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1. LOCATION IN THE GLOBAL REALITY

SITUATING THE MEANING OF WHAT WE ARE DOING

As a cooperative experience we must locate the meaning of our action in the current reality. In order to re-situate this meaning, at the current time it seems to be necessary to carry out a reading of the global reality.

It is suitable to carry out a calm and rigorous diagnosis of reality, to locate what we are aiming towards as a cooperative experience with the maximum quantity and quality of data and reflections. If a deep view is not cultivated in this sense, disconcerting questions arise. For example, in a world where half the planet lives in poverty with new historical annual records of the millions who die of hunger... what is the meaning of our fundamental values, whether they make us fundamentally richer, or more privileged among the privileged people of the planet?

There is always a risk of curtailing the human and planetary diagnosis. Curtailing the deep meaning of what we are doing by limiting us to the currently fashionable ideas mixed with some of our own values.

We are heirs of an individualist praxis and this implies a double task:

1. To base the diagnosis of the socio-economic reality on our values and our ethics, however disturbing and demanding the task may be.
2. To locate the meaning of our thought and our cooperative practice within this diagnosis.

The diagnosis of the global reality can be approached from very different perspectives, some are more critical, others more comfortable, some more partial, others more general, some more disturbing, and others more justified. We can get lost in perspectives and data. However, what is the unavoidable data from an individualistic humanist perspective? What are the primordial analyses from the values that we proclaim?

ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE 21ST CENTURY

Throughout the 20th century a hard conflict has been produced between the different ideologies and their corresponding proposals in relation to the organization of human relations and social life. The latest generations of this century have witnessed the collapse of many of these ideological doctrines and we are certainly at an interesting historical time: we are presented with the challenge of **building a coherent line of thought and practice**, without starting from doctrines explaining it all, but at the same time without sharing a sole line of thought that presents the economic reason as the supreme and almost exclusive reason in the design future of humanity.

It is our urgent task to carry out a diagnosis of the reality that surrounds us, starting from our values as regards the person and the community, in order to situate the meaning of our task in this context. When we undertake this action it is important to recognize the starting point in our universe of values. It is from this point, from the evaluative positions that we recognize as ours, from where we should begin the reflection on our experience and its future, if we do not want to be caught up and blocked in defensive positions of resignation because of readings about the inevitably coercive character of the environment in which we move, of descriptions or views of the reality that they immobilize, or justifications that they disable. As a starting position we propose the position that Arizmendiarieta followed in his time: **starting from his own deep positions and values** (human dignity, the complex relationship between the person and the community), in order to then carry out a diagnosis about the reality, and from there to act in coherence, transforming this reality in a particular direction. The aim is to find in ourselves, in people that form this experience, the creative dimension of the power of transformation that characterizes the cooperative human being.

Capitalism has been established in the dominant economic and social system at a planetary level, without practically any counterbalance. This system is characterized by the unlimited opening out of the economic rationality. Historically, economic rationality has experienced important limitations by other types of rationalities: religious, cultural, social or ecological. Capitalism elevates economic reason to supreme reason and it subordinates another type of consideration, qualified as "irrational", to economic efficiency. Therefore, capitalism as a system of organization of social and economic life would not be characterized so much by the ownership and control of the means of production, as for the motivation and purpose of its activity. With capitalism we witness the standardization and devastation of all kinds of socio-economic and cultural realities that are governed through other principles and other rationalities. In relation to this matter, the challenge could be seen in terms of whether the cooperative experience and, more specifically, the Arizmendiarieta cooperative experience, finds, and to what extent, its own personality through the defence of a differential articulation of economic reason and other kinds of rationality.

We are in one of the **historical systems that generates the most human suffering** both in absolute and relative terms, which is the essential part of each historical system, regardless of the justified myths on which it is based (empire, progress, greatness of God, democracy,

socialism, etc.). We are in an empire or world system as terrible or even more so in objective data of global human suffering as many other times (the time of nazism or fascism, episodes of slavery) that we remember as "intolerable". And the abyss of inequality is growing, as shown in objective data. This serious but real view of the global situation is something that is hard to assimilate, and even to admit. There are, like in all times, many myths and justifications to explain it; admitting it implies making too many things and objectives look ridiculous; and there is always data to curtail the essential data. However, it is an urgent task to "cleanse" ourselves of ideologies and inertias and start from the essential sources: the values that we want to profess and the reading of the essential data. Surprisingly, they are spiritual-religious and scientific-intellectual (not political) authorities that are insisting on this difficult change of conscience.

