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SELF-MANAGEMENT AND GLOBALITY

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1. On the concept of self-organisation

1.1. An approach to the concept

Let us define the term 'autonomy' as freeing the activity of people and communities from being determined by outside forces (from a situation of a lack of self-determination or heteronomy). Not being administered by outside forces, the autonomous subject would be a person or community that would be capable of administering their own initiative.

From this simple definition of autonomy, we shall now turn to defining 'self-organisation'. Self-organisation, as we define it, is autonomous organisation which is born of and from autonomy. We shall define it as an organisation based on the autonomy of persons and communities, and, as a consequence, self-organisation. In other words, when we use the word 'self-organisation', we are talking about an organisation (process) or an entity (the result of that process and the collective creative force behind it) based on people's decision-making power (ability to decide).

We have sketched out the basic tenets of self-organisation by using the terms autonomy, decision-making power, organisation, and entity: autonomy of persons and communities and organisation and entities based on decision-making powers.

Being understood as an organisation linked to autonomy and decision-making power, the concept of self-organisation includes the same prefix 'self-' present in several concepts: this organisation includes the processes of 'self-regulation', its starting point is 'self-arrangement', and it continually calls for 'self-administration' in working towards the goal of 'self-government' or 'self-determination'.

1.2. The nature of the *Continuum* and its range

So defined, self-organisation is a *continuum* of reality. It runs the gamut of self-organisation present in entities. It would be best to speak about approaching (or moving away from) the ideal that could be considered as a self-organised entity, thereby avoiding rigid either/or classifications.

Nevertheless, mentioning that very nature of continuum may lead us to use 'self-organisation' in too loose a manner, something which may detract from the importance and rigor of

the concept. Indeed, anything can be declared to be 'self-organised' to a certain extent. At a microcosmic level, it could be understood as an organising formula that any social system could use to a certain extent. However, if we define anything that has a certain level of autonomy within a given framework as self-organisation, the concept becomes less apt at naming different, transforming realities.

Indeed, to what extent is self-organisation an organising formula that can be understood and applied at a microcosmic level which any social system can promote one way or another (e.g. today's capitalist system)? To what extent is a model that ranges from a microcosmic level to a macrocosmic one a comprehensive social project? A rather rough example could be given: is it a tool of capitalism or an alternative to capitalism? Here, we move on to a scale with varying hues of colours, having left a scale of greys behind: we move on to different wavelengths that are contained within the aims and goals of the transformation of self-organisation.

The basis, demands, levels and direction or aim, if any, of self-organisation must be set out and the nature of its continuum needs to be mentioned as well. The whole gamut of greys and colours should be merged together for that purpose.

At the extreme (arguably too extreme) end of the colour scale, we could take self-organisation as a whole paradigm: starting from organisation on a small scale on up to a model for a social project. On the basis of the decision-making powers of people and communities, there is the broad paradigm that links all areas of social life (education, politics, economy, social movements, culture) to the tenets of autonomous decision-making power.

1.3. On economic self-organisation

Even though the concept is set out in a rather sketchy manner, in this part of the paper we would like to focus attention on economic self-organisation. We are thus talking about businesses or economic entities.

To begin with, we should place this concept in the category of what is called *social economy*. Social economy is, on one hand, a way of arranging things internally while on the other hand, it is a way of conducting oneself in the market and in society externally. In arranging things and conducting oneself in these ways, we run up against the gamut of a grey scale of self-organisation. Indeed, nowadays social economy includes businesses with very different degrees and kinds of self-organisation.

Let us take three areas in order to flesh out the decision-making powers we mentioned in the previous section: participation in ownership, participation in profits, and participation in administration. There are businesses with quite varying degrees of these different dimensions of participation, starting with ESOP, which gives a limited amount of profit-sharing to workers in several co-operatives that comply with these three areas of decision-making powers in various degrees.

On the other hand, as regards social activities and a vocation for transforming businesses, there are also great differences. Here, too, we are referring to a gamut of colours on a scale.

1.4. Our area of attention

For the sake of defining our aims in this paper, we would like to focus on the highest degrees contained within the scale of greys and colours. Here, we are referring to the businesses that are edging closer to the most far-reaching demands of the social economy and, within it, of co-operativism: those which subscribe to the concept of collective ownership that place people above capital, those which are based on the decision-making powers of participants by making use of transparent administration, those that distribute income and profits in a balanced manner, and those that create social cohesion and carry out acts of solidarity.

Why have we chosen to focus on the high degrees within the scale? Because throughout the whole continuum, we think that these degrees are those that have the greatest transforming potential in today's global society and because we would like to study, on the basis of these opinions, the contributions, keys, and limitations of this economic self-organisation.

What could be said about the businesses which are at the lower end of the grey scale or which have a lesser degree of self-organisation? On the one hand, we could, in many cases, place their contributions and limitations in different categories, but since everything is a question of moderation, we do not believe it is worthwhile taking into account endless levels and coming up with never-ending nuances in a paper of this size. On the other hand, however, it is reasonable to think that many observations made about the contributions, paradoxes and limits of the demanding degrees of economic self-organisation will be useful in view of the realities of the overall social economy.

