary to continue such activities for some time. A well thought-out transition, firmly adopted by society, will be needed. It should become very clear that a solution to this complex dilemma of societies that are rich in natural resources yet remain cursed to an almost inevitable impoverishment will not be reached by maintaining or, worse, deepening extractivism.

Therefore, it is necessary to consider a key point: the immediate planned de-growth of extractivism (Acosta 2011):[vii] and in the same line, overcoming the very concept of development, giving way to alternatives to development as those proposed by the good living (“buen vivir”) or *sumak kawsay* (Gudynas and Acosta 2011; Acosta 2013; Unceta 2014).

This option would not deteriorate Nature any further and would undermine deeply unequal social structures. The success of such strategies in creating a social, economic, cultural, ecological transition depends on their consistency and on the degree of social support and the weight they have.

Post growth and post extractivism, a shared discussion

It follows from the discussion above that humanity is urged to debate in a serious and responsible manner the urgent economic slowdown in the global North. This, as noted above, must necessarily come in hand with post-extractivism in the global South, where we will also have to question the growth strategies implemented so far.

This demand does not imply in any way to deny the issue of inequalities and social inequities. Quite the opposite. It demands – following the reflections of Enrique Leff (2008) – a strategy of deconstruction and reconstruction, in order not to turn unliveable the life of human beings on the planet. It is necessary to reorganise

production, disengage the gears of market mechanisms (especially the world market), restore the matter used to recycle and rearrange it into new ecological cycles. It is also of urgency to dismantle the irrationality of speculation in all its forms. The world needs a socio-environmental rationality capable of deconstructing the present dominant economic rationality, to build processes of re-appropriation of nature and re-territorialisation of cultures.

Enrique Leff (2008) says that speaking of de-growth or stationary economy is not the core issue:

De-growth not only implies to downshifting or to de-linking from the economy. It is not equivalent to the de-materialisation of production, because that would not prevent the growing economy from continuing consuming and transforming nature to the point that it will exceed the planet's sustainability boundaries. Abstinence and frugality of some responsible consumers does not deactivate the growth-obsession installed at the root and soul of economic rationality, which carries inscribed the impulse to accumulation of capital, economies of scale, urban agglomeration, market globalisation and concentration of wealth. Jumping off the moving train does not directly lead to retrace the path. To de-growth it is not enough to get off the economy's wheel of fortune; it is not enough to want to shrink it and stop it. Beyond the rejection of the commodification of nature, it is necessary to deconstruct the economy.

It is not, according to Leff, a matter of only 'ecologising' the economy, the solution to growth is not only de-growth but also deconstruction and transition to a new economic rationality. The task is to question the modernizing thinking, science, technology and the institutions that have established modernity's "cage of rationality". This irreparably leads to raise post-growth ideas from a much broader perspective, not only economic but also social and political, without losing sight of the broader cultural dimension. We must leave the society of growth; that is the first point.

Given these challenges, it strongly surfaces the need to rethink sustainability in function of Nature's capacity of load and resilience. In other words, the task lies in

knowing the true dimensions of sustainability and assuming the capacity of Nature to tolerate disturbances that could not be subordinated to anthropocentric demands. This demand requires a new ethic to organise life itself. It is necessary to recognise that conventional development, sustained in economic growth, leads Humanity to a dead end. The limits of Nature, rapidly overflowed by anthropocentric life-styles, particularly exacerbated by the demands of capital accumulation, are increasingly noticeable and unsustainable.

The task seems simple, but it is extremely complex. Instead of maintaining a separation between Nature and human beings, we must facilitate their reencounter; something like trying to tie the Gordian knot of life, broken by the strength of an idea of social organisation that is predatory and, indeed, intolerable. Nature establishes the limits and scope of sustainability, and the ability of systems for their self-renewal, of which productive activities depend. That is, if Nature is destroyed, the base of the economy itself is destroyed.

