

## **A change of meaning. Stop the capitalistic destruction assuming ourselves as ecosystems**

*"If all the insects of the planet disappear, in less of 50 years all life would disappear.*

*If all the human beings of the planet disappear, in less of 50 years all kinds of life would flourish."*

*John Salk*

This statement by John Salk is a painful philosophical provocation. What kind of humanity are we that subjugates and exploits the nature? What kind of civilization have we created that threatens life?. We live within an extreme violence: feminicides, legal and illegal mafias, local guerrillas... We live in an economic violence: inequality of wealth, spoils, land appropriation, extreme poverty... We live in a deep discomfort: increase of physical and psychic diseases, the daily abuse... all these deep problems are due to the direction that this civilization has taken, a trend towards suicide.

*"Who believes that unlimited growth is possible within a finit planet he is a crazyman or he is an economist."*

*Kenneth Boulding*

Many relevant thinkers have already denounced the meaningless upon which this civilization is based: the illusion on unlimited material growth that have exploited the majority of population and have brutally extracted vital elements indispensable for the balance of the planet and the survival of future generations.

There are a lot of researches and books about the deepest hole we have digged. These researches show us that we are inside the hole, very deep inside. Only knowing that we are in the hole, we can get out of it. I emphasize three break points that show us that a change of path is necessary.

**Energy and minerals depletion.** The International Energy Agency admits that we reached the oil peak in 2006 (Energetic crisis, 2006). The critical fact is that civilization is entirely based on oil; for example, the food industry needs machinery that consumes oil, fertilizers are made of oil, and fuel is needed to transport food to places far away. The similar problem occurs within the pharmaceutical industry that manufactures millions of drugs using oil derivatives; the hospital system requires a large amount of energy for all the medical equipment. If we follow the predicted trend of robotization and digitalization in the industries and daily live, soon every corner of our existence would have to depend on oil and scarce minerals, as the coltan. All these problems would increase the tension that

already exists between a civilization that eats and lives on oil, and the planet that every time has less and less oil. So, if the extraction of oil increases, more violence will destroy the ecosystems, animals and humans.

**Climate change.** Since the Industrial Revolution the emissions of gas with greenhouse effects increased and with that the global temperature raised by 1.5°C (Al Gore, 2006). It's predicted that the average temperature of the earth will increase by 2°C in the next 30 years. This little two-digit change implies terrible consequences such as:

- Changes in ecosystems, desertification and extinction of species. Of the 8 million species on the planet, 1 million are in danger of extinction.
- The melting of the poles and sea level rising. The heat causes defrost of the ice at the poles and the sea level rises and threatens to immerse coasts and small islands.
- Acidification of the oceans. The absorption of too much CO<sub>2</sub> causes the death and disease of fish, algae, corals and other underwater organisms
- Mass migrations. It is estimated that in year 2050, one billion people will migrate because the change of climate.

Although the climate change is the main threat, as Naomi Klein (2015) said: "There are multiple ways in which climate change could become a catalyst for positive transformation; in fact, it could become the best argument for the progressive people to call for the reconstruction and revival of the local economies... All this would help to end the bizarre inequality levels inside our nations and between them. "

**Water pollution.** For the middle of this century (2050), it is estimated that the planet will lose definitively 18,000 km<sup>3</sup> of fresh water, an amount nine times greater than water used every year for irrigation, which in turn represents 70% of water withdrawals.

It's estimated that by 2050 around seven billions of persons will suffer water limitation. And in about 25 years, the restriction will have already increased by 50% in poor countries (Matsura, 2003). At present, the distribution of this precious liquid among people is not equitable and the worst part is for the sectors with less resources.

Although the industrial production is the most obvious cause of the destruction of the planet, this logic has been aggravated since the 80's, because of the uncontrollable financial system that is dominating every corner of human life.

## The value confusion

*"Anciently, everything that had value was priceless. Today everything that is priceless, don't have value."*

*Patrick Viveret*

The confusion between Value and Price made us to think that everything must be accounted with prices and to be negotiated in the market. Life is commodified to be sold to the highest bidder. But can we calculate the price of pollination? How much costs the life of one species? Is it possible to calculate the price of caring a child? How much cost a smile?

Commodifying the essential elements of life is the sign that we have sacralized the money. The money is in the heart of the human daily life as an all-powerful and omnipresent entity. Without money is not possible to exist, therefore everything can be sacrificed by it.