All of them should, in reality, be taken into account without discounting their value. Indeed, as we move through this chapter, we shall see the importance that our point of view attaches to the transforming seed that could be present in limited contributions.

2. Placing economic self-organisation within today's global society

Having begun by placing economic self-organisation within today's global society into four areas, we have formulated an area or way of placing them so that they are inter-linked. 1) in the area of a diversity of answers 2) in a broad-based democratic paradigm 3) as regards paradoxes and 4) towards a social project of self-organisation. It a rather complex way of categorising them but, in our opinion, it is an option based on hard reality.

2.1. In the area of diverse answers

A picture of today's global society is an image of strengthening monolithic thought and uniformisation. In the face of such uniformisation, there does not seem to be, at this historical juncture, any real alternative system that can act as a means to counteract it. An intuition of sensitivity towards the goal of human dignity may be another: holding on to diversity, developing diversity.

This intuition to develop diversity has many aspects: cultural and linguistic diversity, diversity in social movements, diversity in ways of organisation, diversity of social viewpoints and approaches, etc. In our paper, we are interested in a specific field: diversity of the socioeconomic experience. The field of socioeconomic experience is linked to all the rest and plays a crucial role.

Continuing with the idea of intuition to develop diversity in the face of uniformisation, there must also be responses in the socioeconomic field, responses to questions dealing with what might go beyond the logic of capital, responses and experiences of all kinds. This historical moment in time may call for a grand alternative with no absolutes and a multi-focused alternative approach which we have termed the task of economic self-organisation. Indeed, since one of the keys to this moment is promoting people's own experiences as well as experiences of all kinds, this goes hand in hand with the nature of economic self-organisation.

This diversity of socioeconomic experiences has two dimensions regarding global society: On the one hand, they are a contribution from many different sources, a way of developing a wide range of realities and people. And on the other hand, they

are a seedbed, a reserve. What is a seedbed? A seedbed for future responses, an area of experimentation for various ways of organisation, a reserve for budding alternatives. We shall therefore stress this in economic self-organisation; the potential that it has as a way to understand economy, as a way to build up relationships, as a way to articulate societal life, as a reserve of future responses.

Suitable self-centring models

Based on a generalising logic of accumulating and maximising capital, a search for new development models means strengthening qualitative aspects (beyond an accumulative-quantitative logic) by working on models which are ecologically and sociologically tenable.

Economic self-organisation has, by definition, its own nature. Basing it on the decision-making power of people results in strengthening smallness or proximity. Self-organisation gives priority to local construction and brings about a bottom-to-top decentralised model.

Self-centring nature is another facet of this bottom-to-top approach that comes from being small and from constructing locally. A self-organising entity works by meeting internal needs internally. The community itself is the main point of reference and its needs, rather than those of external logic and interests, are those that define the process. Consequently, it remains to be seen how those internal needs are linked to the needs of the community in terms of co-operation and interdependency, by bringing the value of co-operation to fruition.

The development of a suitable and self-centring model in today's global society is, and can be, a way out for those marginalised by the logic of power and the market. It is a way of strengthening the small, local areas.

This highlighting of the autonomous and suitable nature of smallness and experiences does not, however, rule out the possibility and (of course) the need for them to join together and become consolidated in networks. In other words, economic self-organisation is based on the idea of self-dependence but in the sense of complementing it with the idea of interdependence: self-dependence in interdependency.

2.2. In a broad-based paradigm

Going beyond the formal political sense of democracy which is prevalent today, if we look towards the most profound and broadest stage of democracy, we see that that is where economic self-organisation will find its natural place. In order to illustrate the stage of democracy we are currently going through, it may serve to take note that, overall, most people in the world have the formal right to choose the president of their country, but not, for instance, any formal right to choose the head of their company. Of course, the kind of media treatment that is involved in that formal right to vote for the president of the country and the limits of the formal representative democracy are another matter altogether.

As everyone is well aware, the accumulation of power is one of the keys of today's development model. A more just and tenable development calls for dispersing power, for decentralising it, for making areas of decision more accessible. In the end, it requires a deepening of participatory democracy.

The broad paradigm of democracy takes in several areas (political, social, economic) and its aim is bringing it closer to a participatory model in each one of them. That is where economic self-organisation can be categorised: in an effort to flesh out a profound and broad-based paradigm of democracy in the area of economics. It presupposes decentralising economic forces, drawing areas of decision closer and promoting the idea of participation and the practice of various other procedures linked to democracy. Its contribution, therefore, runs in the same direction as the strengthening and reforming of political democracy and/or the strengthening of the civil society in which it makes special contributions.

2.3. Paradoxes

In the opinion of several authors, the main feature of capitalism does not lie in relationships of possession but in another dimension instead: one in which economic rationale expands without limit. Throughout history, this rationale has always had certain limits, owing to the fact that the social order always recognised a number of other rationale or key philosophies, be they religious, cultural, social or ethical. Capitalism has turned economic reason into the highest exponent of reason, or, to an even greater extent, has set in motion the process of co-opting all other kinds of logic into the sphere of economic reason.