From the human point of view, the world's situation is extreme: the distance between the rich minority of the planet and poor majority is greater than ever, and this distance continues to grow. The great majority of humanity is excluded from a minimum material dignity. On the contrary to what is believed unconsciously starting from the idea of "historical progress", the magnitude of the current socio-economic uprooting of a great part of the world is unprecedented in history. There is so much data that is so overwhelming that it no longer says anything. Whose mind can accept that many millions of people die from hunger every year when technically there is an excess of food? This data is so typical that it immunizes us against the biggest holocaust that humanity has suffered in history, and it makes us question our development model.

"An unprecedented holocaust, whose horror covers in only one year all the terror of the killings that our generations witnessed in the first half of this century (*including the two world wars*); a holocaust that goes further over the perimeter of barbarity and death every day, at every instant that passes, not only in the world but also in our consciences.

...

We must rebel against this false realism that incites us to resign ourselves, as if it were a fatality, when it actually is a result of the politics and "disorder established".

...

It is primordial to opt, act, create and live to give life without further delay".

* Statement signed by 54 Nobel Prize winners in 1981. (The horror that they are condemning has increased relentlessly in the 18 years after this was written, and it is still on the increase)

This unprecedented human "disorder" is joined by an ecological crisis and a crisis of cultural diversity that are also unprecedented. They are the three faces of the same depredatory and obsessively pro-productive civilization in which we live. We are not going to go further into the ecological and standardization aspects of the socio-economic and cultural diversity that brings the model of civilization that is in expansion.

From a individualistic humanist view it is being considered that the characteristic socio-economic system of the historical phase in which we find ourselves requires deep reflection, and that this task, here and now, with trust and humbleness, corresponds to all of us.

We are at a difficult but interesting moment in history where, in the light of the standardization of a system that is unjust and inhumane for multitudes, rather than compare total ideologies and alternative global systems that are not yet formulated, the emancipating and humanizing direction points towards an intuition: to develop our own, diverse experiences. Therefore, the aim is to promote the **diversity of experiences** as the seed for future answers. That is to say, the multi-focusing of the alternatives. By means of the development of diverse experiences that come from different ways of understanding the reality and at the same time that produce new forms of relationship with others, we start building a kind of a natural reserve for the answers looking towards the future. As in the plane of ecology, maintaining and promoting diversity (in this case of socio-economic experiences) is a central intuition, as besides conforming a value in itself, it possesses a fundamental strategic value as a germ for the future.

The Mondragón Cooperative Experience is fully situated in this perspective of development of different experiences with its own human coherence. We could add that when the international context was different (the rivalry between two world systems), the cooperative experience to which we belong was already situated in this position, as a differentiated community experience with its own coherence. At the present time, this situation acquires, if possible, a greater meaning.

THE SINGLE SYSTEM OF VALUES

We are living a clear tendency towards the standardization of thought. A line of thought that has become a structured, omnipresent speech with the course of the time, where the prevalence of the economic aspect over the political and social aspects is a relevant excellent novelty in the messages.

The framework of economic and social relationships that man has given in this century that is coming to an end continues to promote the selfish dimension of the human being, his individual ambition and personal profit. The desire to have more and more and the negation of the notion of sufficient are the driving forces of our effort in the task of producing the "necessary" material support for life. Social Darwinism (or survival of the fittest) is the principle that governs social life. At the same time, we are witnessing the commercialisation of the whole social area.

Adam Smith: "all individuals are spurred, from the cradle to the tomb, by the desire to make their fortune". The industrial civilization sets the progress and the realization of man in general in the achievements of the *homo economicus* and the *homo faber*, and it locates the centre of our culture outside of human personality and its pro-solidarity, cooperative dimension.

It is a thought that mythologizes the development model that reigns in our world. This thought constantly acts in the different planes of social life, modelling the values and behaviours of generations through the ideologies that are typical to it.

STANDARDIZATION OF THE REAL VALUES

As in all times, the privileged sectors generate myths and corporate values as a frame to justify, sweeten and sustain the humanly unattainable. In this sense, all systems tend to gulp down, to be presented as unavoidable, to make objectives uniform, to achieve that the alternative becomes defensive and gradually assumes its ways of thinking and acting.