Politicians and economists are always worried about the economy's growth, in other words about how the GDP of each country increases. Absurdly, the real values as the preservation of peoples' life and their dignity have been left out of the map.

## A predatory financial system

*"No, we are no longer willing to worship merchandises as a goddess. Nor to give the control of our existence to the priests of the money law. We are no longer willing to contain our rage, neither accept the unacceptable in the name of the realism turned criminal. Nor to continue combining critical lucidity and practical resignation."*

*Jerome Blanchet*

The current financial system is created in order to destroy the planet and the people's lives. Huge amounts of money are needed to finance mining companies, megaprojects or company's merges. This disastrous investment is justified by mass media and some universities, who repeat tirelessly that private investment is necessary for the country's growth. In fact there are no investments to benefit life. The investments of money are used to extract wealth from the nature or to exploit the population of a region.

Although money has a very important role in people's lives, we know little about how it works. We suffer dramatically its effects through the feeling of scarcity, fear and uncertainty when we don't have it. But as a society, we ignore why the most of the

population don't have enough money to survive, why it's concentrated in few hands, why the governments have big debts, and so on.

The economists produce a complicated terminology that difficult to know simple facts of economy. Here are some specific data that reveal some aspects of financial system:

- The 95% of the money is issued by private banks through loans that are granted to persons, business and governments.
- The speculative economy is 125 times more than real economy. The speculative economy creates money through financial derivatives and bets through stock exchange. A huge cloud of money is created, an illusion that explodes frequently causing a wave of bankruptcies and crisis, even of entire countries.
- Money is very expensive. According to Margret Kennedy the 40% of the price of some products is the cost of interest and inflation. Even though we don't borrow money from banks, we are already paying indirectly interest when we consume products that need loans for their manufacturing.

Money doesn't keep wealth among people, it's an instrument of extraction. Susana Martín points out that "three of four dollars that the USA government gives to the indigenous reservations leaves those communities in less than 48 hours"

### **Living the life bonded with nature**

*"We are totally dependence of the biology, the independency of the biosphere means death"*

*Lynn Margulis*

The ideology that has dominated science and technology has isolated the human from the nature. This ideology perceives the nature as an endless source of resources. This kind of science and technology pursue to establish a civilization that escapes the nature. The image of this perception is a human surrounded by houses of cement, dressed with synthetic textiles, fed with industrialized products and communicated with digital gadgets, all mediated by money. This human has been emancipated of what he consider lower and primitive. But this illusion is associated with the nature's predation and isolation that make us a sort of mutilated beings.

We have to re-conceive ourselves as part of life, as part of a cycle, as part of a complex bigger than us, as part of a common subject; so, our conception of human being must change: *"I'm not just me, I'm a common being; I'm a complex bacterial system that*

*constitutes me, at the same time, I am part of a broader system: the planet, with a delicate balance among every being."*

*"We all are a community of microbes. Each microbes, each plant, each animal all of them in the planet are today, a symbiotical product."*

*Lynn Margulis*

Life depends of a narrow and harmonious relationship between the beings that inhabit an ecosystem. An ecosystem is a complex organization of different beings which keep a relationship of interdependence. Singularity of beings implies complementarity. An ecosystem is not an homogeneous and static set, but quite the opposite, the diversity is infinite and in constant movement.

To talk about ecosystem is to talk about how to inhabit the planet. It's a new form of inhabiting where the being is a common being in movement and transformation. This new living is not anthropocentric, not competitive, not hierarchical and not patriarchal.

### **A new map: A geography of rooting**

*"The map lies. The traditional geography steals the space, as the imperial economy steals the wealth, the official history steals the memory and the formal culture steal the word."*

*Eduardo Galeano*

Where do the concept of borders come from? How were those imaginary lines that we see drawn on the maps? Why did we make the planet Gaia a fragmented puzzle? The illusory geographical boundaries were imposed by administrative facilities or political interests. They don't respect the authenticity of a self-realizing life through energy flows, vital cycles and concomitant relationships in a certain place.

It is an essential task to look at the same regions with new eyes, to rediscover the regions within life and the life within the regions; to conceive boundaries established by nature and not for the convenience of the human; to perceive multiple ecosystems with different sizes overlapping among themselves. To conceive the social life rooted to its own ecosystem, to its vital rhythm; to couple the human existence with its culture, art, spirituality, enjoyment, organization, health, nurturing, etc. Then the politics, the economy, the culture and the geography won't be centered in the individualized human, but on a new entity 'human & nature': the ecosystem.