The growing expansion of the economic rationale (expanding to every country and every sphere of life) has a thousand faces against which the aim of alternative development models is to try to stick to and/or come up with different kinds of logic by declaring a change in a paradigm that, in the opinion of some, ends up changing civilisation. In that competition, how should one categorise the contribution of economic self-organisation?

The idea of economic self-organisation, and especially several dimensions thereof (management sharing, profit-sharing, etc.) can be (and is) the tool of a development model operating within today's capitalism. Over the last few decades, businesses around the world have expended much effort on promoting the dimension of management sharing. So-called modern 'management' or the 'new business culture' wishes to strengthen workers' autonomy and areas of decision, thereby increasing their motivation and improving company profits. Involving workers and encouraging them to participate is one of the key factors of company competitiveness today, and is having an impact on the many cultural and technological changes that have taken place. Based on an acceptance of the need to get workers involved, many companies are introducing several procedures related to self-organisation by encouraging active worker participation both in management and profits.

However, this process does have a dark side. From the point of view of the economic rationale mentioned above, the 'new business culture' results in spreading economists' approaches still further. Indeed, if at one time workers' 'souls', desires, or personal projects were at least outside the realms of company economic reason (by limiting one's own opposition or, at least, mistrust), today, in modern management, the worker himself sets the company's goals by integrating his innermost desires into that wheel of management. Moreover, the message linked to self-organisation is namely the dimensions and procedures that businesses are using to that end. The procedures of self-organisation are thus effective in spreading the rationale with a capitalist flavour to it. The procedures of self-organisation are a way to hijack workers' desires by making them dependent on company profitability goals. The procedures of self-organisation are a factor of competitiveness in today's untenable production-based industrial models of development. Many a voice has spoken up against such a subtle perversion, in which human values are placed at the service of productivity.

To go one step further, we should perhaps ask ourselves whether co-operatives that are at the forefront of proposals for a new company culture in many areas are not in fact the very ones that are behind this 'placing of values at the service of productivity'? Are they not, in the end, making use of this

untenable development model by introducing the economic rationale among their workers in a more profound manner? Does it not make the workers more committed, more participatory, and more cheerful promoters of production-based machinery?

After having a look at the dark side, let us now look at the brighter side. There are many different opinions as to the principal reasons why the procedures of self-organisation are being introduced in businesses: technological advance, the need to increase capital earnings, people's growing cultural level or the pressure towards granting participation. Or all of the above. If we, for the moment, leave those reasons aside and look at the consequences, we will also notice that they too can take different and confusing directions. On the one hand, as we said about its dark side, this development incorporates the rationale of productivity into workers' desires. On the other, however, it broadens some areas of personal autonomy, even if only in a limited sense and in the service of productivity, but one could think that broadening those areas may release a kind of democratic process 'virus' into the business world. Even if the nature of business is heteronomous and production-oriented, changing several mechanisms within it could perhaps inadvertently bring about irreversible gains in participation. And even if these gains are not irreversible, one could be forgiven for thinking that it would at least introduce elements that would transform the reality within the inner workings of businesses: opening up some decision-making powers, increasing the sharing of experience for people, and having an impact on the expectations and demands of upcoming generations, etc.

Transforming potential

We should try to tackle this paradox by using dialectics and thinking in complex terms. On the one hand, the danger of hijacking workers' wishes by subordinating them to productivity and, on the other, a transforming potential are two sides of the same coin of economic self-organisation procedures.

The word 'potential', which we have just introduced, is one of the key elements of this topic. This concept adequately expresses how to categorise economic self-organisation within the reality of capitalism. The procedures of economic self-organisation strengthen the rationality of capitalism while at the same time having the potential to bring about a fundamental transformation in them. This potential can be split into two levels. On the one hand, as we mentioned above, the procedures of self-organisation (even the self-standing and weakest ones) have the potential of introducing changes from within the inner workings of the company and of leading the way towards future desires for change.

At a deeper level, the transforming potential is greater if the self-organising approach is articulated at different levels. That is to say, if it goes beyond organisational procedures and if it brings together different dimensions of decision-making powers. If it joins together the decision-making power at the job or management level, economic self-organisation will draw closer to real ownership. Moreover, if an economic self-organisation that has drawn closer to real ownership is channelled towards a broader socio-political project, or if it is deemed to be an aim in society, then its transforming potential can be greatly enhanced.

We have done the easiest thing: we have used the adjective 'transforming' to describe the potential we have been mentioning. Any sense can go with that adjective since everything gradually changes and since every force, one way or the other, is transforming. Many voices, which have called for a profound transformation of society from a position of human dignity, have spoken about overcoming the capitalist system. Others have gone beyond a change in systems and mention a renewal of civilisation in the belief that the dignity of life needs an entirely new model in the face of an industrial civilisation arising from Western Indo-European roots.

One way or the other, whether more profound or superficial, the transforming direction offered by self-organisation has its place among the various voices that say that *another world is possible*. Moreover, this place supposes its own kind of direction to take. In the next section, we shall endeavour to describe this direction in greater detail.

2.4. Towards a social project of self-organisation

In an effort to categorise economic self-organisation, the boldest step comes next: categorising it within a broader social project of self-organisation as an element that acquires meaning in that direction.

