

Ramon Folch

# Socio-ecology and sustainability

## THE FACTS AND REALITY

**The experiment is easy and extremely enlightening. It consists in standing anywhere in a square or in a particular building and taking a few photos, in different directions and at different moments; later, repeating the operation from a couple of other positions; and finally, comparing the photos. The place can usually be identified, of course, but all the photos are different, sometimes very different. It is clear that the position and the moment of observation are crucial. Different components appear in each photo and even the common elements are seen differently in them, from another angle, related to other things, re-ordered with respect to other shots likewise shared and similarly re-positioned. The experiment is an anamorphism of perceptive reality. Better still: it is a fragment of reality itself.**

“The facts are the facts, but reality is the way we perceive them”.  
The observation is by Albert Einstein. Reality is the perception of the facts. The facts are retained in the photographic series, but no two photos are alike. How many realities are there in the same photographed square? As many as there are observers and moments. Yet we often confuse the timelessness of static elements with a supposed uniqueness of the photographed object. The confusion leads us to believe that the precise idea of our perception of the facts is identified with





| **Landscape VI (Paisatge VI)**, Jaume Plensa (2008). Mixed media and collage on paper, 220 x 200 cm

the univocal description of reality, of a single supposed objective reality. At this point, disagreement among observers is inevitable.

The pigeonholing of knowledge makes the subject more complex. It means that the cameras we use to take the photos with are not the same either. Specialisation is not an aim of science, but a limitation of the scientists. But the specialised scientists —namely, the great majority— perceive their limited sectorial knowledge as an added value, so much so that they are suspicious of the knowledge of others, which they find biased or insufficient, without realising that this is also the case with them. The scope of knowledge is growing all the time and encyclopaedism has for decades, maybe centuries, been utopian. Utopian, but by no means undesirable. Encyclopaedism continues to be the ideal condition of the expert, but minimal levels of specialisation are the only possible horizon. Specialisation is merely a forced limitation, a limitation that the specialist usually mistakes for solidity.

All in all, these are not epistemologically minor matters. On the contrary, they are primordial, as the socio-scientific discourse is based on inventoried realities. The facts are barely raw material. The true story is constructed with perceived realities, as many as there are observers.

### **TO LEARN IS TO CHANGE**

The fundamentalisms refute this evidence. Or rather: they do not even consider it. Fundamentalisms reiterate the unidirectional observation of certain static facts, always the same ones, an observation that they raise to the condition of sole truth. It is a very poor way of looking, of course. For fundamentalists, reality is something pre-established, often compiled in some scripture more or less revealed of which one only has to be the keeper or, at most, the exegete. Fundamentalists consider very few facts always looked at in the same way. They tautologically visit the same spaces over and again until they make intellectual cacophony their supposed coherence. But they are not coherent, they are redundant.

The fundamentalist does not learn. By definition. To learn means to change. Change is the expression of coherence with an open and receptive attitude. People who do not change do not necessarily show coherence. They often show inability. The inability to learn from mistakes or, simply, from the new provocations of changing reality. An inability that, as it is so profound, is often disguised as virtue, the only way of seeing faults in the ductility of those who learn.

Learning entails changing the sides taken. It is more comfortable to reaffirm oneself in them (in the name of supposed coherence, naturally). Thus, the 19<sup>th</sup> century idea of the selfish cruel businessman who exploits a good and supportive proletariat continues to provide mental comfort to certain analysts. Things have changed a lot in two hundred years, but perceptions slanted through the filters of prejudice generate dreamlike realities that get in the way of seeing real facts. These days there is greatness and wretchedness in both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, supposing the boundary between them is clear. Through mental inertia, the fundamentalists transfer the historical rejection of bourgeois selfishness to all modern business activity. The truth is that there is now more creativity

and a sense of responsibility among newly created businessmen —many of whom are the grandchildren of proletarians— than among certain overprotected salary-earning sectors, with untouchable acquired rights and gauzy obligations. But it is the wish of fundamentalism that, if there are social or environmental problems, the traditionally evil sectors are necessarily guilty of them. Needless to say, the fundamentalists on the other side, with the same stubborn attitude, reach opposite and equally simplistic conclusions.