## **Inhabiting an ecosystem**

To conceive an ecosystem is not easy, it's a continuous process of creativity and struggle. Inhabiting an ecosystem it's a life's call. To live in an ecosystem is the art of living, it's a daily life transformation, it's the creation of life's alternatives, it's to look new ways to develop everyday life. to search alternatives to housing, transportation, health, food and culture. Thus the transformation is based in a personal and community change. It's a mutation.

To protect an ecosystem is to defend the commons, the territory, the nature. To resist the invasion of megaprojects: real estate developments, highways, mining corporations, companies monopolizing wind power, touristic resorts. It's to be also aware of the confrontation with the capital and the predatory system. To be part of a constant battle, which requires organization and multiple strategies to defend seeds, water, land, jungles, forests, rivers and so on. It's a militancy.

## **Ecosystemic activism**

The ecosystemic activism is an essential task for every person inhabiting a region. This activism may create peacefully life's alternatives or may defend life against the capitalistic depredation. The ecosystemic activists are deeply sensible and courageous people who are dedicated to take life's care. They are indispensable people who during years or decades have persisted in the defense of life facing an extreme violent system who is exterminating dignity and life.

To be an ecosystem activist is not simple, it's to practice patience and dedication. It's to see in each small action a worthy step to reach the utopia. It's being aware of the merit of the little actions and its transformative power. To be an ecosystem activism implies a committed and disciplined life. It's the sublimated passion on actions, thought and organization. It's the walker who finds their own tireless rhythm, sometimes lonely, frequently accompanied; always willing to open his heart and joining to others.

The ecosystem activist thinks the present integrating the future; he knows that he needs to sow today before waiting the harvest. His work is done with joy and love. He spreads, inspires, motives, teaches and shares.

## **Some axes of the ecosystemic activism are:**

- Alternative economies: solidary, ecological, cyclical.
- Commons: water, land, air, seeds, jungles, forests.
- Food sovereignty: urban gardens, agroecology.

- Integral health, self-managed and responsible.
- Communication, education, free art and emancipative culture.

The ecosystemic activists are many and they are in many places, some are known and others work in the anonymity. Some defend and are creative on small spaces; others, because their circumstances, have to defend an entire ecosystem. But everyone is aware of the humanity's current challenge and they are looking for a deep change.

#### **Some examples of Ecosystemic Activisms in Mexico:**

- Defense of the forests and the official reserved lands avoiding predatory human settlements in the South of the Metropolitan Zone of the Valley of Mexico City (in opposition to real state developers and depletion or contamination of water). It is a matter of 80,000 Has. monitored by the Autonomous Assembly of the Peoples of the Basin of Mexico (AAPCM in Spanish terms).
- Training and caring for personal and communal health applying natural resources as roots, herbs, vegetarian food, acupuncture, massage, mediation, yoga, bioenergetics and new or old ritual performative practices.
- Defense of the last virgin jungle in Mexico and its rich biodiversity, the "Chimalapas" in the state of Oaxaca, Istmus of Tehuantepec... Protection of their ancient ethnic groups and constant struggle with mining and timber companies, invasion of foreign cattle and agrobusinesses, hunters and desperate migrants, drug traffickers... even, improving the awareness of the always ignored local population about the construction of a military protected railway linking eastern and western seas for massive transportation of merchandises... it will work as a barrier stopping migratory trends and separating south of Mexico (and Mesoamerica) from center and north, the poor and the rich.
- Defense of the land and fostering of natural agroecological practices in the western territories nearby Mexico City, rural settlements as Metepec and the industrial city of Toluca. Fostering of local appreciated products like avocado and mushrooms. Defense of the ethnic groups called Mazahuas and their healthy practices as the traditional steam bath called "Temazcal".
- Permaculture and solidary economy among children in the city of Queretaro. In a school for children called Gardens of the Ranch there is an initiative among the children, girls and boys, to produce or transform organic agroproducts in order to have healthy food and ecotechnical gadgets and services. Periodically they organize fairs in order to exchange among themselves (producers and consumers: 'prosumers') using alternative money called "verdillote" (green bill) that means fair

market, solidarity, mutual help, autonomy of toxic capitalistic money. This experience has been reproduced in other schools in other Mexican cities.