We mentioned above that we should understand the paradigm of self-organisation, as a whole, as being at the very extreme end of a colour scale (or even at the ultra-extreme frequencies that are usually invisible to the casual observer), running from a small-scale organisation to a model for a social project. This is a broad paradigm that seeks to base every model of social life on the autonomous decision-making powers of people and communities. This product can have an aim: a (more) self-organising society. Here we are referring to a socio-political project in the purest sense of the term *political*.

We have to admit that the aim is rather blurred. Despite its presence in past ideologies, today, the idea of a self-organising society no longer has a structured political reality or movement

that supports it. On the other hand, however, let us take a look at the many varied experiences and forces that are arraying themselves against neo-liberal globalisation: the idea of self-organisation appears in their practices and messages in various guises as if it were a deeply held intuition or a budding idea that has yet to come forth. We say budding idea, as it were, since it has still not achieved the status of becoming a treatise.

This aim, for all its fuzziness, can lend special meaning and strength to the transforming potential of economic self-organisation. It gives it direction which is no small matter since it is an invigorating direction that encompasses it in a broader project in order to constantly revive economic self-organisation. Indeed, if economic self-organisation is to survive in a capitalist world, and what is more, if it is to be developed in a self-organising manner, it must undertake a great 'nurturing' project, since democratic practice calls for ongoing work on education, motivation and, in general, the big picture. The shortest route to this nurturing is not having any frameworks governing the direction. Or, to be more precise, not having any breaches in the direction. Therein lies the lack and one of the major gaps in today's co-operative education.

Having a sense of direction, therefore, results in a breath of fresh air for nurturing and broadening points of view. Furthermore, it also results in other things. It orientates (i.e. steers in the desired direction) the activity of businesses with economic self-organisation, especially as regards the development of their social commitments, towards a particular meaning. In the end, in addition to the nurturing function, having a fuzzy socio-political project of self-organisation can point the way to a business with economic self-organisation or an experience: in order to carry out an agenda of social commitments, in order to make alliances with self-organising sectors of civil society, in order to think about how to behave in certain socio-political situations, in order to implement strategies of growth and expansion both here and everywhere. In a word, it can give it an aim¹.

¹ We can take the Mondragón Co-operative Experience as an example of a concrete case of the ups and downs experienced by a broader fuzzy project of self-organisation. An in-depth investigation would call for that, but in a nutshell, we could say that during the initial decades of the Mondragón experience, the twofold nature of the promoters' aim or direction was clearly evident. On the one hand, the nature of the co-operative itself was not even a goal but was, instead, a starting point without a known goal in a dynamic process of experience. There was thus no structure behind the aim. On the other hand, however, Arizmendiarieta's thought inevitably appears there in the production, as a broader direction of self-organisation, an aim of a long-term social project. Arizmendiarieta places the Mondragón co-operative experience within that broad direction: co-operatives are tools for a wider social project, not a goal in and of themselves. Moving beyond theory, one could say that the fuzzy direction also fulfilled its function within the Mondragón experience. This experience, on the one hand, extended the principles of self-organisation to, among other things, consumer goods companies, the banking sector and social security, as well as to industry. And on the other, it also gave rise to self-organising entities in the world of education. It attempted to set in motion experiences of self-organisation in agriculture and even the fishing industry, although not with much success. The commitment to spread the idea of co-operativism and to work with other forces in that direction is still evident today in the underlying principles of the experience.

We have said that the social project of self-organisation is a fuzzy concept, and it is not our aim to outline its limits in this paper. However, we believe it is worthwhile highlighting some of the characteristics surrounding it:

∅ We have considered the social project of self-organisation as a fuzzy direction. On account of the nature of self-organisation itself, the method *per se* has as much, if not more, importance as the goals or the aims. That is to say, the question is not whether the goal of transformation is just a self-organising society: the procedure of transformation itself must also be self-organising. Indeed, self-organisation is an activity more than a goal. By bringing both together in a social project of self-organisation, you have an activity with a goal and a goal with an activity. In that way, identification and coherence meld together more tightly as a goal and a means than in most other social utopias. Not only are they articulated, they are merged together and the way becomes the goal even when the aim is blurred.

∅ The social project of self-organisation has an openly grafted nature to it. Let us try and explain it with a couple of adjectives. Self-organisation implies an important combination: on the one hand it constructs a practical alternative while on the other it is grafted on to capitalism (or onto the reigning economic system). Self-organisation works in non-self-organising economic systems. It fulfils functions. The paradox mentioned in section 2.3 is linked to that, a dimension to strengthen the reigning system. However, by grafting it onto that economic system, by functioning within it, it can achieve the same results as a grafting to a tree: it can change the nature of the tree and fruit above the grafting itself. Hence, on the one hand, it becomes an alternative practice in some dimensions, while on the other, it can serve as the transforming seed for a self-organising social project.

In this sense, the project of self-organisation combines the heavenly dimension of a utopia with the down-to-earth dimension of pragmatism in a special way. Often, that heavenly dimension is probably lost, or is out of reach, but in practice, it is always linked to the down-to-earth dimension.