To sum up, the economy must bring down the whole theoretical framework which, according to José Manuel Naredo (2009), emptied of any materiality the notion of production and completely separated economic reasoning from the physical world. That process meant the epistemological rupture that displaced the idea of economic system, with its carousel of production and growth, to the simple field of value.

This urges us to avoid actions that eliminate diversity, replacing them with uniformity. And it is exactly this that provokes mega-mining or monocultures, given that these uniformed activities, as recognised by Godofredo Stutzin (1984), "break equilibriums, producing even larger imbalances". And now, when the limits of sustainability in the world are being literally surpassed, it is essential to build universal environmental solutions.

On the other hand, if the economy has to subordinate itself to the mandates of the Earth, capital should be subdued to the demands of human society, which is part of Nature itself: human beings are Nature! This demands giving way to schemes of profound redistribution of wealth and power, as well as construction of societies founded in plural equities. Not only is the issue of class struggle at stake here,

meaning the capital-labour confrontation. It is the question of overcoming the concept of "race" as a structuring element of dependent societies where racism is one of the crudest manifestations of this dependency. It is an essential and urgent task to overcome patriarchy and sexism.

As a corollary

Having more does not make people happier. From that perspective, it does not matter how many things a person produces in their life, but how the things they own help them have a better standard of living. This means we need to get over this dominant religion of economic growth, of endless accumulation of material goods and the logic of progress itself which has been around for long – maybe more than 500 years – nurturing the foundations of the capitalist economy.

This dilemma will not be resolved overnight. We must build – as Eduardo Gudynas recommends over and over – plural, clear and precise transitions from utopian horizons, such as good living or *sumak kawsay*, although it would be better to talk about *good coexistence*, as Xavier Albó suggests (2009).

Good living, as a proposal free of prejudices and under construction, opens the door to develop alternative visions of life with its assumptions of harmony with Nature, of reciprocity, relationality, complementarity and solidarity between individuals and communities, with its opposition to the concept of perpetual accumulation, and its return to use values. Without forgetting or even less so manipulating its ancestral origins, it can provide a platform to discuss, set up and implement responses to the devastating effects of climate change on a global level and the increasing marginalisation and social violence in the world. It can even contribute to proposing a paradigm shift in the middle of the crisis that is hitting many of once core countries. In that sense, the construction of good living, as part of deeply democratic processes, may be useful in finding even global answers to the challenges that humanity faces.

As it is easy to understand, questionings of that kind are beyond any instrumental correction of a development strategy and of continued economic growth. Development discourses that justify visions of domination and exclusion, of colonial

roots, can no longer be sustained. It is required a counter-discourse that subverts the dominant and its related practices of domination, while generating new rules and logics of action. Its success will depend on the capacity to think, propose, unfold, and even to show indignation – if that is the case – globally.

Consequently, good living or *sumak kawsay*, by opening the door to a transition towards a new civilisation, demands another economy. This will not emerge overnight and even less through the guidance of enlightened leaders. It is a construction that is patient and determined to dismantle several fetishisms and to foster radical changes, restoring the values, experiences and above all the existing practices in the Andean and Amazonian world, nurturing from those visions and experiences synchronised with the praxis of life in harmony and fulfilled life that are developed worldwide.

From the above, as a way to sum up, we can conclude on the need to consider the following:

It is evident that economic growth cannot be the goal of an economy proper of a civilisation other than a capitalist one. Moreover, for some chores it may even be counterproductive. We must accept that permanent economic growth in a finite world is crazy. We must dismantle, then, both the economy and the society of growth. Moreover, if we already accept that economic growth is not equivalent to development, even more so that should be valid for a determined construction of good living or *sumak kawsay*, which represents an alternative to development.

De-commodification of Nature, as part of a conscious reencounter with *Pachamama*, is a crucial issue. Plainly, the economy must subordinate to ecology. De-commodification of Nature will come hand in hand with the dematerialisation of production processes, oriented to a more efficient production, capable of using fewer resources. Economic objectives should be subject to the operational laws of natural systems, without losing sight of respect for human dignity and ensuring the quality of life for all people.