Sustainabilist ideas are born in this perceptive moment, so confusing. Although they stem from different areas of society, they have taken root especially strongly in environmentalist sectors. Sustainabilism is based on the well-known triangle of environment-society-economy, but in the eyes of many it still represents another version of

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ecologism. This is not true. Indeed, ecological fundamentalism is clashing increasingly violently with sustainabilist holism. Conversely, more advanced and ductile ecologism is these days expressed almost exclusively through sustainabilism. It might be said that ecologism capable of learning considers more and more events in their perceptive template, which distances it from profound ecologism which, according to the expression of its chief ideologue, “thinks like a mountain”. Mountains neither perceive nor think.

Whether one has arrived at sustainabilism through environmental reflection, through sociological considerations or through economic verifications, global thinking eventually prevails among its followers. This is why sustainabilism, which is holistic, many-sided and globalising, is presented as a new cultural dimension.

## THE NEW SUSTAINABILIST CULTURE

The concept “new culture” has triumphed. In no time we have got used to talking of the new culture of water, the new culture of energy, etc. We ought surely to be calling them new subcultures of the new culture of sustainability. In effect, they are successful sectorial developments, born in the shadow of a powerful trigger, which only become fully meaningful in the framework of a more global context, that of sustainabilist culture.

There have never been as many cultural orders in the history of mankind as now. A cultural order is more or less a template of values that hierarchises objectives and priorities, in such a way that it generates a specific way of understanding life. The concept of sustainability, by incorporating diachrony into synchronic options (the future is managed with the options of the present), shakes up the social and economic order that has been in force for centuries and, therefore, fully deserves the term new culture. These things only happen from time to time.

The new sustainabilist culture is a great upheaval, in effect. It means that our actions have to be compatible with the synchronic management of global space and with the



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diachronic management of future reality. Sustainability radically changes the spatial and temporal scale of actions, therefore it internalises consequences hitherto not taken into account. This does not have much to do with supposed balances and harmonies of allegedly wise natures. The reactionary sector of the ecologist movement, which exists and does not cease to make itself heard, will never be sustainabilist. When it says balance, it thinks immobility.

Sustainabilism is not founded on Newtonian balance, but on Prigoginian stability. Sustainability is a global culture, of biospheric scope —and therefore internalising and supportive— that champions dissipative structures in an immobile state. Technical terms apart, this means that it assumes responsibilities, takes care of everything and does whatever is necessary thinking of the future.

Trying to understand it with the old tools is pointless. It is precisely for this reason that it is a new culture. We have to educate so that everyone may be aware of it, then. Repeating normal science will not get us very far. It would be like explaining electricity with mechanical concepts. The phenomenon of electricity posed the need for a “new culture” and so the operators of levers, connecting rods and cogwheels could not understand it without first recycling themselves. You do not get as far as computers or television by deepening knowledge of the steam engine...

Sustainabilism has to give battle on three conceptual fronts: those of the defenders of the old order, those frightened by the new order, and those indifferent to any order. Together, they are the majority, and therefore we sustainabilists are in the minority. For the time being, of course. The tables will turn sooner or later, I think, because they have no alternative. Because of the facts, I mean. The new preachers of sustainabilism, like all evangelists, seek conversions through grace. I do not believe in that. I believe in disappointment in the face of the useless old paradigm and in the robust proposition. I believe in the exhaustion of oil and in determinist chaos, namely, the pressure of need and the subverting force of trustworthy ideas.

The unbearable nature of the growing unsustainability will soon lead us to look up into the sky. What will there be to see, however? Slogans won't be enough. Purposeful sustainabilist theses will be necessary, capable of designing a new way of being and doing —a new culture— that works without differentials and externalisations, that sees in growth a circumstantial ally, bounded in time, and which cares more about making friends than defeating enemies. All this has to be taught, which is much more than simply preaching it.