One could write long and hard about the evolution of the practice and meaning of the Mondragón co-operatives, and indeed it is a complex theme. But one could say that the fuzziness of the direction has increased as the experience has gradually grown in size and has become more immersed in economic competitiveness. If we refer to a social project of self-organisation as *direction*, *purpose* and *aim* in the minds of today's co-operative members, one could say that it has passed well beyond the state of fuzziness, to become completely disorientated in a far-away dimension. Co-operative members are becoming more and more aware of this diagnosis, and this in turn is having a direct impact on the current evolution, impotence and limits of the co-operative movement.

- Ø The social project of self-organisation has slowed the nature of the process. The transformation that this project needs is brought about by giving it its due time. The process of self-organisation is a process of experience, a maturing process in which superior political processes and actions taken by authorities lose priority. One of the main facets is the process of education which is linked to the process of experience and practical experience, i.e., it is a project of self-organisation. It is spread out, it is social, it is a bottom-to-top phenomenon.

We say *slow (pausatua)*, but we should say *step-by-step (pausotua)*. The aim is not to highlight the slowing down of the process but rather to affirm that it is taking place gradually, step by step (*pausoka*) in a way naturally corresponding to the nature of a process of experience, maturation and education. At a concrete global moment on the threshold of the 21st century, for example, this step-by-step nature can have the following interpretation: even if it is a paradoxical function of economic self-organisation, it is important to take steps forward towards real ownership of labour. Having taken that step, the idea of a more suitable development model can gradually take shape from the bottom up, by basing it on the areas of decision-making powers that real ownership provides.

- Ø The social project of self-organisation is linked to multi-dimensional development. Our development model is without doubt one of the main problems of today's different political and socioeconomic *Weltanschauungs*. Some have formulated it as growth vs. development. In the face of a stronger paradigm that constantly leans towards a supposed economic dimension of development and its growth, forces opposing neo-liberal globalisation somehow pose the question of admitting different dimensions to development (economic, social, cultural, political, psychological-spiritual, etc.) and of maintaining a balance between them. The project of self-organisation is profoundly linked to a broad way of understanding development. A paradigm based on the *autonomous decision-making powers* of people and communities is not compatible with a predominance that cuts back and thrusts itself on the economic dimension revolving around growth. Indeed, decision-making powers have profound implications: they naturally tend to develop that which flows from people and their communities in every field. That flow, that grouping of personal and community needs and/or desires is multi-dimensional. And it is the response to this multi-dimensional nature of those needs and desires which is, in fact, the starting point for a comprehensive and balanced development.

In treading deeper water, the social projects of self-organisation are linked to a deep sense of ecology. Going beyond being an approach on behalf of nature, the essence of ecology is protecting the balance thereof by admitting the sacred nature of the existence of diversity: it is a space for relationships between all things and it all comes down to ecology. That space of relationships between all things, coming from many various paths, brings us closer to an autonomous organisation. But let us leave this intuition for now, and develop it in the future.

Ø A social project of self-organisation needs intellectual open-mindedness, creativeness and practical adaptability. Why open-mindedness? If anything, there is a set of various kinds of intuitions and practices within a project of a self-organisation and, as we said above, in all its fuzziness there is no solid, monolithic body of theory nor any definite vision for the future. From the standpoint of an idea, it leads the actor engaged in a project of self-organisation to be open-minded: being open to unexpected lessons of experience, open to the lessons of various kinds of experience of others, open to the contributions from other ideologies, and, especially, open to changing formulations coming from that which is flowing from communities. Self-organisation itself is an open process which is inevitably influenced by a set of ideas supporting it and by that open-mindedness itself.

Self-organisation, to a certain extent, is an endless organisational process. Self-organisation becomes an unending process of reorganisation which calls for creativity because it must be attuned to that flow from the communities and because it is itself subject to change. There are many kinds of answers, there is no one-size-fits-all pattern. In addition to creativity, we would add the importance of practical adaptability. In discussing the nature of grafting, we have laid great stress on adapting it to everyday reality, on its vital importance within the project of self-organisation which provides the foundation for intellectual open-mindedness and creativity.

Here we shall close with a less weighty overview of some features of a social project of self-organisation which we understand, we must repeat, to be a rather fuzzy aim or as a set of intuitions flowing from experiences rather than from a structured line of thought.

In the previous chapter, we attempted to situate self-formed economic organisations in the globalised system. In this chapter, we are going to look more closely at the specific potentials and contributions of self-formed economic organisations and also some of their limits.

3. Potentials of self-formed economic organisations

We will begin by analysing the contributions and potentials of self-formed economic organisations, focusing on eight of them in particular. Some of these contributions are real contributions. Others, on the other hand, are potentials more than real contributions at this moment in time. By analysing them, we will get an idea of what self-formed economic organisations may offer us at the beginning of the 21st century.

3.1. Potential for articulating the balance between community and individuals.

Articulating the balance between people and communities is one of the problems of the Modern Era. It is one of its pending subjects. Self-formed economic organisations are situated right at this precarious balance, which is where one of their specific contributions comes into play. Self-formed economic organisations have developed interesting practices in the field of harmonising individual and collective interests.