- Ecological activists practicing permaculture and dry toilets through a network called 'Transition Towns' have created their proper community money called "kuni". Based on this experience they produce books explaining the concept of mesoeconomía and its general money based on gifts serving different community moneys based on credit.
- In Mexico City, near the University City, there is a movement called 'United Neighbors Copilco University' who is opposing the creation of big buildings for expensive housing and commercial offices and businesses, even including an heliport. This challenge implies to oppose the process of 'gentrification' (expulsion of original poor inhabitants). This activism is influenced by a movement 'Tradition and Harmony' who includes a leadership training in Zen Buddhism.
- In Mexico City, there is a famous lake and productive gardens called Xochimilco (where the Aztecs invented the floating gardens called 'chinampas'). It is a famous touristic old town in the middle of the megalopolis characterized by a network of channels and small collective boats connecting productive gardens called 'milpas' (it is the aztec version of Venice in Italy). A network of farmers are taken care of the preservation of this historical zone with its fresh water and they produce organic food and medical herbs introduced into alternative markets using community money, as the network Mixiuhca.

### **To assume an ecosystem life: The Ecomun**

The worldwide financial system is destroying the planet and the people livelihood. Huge amounts of money are needed to finance large megaprojects of transnational corporation. One of the great problems in Mexico is the dispossession of territories belonging to their original inhabitants. The volatile masses of speculative money find materiality when they are invested in territories. The outcome is the contamination of ecosystems, the creation of poorly paid jobs and decomposition of social tissues.

We need an economic, ecological and cultural transformation where the money is a tool to transform the economic rationality that preys the nature and all living beings in the planet.

- **The Ecomun is a currency that does not exploit nature, but conserves it**

Official toxic money is issued to invest in productive businesses, which implies energy expenditure, but on that trend it is difficult to think about conservation and care of the



nature. We need a community currency that conserves nature and creates new forms of non predatory life.

The Ecomún is a currency that is issued with the objective of supporting the people who have dedicated their existence to the care of the land, of the ecosystems.

- **The Ecomun is a currency not issued as debt but as a gift**

The gift's economy means an economy sustaining life, it is based on reciprocity and reproduction of life. For example, the considerable time/work that implies the caring of children is offered freely by adults who take care of them and later they are compensated reciprocally by similar services provided by the parents. Indigenous communities teach us with their practices called 'tequio' and 'guelaguetza' that the gift's economy creates a circle of abundance.

Those who have dedicated their lives to the defense of nature or to a conviction for the good of humanity, deserve to be appreciated, taken care of and paid back. Offering them a basic income in a community currency such as the Ecomún is a minimum reciprocity to the contribution they have given.

- **The Ecomún is a currency that does not extract wealth, but keeps it in an ecosystem.**

Official money is easily spent on the multiple offers of the system but the wealth based on the circulation of goods meeting our needs is in the hands of large corporations.

The Ecomun is a currency that is mainly spent among small producers, local businesses, cooperatives, etc. It maintains the wealth among the network of producers, who, as they consume within that same network, they become prosumers. It is a membrane that protects, stimulating local consumption and encouraging production to satisfy needs among the inhabitants of an ecosystem.

Today, humanity faces two essential challenges: its devastating voracity and its inability to establish among other human beings relationships based on trust. With alternative currencies, like the Ecomun we are relearning to live and love among ourselves in everyday life and being part of a new social tissue. From there contribute to a global consciousness.

#### **How does the Ecomun works?**

The Ecomun is a currency that comes from the experience of more than 25 years of community currencies in Mexico. The Ecomun is a currency based on the sharing of time, labor and conventional monetary resources of people who commit themselves to the defense of the

environment and the creation of life alternatives. A reserve of conventional money (pesos) is created based on donations, then the Ecomun is issued (One peso : One ecomun). The 'Ecomunes' are given to 'ecosystemic activists', people who defend a territory, an ecosystem, the commons, or promote a dignified livelihood. Those ecosystemic activists spend their Ecomunes within a network of 'prosumers' (producers/consumers) who accept them. Prosumers, in turn, use the Ecomunes to exchange among themselves, thereby fostering an economy based on trust and specific ecosystems.