And, firstly, it has to be studied. Religious beliefs may be the result of timely revelations —knowledge is not. In dreams no equations appear. Sustainabilism stems from the need —the failure of old-industrialist developmentalism— but it prevails from the standpoint of the reasonable proposition. Educating means transmitting wisdom. Nursery schools and the university should get on with it straight away. From ABC to the

doctoral thesis: a long road. And don't forget that we begin to unlearn as soon as we stop learning. Wisdom and goodness are like lukewarm water: they easily go cold.

## THE SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL APPROACH

Some have got this far starting from socio-ecological considerations. Socio-ecology is more or less a still ethereal branch of ecology that incorporates social and economic considerations to the study of the environmental reality. Or, perhaps, a branch of sociology that takes the systemic naturalistic view for the study of social and economic phenomena. Or neither of the two. It could be considered as a holistic approach to the study of the socio-economic and environmental whole. In other words, a trans-disciplinary discipline—nice paradox—that tries to understand things before wishing to explain them, interested in people's relationships with the natural surroundings and with one another. It would be one of the thinking arms of sustainability.

Though still in an incipient phase of formalisation, socio-ecology is science, not religious belief. It therefore learns, it therefore doubts. Religions limit themselves to teaching, without learning (they already think they have God-given knowledge). Socio-ecology is a possible future science, at least a scientific discipline, the result of the synthesis of knowledge and experiences that, in the light of some basic information provided by the natural sciences, aspires to give meaning and to find explanations for quite a few situations dealt with empirically by the social sciences. The interest of the socio-ecological approach lies in the making of explanations of synthesis, not of mere additive apposition, of the contributions of the various sectorial agents, fragmentary due to their renowned respective methodological shortcomings. Environmental problems are incomprehensible in the light just of ecological science, which has not been conceived to explain the behaviour of the social agents that trigger and fuel these disputes.

The ways of economics and sociology, in turn, are scientific, but their working material is made up of conventions with no physical pre-existence and by subjective processes, and therefore unsuited as a safe scientific point of reference. Thus the need to resolve positions and to go for the holistic approach advocated by socio-ecology.

Algorithmics is often confused with heuristics and the multi-disciplinary with holism. Algorithmics arrives at solutions by applying previously established efficient formulae, algorithms. Thus, for example, we only have to apply the algorithm of the square root to the surface of a square to know exactly and for certain the length of its sides. Technologists are typical algorithmists who base their gradual professional competence on the mastery of a growing number of suitable algorithms. For them, knowing equals having prior knowledge of solutions. Scientific research, conversely, is heuristic, i. e.,

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it applies the method of trial, error and correction to make progress in knowledge. It does not apply formulae, but makes tests, from which it concludes provisional algorithms based on which it carries out new tentative trials. Indeed, algorithms come from heuristics (someone established them at some previous moment by way of trial and error and checks), but they are not substitutes for it. Socio-environmental problems can only be tackled reliably by applying the heuristic process and from a holistic point of view. This is what socio-ecology hopes to do.

Whoever casts their eyes towards the ecologists in search of solutions to the problems of the environment will most probably find unsatisfactory answers, then. Ecologists can —we ecologists can, I should say— contribute to a large extent to the correct establishment of the diagnoses, but I doubt that our knowledge and skills are any more than purely instrumental, or lie below a generically strategic level, when the time comes for therapeutic design. We are more forensic scientists than orthopaedic surgeons. Because, in the end, ecological problems do not exist: what there are, and there are lots, are socio-environmental problems. This is why socio-ecology makes so much sense. The socio-ecological approach, almost certainly, can contribute to the understanding and overcoming of socio-environmental disputes that, while not being ecological problems as such, usually generate serious dysfunctions in the environment.