We should situate cooperative ownership at the centre of these specific contributions, for the union of individual interests and the interests of the community. Beyond the dichotomy between individual private property and state property, in self-formed economic organisations it is the group of workers, or the working community, that holds the right of ownership. Here, personal autonomy has a place in the working community but, at the same time, it is part of a collective project in interaction with other areas of personal autonomy. A self-formed community is a structure built thanks to personal decision-making capacity and, consequently, is a point of tensions and distensions caused by the interaction between autonomous, but associated people.

On a larger scale, self-formed organisations have had a tendency to articulate the balance between small communities and larger circles. Inter-cooperation networks are a reality and a potential in a number of self-formed economic organisation experiences, as a result of the desire to bring together autonomy and commitment.

3.2. Potential as an instrument for development

We will start to discuss this second potential by defining development as a “balanced process of extending people’s capacities and options”. From this viewpoint, self-formed organisations may be an instrument for development. Why? Development, beginning with basic material development, is currently established as one of the prevailing needs in a large part of the planet, as it may have the capacity to create means of development suited to the needs of each person. This potential is already a reality in many communities.

In point 2.4., we mentioned that self-formed economic organisations are related to a multidimensional perspective of understanding development. In all truth, development has forms to suit all tastes. What do we mean when we say that self-formed economic organisations may be an instrument for development? What kind of development do they promote?

- Firstly, we should mention **endogenous development**: self-formed economic organisations implement processes created within communities. The idea of endogenous development ties in with the idea of the self-focused model that we mentioned in point 2.1.; since, the community being the main reference point, we are talking about processes built from within and from below upwards. We are talking about using means within our reach for self-development.
- Self-formed economic organisations stimulate **rooted development**, as we will explain in point 3.3. further on. Rooting is related to the community’s multidimensional development, as being rooted somewhere means being linked to the hopes and needs of specific societies.
- Self-formed economic organisations may encourage **personal development** incorporated into community development. A self-formed company has its own particular characteristics that reflect paying special attention to people. In this sense, one of its pillars is that the decision-making capacity is in the hands of those that provide the work, and that the capital, on the other hand, is a mere instrument. Paying attention to people takes on a certain form in self-formed organisations and, what is more, a self-formed company enjoys, at least in theory, norms that enable personal development: using democratic procedures, guaranteeing transparency in management and information, paying particular attention to training and educating staff, encouraging internal promotion. Besides these traditional characteristics, self-formed economic organisations have an interesting potential for paying attention to a variety of new aspects as regards the development of people: the balance between work and leisure, respect for language and identity at work, and, in general, all those aspects that may be a matter of concern for new generations. Self-formed economic organisations may be receptive

as regards these demands and act with a special breadth of outlook, precisely because they are based on decision-making capacity.

- **Community development.** In line with rooted development, it is characteristic of self-formed economic organisations to tend to answer to the needs of communities, and this may act as a stimulus for community development. On the one hand, self-formed economic organisations are capable of offering rooted economic development. Being concerned about creating and sharing wealth and, above all, paying special attention to creating jobs –as we will see further on– can be natural behaviour in their commitment with society. On the other hand, a self-formed company has a special potential to project its influence beyond the realms of the company and become involved in other areas of society (both social and cultural). This implies considering that the economic aspect, or more specifically the business activity, is in the service of the community's integral development.

As regards other areas of social development, self-formed economic organisations have the potential to establish links and cooperation relationships with other self-formation experiences. Thus, they may be open to the potential of social movements and assume their motivations and claims, paying special attention to problems concerning ecology, time distribution, models of development, etcetera.

3.3. Rooting potential

In the previous section, we mentioned rooted development, but we will devote a special section to rooting, because of the special meaning it has in today's globalised world. A self-formed economic organisation is a rooted experience that has a natural tendency to be linked to its surrounding communities, because it is based on the decision-making capacity of people and because these people are linked to the surroundings. A self-formed economic organisation is linked to a certain group of people, to a specific human geography.

In the current globalised model backed by capitals *with no homeland*, self-formed economic organisations are of a very different nature. The capital comes from the people who provide the work and, therefore, it is shared. As these people, besides forming part of the company, are members of a community or certain territory, the company's productive activity is rooted in this geographical area.

3.4. Potential for creating and maintaining employment

The social commitments mentioned above may materialise in a number of different ways, but probably, at first sight, the commitment to employment is most noticeable. Creating jobs and fighting in favour of employment have been firm objectives of self-formed economic organisations.

Self-formed economic organisations have demonstrated their ability to create employment. As regards cooperatives, the International Cooperative Alliance reckons that there are hundreds of millions of cooperative members, spread across the majority of sectors: starting with agriculture and including construction, industry and services.

In a globalised world in which unemployment is a structural problem, self-formed economic organisations make the following contribution: creating jobs and ensuring small nuclei of stability. Creating stable employment is a natural vocation of self-formed economic organisations. Whilst the workers are partners, they are also owners, and their futures are linked to the company's collective future. Moreover, it is important to note the potential of self-formed economic organisations as a self-employment formula for social collectives and sectors which are pushed aside by market logics.