### **We need a social alchemy.**

We live in the incongruity of being part of an economic capitalistic system whose essence, money and power, is against life. We urgently need a social alchemy capable of transforming a destructive money into a tool caring people and nature. This social alchemy implies to collect money from the capitalistic system taking away its destructive power, reserving it outside its usual circulation, keeping its leveraging power and issuing instead a new voucher, the Ecomun, without usual toxic properties (indebtedness, usury, speculation, inflation, concentration, etc.).

The alchemy to which we refer begins in a simple act that has historically made us human beings: sharing. Offering something valuable that we have to those who need it in their efforts contributing to restore a common good greater than the particular concerns. To share with a great sense of community is an act of personal transformation.

Therefore the Ecomun is a voucher that is based on the sharing of people who offer voluntary work, time, knowledge and financial resources. It means people who pay attention to the ecological catastrophe that almost everybody is causing, it means people who propose a more ethical way of obtaining products and services for the survival of our ecosystems and communities, it means people who are giving back valuables to those that are caring our ecosystems as well as our lives.

The Ecomun is an offering and a deep thanking to all ecosystemic activists in the world not only those who participate directly in the Ecomun benefits. It is also a way of spreading consciousness about how we are oppressed and destructed by the capitalism system. Above all, it is a way of showing that we are many who are creating an ecosystemic world. Our great hope is that we may combine our efforts with confidence and solidarity. The Ecomun is a tool who works as a leverage reinforcing the voluntary work of many people.

### **Some lessons from the experiences of community currencies in Mexico.**

The movement of social currencies in Mexico started in 1994 when an alternative currency was created in the Valley of Mezquital (state of Hidalgo) by an indigenous community belonging to the 'Otomi' culture. We have now 25 years of experiences. During this century's quarter there have been several courageous initiatives alternating to the official money, some experimenting success and others unfortunately disappearing. A general voucher, the Ecomún, designed to reinforce the

ecosystemic activists, the local efforts of community currencies and many 'prosumers', was created in 2017.

In Mexico, as in other countries, social currencies are very diverse because the context in which they are born and developed. The circumstances in which they are generated mean facilities, challenges, difficulties, and at the same time peculiar characteristics depending if they are urban, rural, middle class or poor levels, indigenous or cosmopolitan cultures, etc.

Mexico is exploited by megaprojects of several corporative businesses, like mining, water, tourism, agroindustry, forestry, cattle, energy, banking, housing, etc., that shatter the country's natural resources. All of them respond to the relentless growth that the capital needs to perpetuate itself; this explosion is a response to the speculative bubble that the financial system has put together: large amount of money created without real support ('funny money') to acquire real values concentrating them in a very few hands.

For those of us who participate in community currencies experiences, a first challenge is to unveil the relationship between the speculative financial system and the hyper exploitation of the nature. Those of us who promote community currencies are walking along organized groups, territory defense networks, ecological and educational projects and so on, to generate holistic strategies where the topic of money is fundamental.

In Mexico, we decided to refer to alternative currencies as "community money". We are a cultural mix, which give us the opportunity to choose the best elements of the culture that shaped us. We can substitute the values of the mercantile society -competence, speculation, depredation- with values of reciprocity, sharing and respect for the environment. The community is in our collective imagination, as it is the need to be with the 'Others' based on concepts such as solidarity and mutual help.

If Community money must be a transformative element, it is necessary to accompany it with a sharing model. Edgar Morin points out that "As capitalism and individualism have extended monetization to sectors of life where favors prevailed, we have to reclaim the satisfaction of giving, through which the donor gives the best of himself".

Substituting one money for another does not change the existential logic, it is necessary to overcome the quantitative dilemma, and with it, the selfish-utilitarian logic. We propose to return to the logic of reciprocity. Reciprocity is a relationship between people that develops common awareness, a value similar to friendship is produced, and the important thing is that such value becomes something that goes beyond each person.

In the Mexican case there are many examples of giving practices, such as "Guelaguetza" or "Tequio", that teach us that sharing is the experience of being together and feeling in common.

It is very important to note that the experiences of community money in Mexico do not receive systematic support from NGO's or governments. On the contrary, they face a hostile market that

perverts equity relations, they are supported by unpaid voluntary work and apart from any political and economic powers.

In the virtuous circle of gift we find the key to generate a network of mutual support that sustains experiences of community and ecosystemic money, where it is possible to share values between different generations. In this way, an appropriate use of time and material resources can be made, unnecessary consumerism is avoided and, little by little, our attachment to the concept of private property is overcome, as we move to the notion of the commons.