The socio-ecological approach clearly shows that socio-environmental problems are quite a lot more than pollution and other similar nuisances that worry the more developed countries. From the opulence in which we live, we Westerners usually have a very slanted perception of global environmental events. Our culture of global economic conquest prevents us from seeing the environment as a whole, a dramatic paradox with

serious consequences. However, the irruption of climate change has begun to modify this perception, as for the first time an environmental problem is to all intents and purposes perceived as global. Habitually, though, by getting our little or large environmental inconveniences mixed up with the real problems, we tend to lose sight of the fundamental question: how are environmental resources captured, used and controlled on a world scale and what is the balance of all this in planetary terms? The socio-

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ecological approach invites the global view and shows, among other things, that the main socio-environmental problem is famine and poverty, the most important and authentic weapon of mass destruction. Socio-ecology shows that globalisation is a characteristic of the biosphere, and that this term cannot be applied, as it usually is, to the global conquest of captive markets. The globalisation of the local economic strategies of some is not the globalisation of the economy, but its chief enemy. If economic activity were really globalised, as the biospheric strategy is, diversity and fairness would follow.

All this is in line with a process of dialectic tension between thought and action. A tension that comes from way back, associated as it has been to all human activity ever since humans began thinking and acting. Thought is either critical or it is not thought, while action either overcomes the criticism to construct positively or it is not really action. One cannot think without acting, but one cannot act suitably without having thought. The ecologists' motto of "think globally and act locally" without doubt shares these principles. Principles that confer on socio-ecology a certain added ideological value.

## **SOCIO-ECOLOGY AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECT**

Socio-ecology would therefore be one of the tools of sustainabilist thinking, and ecological knowledge one of the instruments of socio-ecology. Socio-ecology would make it possible to give sustainabilism an environmental project, plus ideas about the environment. The project is an apt techno-scientific invention that marries thought with action. Humanist science understands and explains; the techno-sciences construct new realities from knowledge. The environment is a construct that has to be planned, and this is where ecological fundamentalism gets it wrong, mixing up the environment with the biophysical template, a biophysical template that it dreamt of as intangible without realising that for centuries it has been transformed almost everywhere.


The biophysical template is the bioclimatic, geomorphologic, hydro-geologic and eco-systemic elements. Human activities situated on this biophysical template interact with one another in such a way that they generate effects by addition-juxtaposition, repetition, fragmentation, reversion, interconnection, etc. Therefore, without limiting oneself to it, one should never lose sight of the biophysical template when conceiving the environmental project, because its response is not always the same depending on the pre-existences, the capabilities and the limitations that transformation itself imposes on it. Knowing and acknowledging the possibilities and limitations of the biophysical template as a premise is a prime component for the sustainabilist environmental project.

For centuries, the biophysical template imposed itself on humans. It seemed infinite and all-powerful. Today, in general lines, most templates are subjugated, encrypted beneath much-changed environments, so much so that geographical unevenness is perceived as no more than a constructive nuisance that has to be removed by bridges, tunnels or corrective land lowering. What began as the timid transformation of an immense complex template has become a banal and apparently autonomous activity. Likewise, the economic thinking of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries considered that the biophysical template was beyond economic processes, so much so that some of their productively essential components (water, soil, climate, etc.) were unimportant free assets. However, and today more than ever, these supposedly secondary factors have enormous value (climate change, falling resources, forest fires, flooding... ).

The result of the interrelationships between the biophysical template and the changes in human activity is the environmental template, and the landscape is one of the chief expressions of these interrelationships. The correct sequence of the process would be: template (pre-human landscape), discreet transformation of the biophysical template into the environmental template or territorial space (humanised landscape), profound







and even harmful transformation of the template into an unstable territory (degraded landscape), prudent commitment to change and management (landscape wisely humanised). We have to think about getting over the penultimate stage, in order to enter the last one decisively.

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The permanent dialogue between the biophysical conditioners and the strategies for transformation mean that the environmental template is neither permanent nor immutable. Changes in the dominant uses of the territory, the juxtaposition of networks, profound environmental (from a water modifications pipeline to the forced regeneration of an aquifer) generate a new environmental template that interacts differently with the new proposals for organisation. The environmental template, therefore, presents variable pre-existences with different levels of consolidation, which generates a complex system, not immutable, with differing degrees of freedom, which has to be learnt about and integrated into the origin of the spatial decisions.