We have mentioned the role played by self-formed organisations in creating jobs and emphasised their capacity to create stable jobs. However, besides creation, we must also mention their capacity to maintain employment. Self-formed economic organisations place particular emphasis on defending employment, and in today's world this is also an interesting potential. The ability shown by cooperatives to maintain non-profitable companies and fight in favour of employment in times of crisis has been, in this sense, admirable and, in view of the nature of these companies, understandable.

3.5. Potential for achieving integral participation

Participation in self-formed companies consists of two areas. The first area, which concerns them specifically, is institutional participation, participation in democratic governing bodies, as company owners, and in final decisions. The second area is technical participation in jobs, which to a greater or lesser extent occurs in any kind of company.

The latest tendencies of the business world, in line with modern *Management*, defend intensifying participation in jobs. Workers' areas of autonomy in companies have been extended and methods for workers' participation in the production process are being increasingly fomented. More and more, workers are being asked to get fully involved in the company's activity and adopt an attitude in favour of the company's objectives. In accordance with this approach, workers participate technically in their jobs, but a large part of the company remains beyond their area of influence; in other words, control and results are usually beyond the scope of workers' influences. Their tasks are limited to technical participation, as they will not have the opportunity to take part in the broadest field of activity which involves defining the company's strategies and main courses

of action. And that is precisely the profound contradiction of this kind of approach: the autonomy of workers is in the service of a heteronomous power; in other words, they are able to participate in what concerns their work, but the results of that participation will be in the service of projects established beyond their decision-making area. With this approach, participation is a mere instrument for obtaining important objectives, growth, economic profitability and competitiveness. It is an instrument of the capital for circulating economic approaches.

Self-formed economic organisations have the potential to understand participation in a broader sense. They extend workers' participation to other areas of the company: institutional or political participation in the company's governing bodies. Partner-workers have an entire institutional framework within their reach and in theory have the capacity to participate in the decisions that affect the company's evolution.

Self-formed organisations may in this historical moment have an excellent opportunity to join the two areas of participation together and start taking steps towards integral participation. On the one hand, it may be easier and more coherent to promote participative work methods in companies governed democratically, as the opportunities for institutional participation (being an owner of the company) make encouraging involvement in jobs more credible. Making a special point of participation in jobs would give coherence to institutional participation. On the other hand, if decision-making capacity in jobs or in management is linked to the ownership's political decision-making capacity, self-formed organisations will come close to real ownership. This is exactly the potential of self-formed economic organisations: to develop a complete and coherent model of participation.

3.6. Potential for setting limits to economic activity by means of social commitment

Earlier we talked about the tendency of self-formed economic companies to get involved in their social surroundings. Self-formed economic organisations aim to achieve social objectives by competing for economic objectives. However, the field of play is not favourable. Market competitiveness has rigorously adjusted companies' area of action and in this kind of economy the rules of the game are implacable. Self-formed companies suffer from the strain of the balance-unbalance between social objectives and economic objectives.

Companies' *social responsibility* has awoken a special interest over the last few years, as regards the call to unite economy and ethics. An increasing number of people ask companies to act according to social criteria. Ecological and social consequences of the way businesses behave (contamination, violation of working rights) are a source of concern for consumers, NGOs and other social agents. In answer to those who ask businesses to act according to ethical-social criteria, more and more companies talk of their social function, ethics and social responsibility. For some, this is no more than a marketing strategy, *given that ethics sell*.

Others believe that, even though the main objective is commercial, this kind of behaviour may be a first step towards starting to regulate economic development. How can we situate the potential of self-formed economic organisations in this new trend of companies' social responsibility?

Social responsibility is inseparable from economic self-formation, which is a formula that implies a global way of being in the economy and making companies, therefore its contribution can not be limited to just a self-focused company formula. It has its own potential to develop social commitment (for attending to society's social, cultural and ecological needs) and set limits to economic activity from there.

Market logics leave little space for this. However, in this small space, self-formed economic organisations set or may set some limits to economic logics. They have the potential to set limits, regulating the activity of companies according to social, democratic and ecological standards. The following could be some ways of setting certain limits:

- As regards company size, it is easier for self-formed companies to raise the possibility of setting limits to the excessive growth of businesses derived from technical-economic demands.
- With regard to products and processes, self-formed economic organisations enjoy better conditions for determining what and how to produce. They may, for example, decide to manufacture products that answer to social needs or forbid the manufacture of others. In this kind of company, it may also be easier to develop an awareness for taking care of the environment in manufacturing processes, as the company's decision-making nucleus is made up of people linked to the territory.
- As regards paying attention to people, offering decent working conditions and making a special effort in favour of personal development are aspects related to the original motivations of self-formed economic organisations.

3.7. Potential for inter-cooperation

As regards the self-focused nature of self-formed companies, we have already mentioned that this poses no obstacle to their relationship with other self-formation movements. We have formulated self-dependency within inter-dependency.

We will call the cooperation between self-formed organisations, inter-cooperation. The concept of inter-cooperation, which forms part of the international principles of cooperatives, has been, in part, a reality; self-formed companies have shown a great tendency towards association. Association produces solidity and is often an arm for facing up to challenges of survival.

The basis of inter-cooperation is to establish links that respect each organisation's autonomy and identity: cooperation between cooperatives. The network structure, a decentralised model based on decision-making

nuclei, is the natural way of association between self-formed companies. Efforts to articulate small circles around larger circles are constant in self-formed economic organisations and this system offers a great number of possibilities with a view to the future.