If we talk about de-commodification of Nature, this action should also be implemented with common goods, understood as those goods that belong, are of

usufruct or are consumed by a more or less extensive group of individuals or by society as a whole. These goods can be natural or social systems, tangible or intangible (Wikipedia, for example), different from each other, but common to be inherited or built collectively.

Decentralisation is another core aspect of another economy. In many areas, such as in food and energy sovereignty for example, answers-actions that are closer to people are required. This means that, from communities themselves, from their own territories (rural and urban) more accurate responses will have to be found; responses that often have already been present for a long time and that have not succumbed to the capitalist mandate. This action, as part of an exercise in cultural re-territorialisation, is guided towards recovering the protagonist role and control that the people, meaning, of communities, have in decision-making, to strengthen participation and local processes.

The equitable distribution of income and redistribution of wealth (including labour, which shall also be subject to a process of de-commodification) is a fundamental step towards the construction of another economy that will lean towards good living. If the economy must be subordinated to the mandates of the Earth, the economy (not just capital) has to be subdued to the demands of human society, which is not only part of Nature but is Nature itself. This requires a profound redistribution of wealth and power, as well as building societies founded on equality and in plural equities. As we have already said, the question of class struggle, meaning the capital-labour conflict, is not the only one at stake. At stake is also the effective overcoming of ethnic, social, economic, political, gender and intergenerational inequalities.

The democratisation of the economy, of an alternative economy, complements what was noted above. It is essential that decision-making in the economic field, at all levels, is increasingly participatory and deliberative. This implies ensuring the rights of both producers and consumers. The principles of communal social organisation should govern and go beyond of the economic, financial and conventional utilitarianism.

In sum, as part of a great transformation, which will have to be eminently cultural, we need a vision that overcomes the fetish of economic growth, that is conducive to the de-commodification of Nature and of common goods, the decentralisation and the change in production and consumption structures, the redistribution of wealth and power, as the basis for a strategy of collective and constant construction of another economy, essential for a different civilisation.

We aim therefore to an economy that will tend to the reproduction of life and not that of capital. This task implies local, national and international actions that require a future utopian horizon, but that equally demands short and medium term answers.

A central issue that should be considered will be that the vast majority of the population, systemically doomed to exclusion and even poverty, does not reflect on these problems. On the contrary, they aspire to permanently live with the same levels of consumption that the wealthier groups at global and national level, without asking whether it is possible or even convenient. We should remember that society, in the North and the South, is bombarded with messages that predispose it to mass consumption. It would even seem that marginalised individuals have had a consumer chip of high aspirations incorporated into their heads, but that they cannot achieve this consumption due to a lack of resources to finance them or because, if this were to occur, the global environmental problems would deepen.

In hand with consumerism comes wasteful spending of all kinds. For example, according to FAO, every year more than 1.3 billion tons of perfectly edible food is wasted: 670 million in the global North and 630 in the global South. These situations, aberrant from any point of view, are worsened as increasingly more agricultural land and vast resources of all kinds are destined to produce supplies for cars: biofuels, and not to meet human's food demand. That explains why, despite the undisputed technological advances, not even hunger has been eradicated from the planet, and this is not because of lack of food. That exists.

Humanity's great challenge is synthesised in how to democratically process a new way of organising the economy, recognizing the limits of Nature and ensuring a dignified life for all the inhabitants of the planet. In this endeavour we will also have to leave

behind the "civilisation of waste" as the economist Jürgen Schuldt (2013) appropriately defined the current situation.

We must achieve a great historical transformation and make the step from an anthropocentric conception to a (socio) bio-centric one, overcoming an economy inspired in growing tied to the accumulation of capital to one at the service of life. That is Humanity's great challenge, if we do not want to jeopardise the very existence of human beings on Earth.

From this perspective, we must consolidate and extend the validity of Human Rights and the Rights of Nature, seen as a starting point for the democratic construction of democratic societies, that is, to ensure greater and more effective citizen and community participation.

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