Up to now, and with the odd exception, the environmental template has been a mere consequence. The transformation has been planned, but not the environmental results of the transformation. The environmental template was —is— the result of transforming the previous template, but by no means an objective to achieve deliberately. Having a particular environmental template, configured this way or that, is not yet an aim of the project. Certain schools propose it and advance in this line of planning the new environmental template along with the constructive projects, but they are still the exception. In any case, the land is the result of transforming the biophysical template. Advanced territories are always highly transformed territories, but this human transformation, no matter how intense it is, cannot overlook the previous reality of the basic template. It is elementary evidence too often overlooked.

Knowing and recognising the possibilities and limitations of the biophysical template is a prime component of the sustainabilist environmental project. The transformations only become a problem when there is no project or when the project is unsuitable. Then the environmental dysfunctions appear: unwanted flooding, loss or contamination of water resources, erosion and soil loss, difficulties for ecological connectivity, atmospheric or water pollution, squandering of renewable or non-renewable resources...

## THE PRESCRIPTION OF OPINION AND CHANGE IN THE MEDIA

The sustainabilist project cannot progress without minimal levels of social agreement; it has to be understood and shared by quite large sectors of the population receiving it. At the present time this requires the active participation of the media. The problem is that the media is motivated by a different logic. “The channels transmit images without analysing their causes. War has become a soap opera. [...] It is not the time to stay silent. Subversive work has to be done against the simplification of this audiovisual war machine that bombards us without explaining anything to us, which merely creates emotions, saying that the Israelis are angelic and the Palestinians savage, and vice versa”. These are the words of the Israeli filmmaker Amos Gitai (*El Periódico*, 24/07/06). He is so right. This is not the time to keep quiet or talk rubbish, now that so many with nothing to say fill the emptiness of their ideas with words.

We are living in an age of trivialisation of complex things. Complex issues do not become simple through banal explanations. Simplicity in the face of complexity leads straight to confusion. Banalised complexity becomes mere impoverishing complication. In this way, a way of thinking is installed, schematic and at the same time confused, that does not allow us to understand anything. In fact, this way we do not install a way of thinking, but a way of not thinking. The situation gets even more complicated when confused ideas are accompanied by a lot of deceptively clarifying images, the reason why bad television distorts even more than bad newspaper reporting. Amos Gitai was referring to this: a few tanks, a few explosions, a few dead or wounded and a couple of statements by victims on either side that provide emotion without judgement. That is going nowhere. This is why “subversive work” has to be done to stand up to agnostic simplicity disguised as informative impartiality (as if impartiality were possible, by the way, or as if impartiality equalled truth... ).

It is true that a certain society of knowledge is emerging, but it is even more so that a society of ignorance has already emerged. Before, ignorance was administered in silence; now, it is proudly proclaimed. Before, ignorance was assumed in silence, an act of humility that never came out (and which for this reason was socially so important). Now, ignorance is an aggressive cultural form, the culture of ignorance. Legions of ignoramuses socialise their lack of knowledge and contribute to installing a state of general ignorance in which wisdom is a nuisance and humility is frowned upon.

Knowing is hard. Informing with good judgement demands depth and knowledge. In a television news programme a farmer appears, replacing his dry-field crops with solar panels. “It’s easy and the kilowatts fall off the trees”, he says hopefully. Not a single comment by the reporter, no questions about the phenomenon. Nobody explains that the photovoltaic kilowatt is heavily subsidised and that herein to a large extent lies the false profit this good fellow will make. No one wonders if that farmer is qualified, just like that, to all at once become an energy operator. What social mutation, for better or for worse, will this territorial transformation bring about that, overnight, goes from the most traditional primary to a post-industrial tertiarised secondary? Nothing, no comment or reflection.