Beyond the links between self-formed companies belonging to the same sector, the transformation potential of association may be even greater if structured by means of multiple performance networks. Self-formed companies from various sectors may establish links with culture or education, with social development as their aim. Links between the great number of experiences offered by self-formation may be pillars of the diffuse socio-political project that we outlined in point 2.4.

3.8. Potential for global solidarity

On the broadest level of inter-cooperation, lies a global perspective of the world. In this respect, and with a view to cooperation for the development of the poorest countries, self-formed economic organisations may have a potential for activating global solidarity mechanisms. On the one hand, they may have this potential considering that one of the pillars of the set of values they promote is solidarity. On the other hand, as the decision-making capacity is in the hands of the partner-workers, depending on their level of awareness about these matters, it is up to them to activate the mechanisms for putting this awareness into practice, through their institutional democracy.

The South is still rich in community-based realities. It is a natural breeding ground of community union experiences and the social and economic experiences of those places also form part of the reserve of multiple answers in that area in the future. In this sense, a potential and highly-varied space for cooperation is opened up to self-formed economic organisations in technified countries: creating paths of cooperation with self-formed realities from the South.

4. Some risks and limits of self-formed economic organisations

In the second chapter, we outlined the relatively complex positioning of self-formed economic organisations in the current globalised world. Within this complex positioning, so far in the third chapter we have focused on their potentials. However, we would also like to mention some of their risks and limits.

In principle, the limits are established by the potentials, as many of them may well result in nothing. Functioning in the market is their greatest limit and limiting themselves to that is their great risk.

Below are some aspects related to that generic risk:

1. That the economic viewpoint prevails. This is another way of referring to limiting oneself to playing in the market. In this case, self-formation may be limited to being a mere internal organisational formula which, repeating the schemes of other companies, only has economic objectives.

We mentioned in point 2.4. that self-formed companies, despite being within the prevailing system, have the potential to encourage the latter's transformation. Nonetheless, this ability to transform depends on the potential's development and, if the potential is not developed, it will be no more than just a short-range mechanism.

2. That self-formed economic organisations shut themselves in without establishing links with other self-formation forces. As mentioned in point 2.4., situating self-formed economic organisations within a wider social project is what gives them purpose and direction. And in that direction, aimed at achieving a (more) self-formed society, it is up to self-formed economic organisations to establish links with other social forces (with other self-formed social structures) that develop the intuition of self-formation. If no link is established, they may become mere economic activities with a weak transformer sense or activities with no fixed objectives.
3. That technocracy prevails over democracy. Self-formed companies, while answering to the market and social logics, feel the technocracy-democracy strain. Democracy, on the other hand, needs to be constantly fed. What we could call "democratic chilling" is a real risk; in other words, that participation in supreme bodies grows cold in the face of complex company decisions, that it becomes something formal and that, in reality, the technical board –which has more information– determines the company's evolution. In an increasingly complex reality, decisions must often be made on the spot and, for reasons of pure efficacy, the decision-making capacity is usually delegated to just a few people. In this way, areas of real power are created, despite the fact that decisions formally ought to be approved by democratic bodies.

With all their risks and potentials, self-formed economic organisations are immersed in the strains and paradoxes mentioned. We will end by talking about one last strain. In this historical moment, we are immersed in a debate about the role of the State and the Market, from a global point of view. Where can we situate self-formation in this debate? This is undoubtedly an area of very unstable, but inevitable, ground.

The neoliberal tendencies of States have questioned their social obligations and they have begun to abandon some public activities, fomenting privatisation and deregulation. The State's social responsibility is denied or limited, making the market responsible for health, education, social security and many other social functions. Others, on the other hand, call for a strong

State, that is capable of carrying out the greatest amount of social functions possible.

Whatever the case, the welfare state is going through a crisis. And this opens up a new prospect for self-formation. What are the State's functions? What are the market's functions? What are society's functions, in other words, those of organisations and networks that operate independently of the logics of market gains?

The contribution made by self-formation must be situated right at that strain of the State-Market-Social Network trinomial. Self-formed organisations may, for example, take care of certain areas and services abandoned by the State (caring for the weakest members of society, education, health...). And this option has a double meaning. On the one hand, it may appear to merge with neoliberal theses; in fact, neoliberals also say, in their own way, that society or the community should be responsible for certain functions, and in this sense, self-formed organisations could be filling in the gaps and serve as a complement to the State's abandonment of responsibilities.

On the other hand, the self-formation approach goes beyond the possibility of leaving certain State functions in the hands of the market (or in the hands of organisations that will compete in the market). It also goes beyond the possibility of simply wanting to cover the functions left to one side by the State and the market. It is true that it may cover those functions or deficiencies, but by fulfilling those functions, self-formation can give people and communities the opportunity of self-formation. And should the latter be accomplished, the model created would be different from the state model or that directed by profit-making organisations, despite the fact that, at times, conduct within this model coincides with neoliberal theses. And that differentiated model may open up its own future prospects, with the aim of obtaining a social model based on autonomous decision-making capacity from below upwards.