When I mention it, my colleagues in the media look at me gone out; they have already given the news “impartially”, they ask me what I’m talking about. Well I’m talking about



not confusing news with information and not passing information off as knowledge. Because before the wheat field turned into a solar power station they have given the local news of the day: summer electricity consumption has never been so high, so much so that Catalonia already exceeds 8,000 Mw of instant demand (in Spain it already exceeds 40,000 Mw). A FECSA-ENDESA director declares that this is not good, because later society will not want to assume the obligations inherent in this crazy demand (more generating stations, new lines, transformer stations, etc.). These are sensational declarations, coming from someone who makes his living from selling electricity, but they do not arouse any truly informative reaction. They are placed in the block of news items “impartially”—that is, without any judgement or perception of their importance— and thus contribute to consolidating an audiovisual press that “limits itself to creating emotions, which bombards us without explaining anything to us”, as Amos Gitai says.

This trivialisation of information is not the preserve of any specific channel or any particular newspaper. It is a general phenomenon that seems to be a sign of the times: large media companies available to all audiences to block up all the minds, incapable of swallowing and processing so much raw data. We must not forget that informing is teaching and that teaching entails selecting. The teacher chooses and establishes a hierarchy, because he knows and, above all, because he knows how to know. We need *maîtres à penser* and, even more, preceptors with judgement. It has to be said, because it is not a time to remain silent. If something can be explained, it has to be explained clearly, which is the opposite of banalisation.

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To be precise, complex phenomena can and must be clearly explained, like the issue of energy and its economic and socio-environmental dimension, because complexity is the chief characteristic of the times we are living through. If there really is nothing to say, it is time to talk. It is time to explain complexity simply, so that it does not become simplified complication. If not, we shall only be socialising ignorance.

Indeed, a solid socialisation of ignorance is advancing implacably that could end up plunging us into a state of collective mental mineralisation. On one hand, fewer people know more things, while on the other, more people know less and above all, embrace the culture of ignorance, that complacent state of permissive intellectual anaesthesia that mistakes the abundance of data with the increase of knowledge and opinion with judgement. In a sea of trivial opinions the few reliable criteria are shipwrecked, in a society that legitimises ignorance if it gets big enough audience ratings.

Climate change has arrived in the media, but media change has not yet arrived in society. Information, already profuse and diffuse enough, is even more confused. A particular municipality in Catalonia unveiled a photovoltaic power generating plant at the

beginning of 2007. The media expressed the people's satisfaction because, at last, the streets were lit at night. The fact is that the good street lighting came from the renewal that had also been made of the lampposts, which, as is well known, work at night and, therefore, with energy not generated by the solar panels. During the day the photovoltaic power plant sends electricity to the grid, energy that is bought at a price three to five times higher than the average price the customers pay —the law stipulates this— by the same company that, at night, lights the town at a normal price. The cost of installing the plant, moreover, was to a large extent subsidised by the Catalan or Spanish government. Thanks to all this, the town council in question will *only* take twenty years to pay for the operation.

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This brilliant deal for the town council, greeted with enthusiasm by the press, is a socio-economic rip-off. Direct or indirect subsidies of this kind may help a town council, but they are no solution to general problems. I wonder why the press does not clearly expose these things and why it does not explain that, if everyone acted like this council, general public budgets would go broke, prices would go mad, the landscape would be covered in photovoltaic cells and at night we would all be in the dark.

The energy the world consumes is, for the moment, over 85% fossil fuel (coal, oil and gas). It is running out, at least the oil. A considerable part of the remaining 15% is nuclear fission.

Nor do we have much uranium. The current climate change, incipient for decades —an illness diagnosed some time ago, but without painful symptoms until now— is caused by the burning of these dwindling fossil fuels. Renewable energies barely supply 10% of the demand, and to think that they will get much beyond covering 20 or 25% of it in the future is very optimistic, unless this demand drops drastically. Nuclear fusion will not arrive for twenty or thirty years, if it arrives at all. This is the panorama. It is not news, but it is information of prime importance.

Prime, indeed. Quantitative growth as a motor of the economy is now an idea of the past and an impossibility in the future. What do we do? Increasing efficiency is as necessary as it is insufficient. It serves to gain time. But, to what use will we put the time gained? To changing, there is no alternative. To conceiving and executing the Post-Industrial Revolution, while with the other hand we try to get by with nuclear fusion. All this is more like news, I find. Above all, though, it is a great concept. It would be fantastic if the press recovered its opinion. Its judgement, rather. If it reduced the news and re-centred the concepts. It would not be erudition, it would be culture.

Water pours out of the tanks, whether they are full or whether there is only a drop left in the bottom. Suddenly they dry up. What news, then! And what an avoidable drama.



This is why I am more worried about media change than climate change. The change in the media that has not quite arrived, I mean. Because without media change we will not halt climate change. Sustainabilist ideas, by definition based on the forced rigorous subversion of obsolete paradigms, cannot do much in this context of banality and trivialisation. I therefore believe that we have to begin to reverse it as soon as possible. It is a cultural necessity. Or social. And if it is socio-cultural, it is also economic.

## SUSTAINABILISM AND THE WELFARE STATE

According to a Buddhist maxim, happiness is the absence of desire. The greatest unhappiness of all, then, would be pressing unattainable desire. As I see it, this is very close to the state of anguished dissatisfaction in which modern Western society lives, above all the generations born from the seventies onwards. No one has ever had so much in the history of mankind, and no one has ever considered himself more unfairly treated. I believe that their feeling of frustration is deep and sincere. They have a lot, but they feel that they lack a lot more. Therefore, they feel they do not have enough. Dissatisfaction is the distance between what one has and what one wants to have. It does not depend on what and how much one has, but on what and how much one feels one needs and still does not have. They are the generations subjectively most dissatisfied in history, although, objectively, they possess the most goods and securities. The fact is they have a lot; their perceptive reality is that they do not have what they would like. Once again, reality is not the facts, but the perception.

This feeling of dissatisfaction does not affect just the young. In fact, it has taken hold in almost all age groups in developed societies. Government is therefore becoming increasingly difficult. It is increasingly difficult for social and economic roles to go together. Governments, businesses, schools, NGOs and citizens are undermining each other's authority instead of making progress in the complementary nature of their respective functions. It all stems from the insatiable wish to have more, incompatible with any reasonable socio-environmental project and with any minimally equitable socio-economic approach on a global scale. Therefore, with gentleness and firmness, the advisability of managing the demand has to be explained.

For decades —forever, actually— the productive sector and the regulating public bodies have made efforts to guarantee supply. Their concern, in their own interest or in the interests of the group, has been to satisfy the citizens' demand, a demand which, on the other hand, they themselves often stimulated (advertising is no more than a stimulus to demand, as is also the repeated promotion of socio-economic models based on continued quantitative growth). All of them, either exploiting a universe of needs or guaranteeing their own satisfaction, have put all their efforts into producing and supplying, managing the supply in the best possible way.

The gradual scarcity of certain basic resources (fossil fuels, fresh water according to where, coastline, etc.), plus the unmanageable accumulation of waste products (local pollution, excess CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere, etc.) hinders this traditional strategy of expanding supply indefinitely. The management of the supply will have to be substituted by the management of the demand, namely, going from "how much I ask for" to

“how much I have”. It is not so difficult to imagine. In fact, everyone practises management of demand in their household economy, adjusted to the availability marked by the salary or the space they have.

In the opulent Western welfare state, management of demand does not have to lead to sizeable restrictions in the meeting of needs. Quite the contrary: it will probably be the only way of guaranteeing them. This apparent paradox is easy to explain: our system of production and consumption is dominated by waste and inefficiency. A very considerable part of the resources consumed do not meet any needs. The lights on in empty rooms or incandescent light bulbs that give more heat than light are examples of this situation. Turning off these unnecessary lights (waste) and replacing the incandescent light bulbs (inefficiency) would lead to satisfying the same needs that are actually satisfied now with a reduction of the resources used. The management of demand has a lot of room for manoeuvre among us then before introducing any limitation in the expectations of service received.

The management of demand will be crucial to the “new welfare culture”. The new welfare state, which already has what it needs, has to learn to identify what it does not need. The socio-ecological project can help. Only this way will speaking of sustainability make any sense II