By denying the essential part of the diagnosis of the current world, i.e. ignoring that the main data is the growing abyss, and by not establishing these matters in the questioning centre of what we do, are we left with the possibility of talking about individualist, humanist thought? We would perhaps be losing the initial, motivational perspective of the Experience, in the interests of adapting to the dominant aspect, not only in a large part of its praxis, but also in its perception of reality, entering in the absorbing circle of its logic.

The single system of values elevates effectiveness and economic growth to absolute values, and it crosses out the moral and ethical aspirations of the human as irrational as they enter in conflict with the reason par excellence (the instrumental and economic reason). However, in the light of the human, ecological and cultural crisis that we are experiencing, we must ask ourselves if it is not in fact the thought that spreads and justifies this state of things that is the greatest expression of human irrationality. It is based on the imposition of economic rationality above all other human dimensions by standardizing means and objectives in having, consuming and growing economically. An economic view that ignores the fact that 35 million people die of hunger every year (in the Jewish holocaust 6 million died in five years), an economic view that standardises wealth from the natural and cultural diversity of the planet, an economic view that relegates many spiritual dimensions, of the utopian, social and cultural capacity of the human being, that individualizes, isolates, programs it to compete to produce, to sell to consume, to consume to grow and to grow to compete again.

THE DEVELOPMENT MODEL

The development model that we are experiencing in this historical period is characterized by a massive, progressive and expansible application of technologies that are increasingly more powerful in the extraction and exploitation of the planet's natural reserves, at the same time as it promotes and strengthens new consumption needs, a good part of which are superfluous, in the citizens of the developed world, making the logic that "more is always better" and its corresponding relationship with nature the key principle to satisfy the material dimension of the human being.

From this logic that is dominant today, the problem of the impoverished countries that make up the great majority of the planet, is located in their

inherent difficulties in reaching this level of development. However, this position is installed on a fallacy. It is demonstrated, although not very widely spread, that the **generalization of the development model** of rich countries across the whole planet is **unviable**, for one simple, weighty reason: the **physical limits of the actual planet**. Even in the hypothetical case that these limits did not exist we should ask ourselves about the convenience of irrational habits of consumption that rest on a narrow, limited view of the human being that considers it as a being whose dignity is based on having. However, what the data demonstrates is that if the level of consumption of the citizens of the first world was extended to all the inhabitants on the earth, the globe's natural reserves would be drained in a short period of time. It is materially impossible for the whole world to have the level of consumption of a citizen of Mondragón. The other side of the coin, in order for the citizen of Mondragón to continue with his/her level, or increase it, is that the masses (even majorities) of the world will continue to be below the decent minimum levels, since the hypertrophied coin of western consumption cannot exist without its other side. The subtle and veiled fallacy that accompanies this development model is precisely the omission of this fact, because its acceptance forces us to question a situation that only guarantees the decency of a privileged minority at the cost of a natural wealth that belongs to everyone, and that would not be able to go round if we all consumed it with this model. The derivation is disturbing: we are the ones who should lower our level of consumption, review our paradigm, it is our development model that is humanly unattainable from a global perspective (and, therefore, also from a local perspective).

One of the tasks that is most urgent with the coming of the new century is to start to visualize **new development models** that are sustainable from the human and ecological point of view. In this task it would be interesting to strengthen the diversity of experiences and the exchange between them. Ours may be one among many, from the modesty and acceptance of our limits and contradictions, but with our outlook towards a future in accordance with the values of cooperation, i.e. the development of the person and the community not against the other ones but together with them. This means that within a context of economic globalisation the solidarity must also be globalised, not from the perception of suffering as other people's problem, but from the acceptance of our own responsibility in the suffering of others.

In the progress towards new development models we will have to build and to imagine new realities, and we will have to see to what extent we are able to transform other realities that are deep-rooted in ourselves (the pro-development and production logic, compulsive consumption, etc.). Perhaps we should begin by considering values that contradict many typically western behaviours. Values that are not so far from our roots, such as austerity, for example, by establishing relationships that are respectful of the social surroundings and the environment. It would mean **activating efforts and creativity** in the search for another equilibrium, with ourselves and with the environment, in accordance with our evaluative corpus.

THE INFLUENCE OF INDIVIDUALISM

The model of action and society based on the competition with others and the satisfaction of personal ambition, promotes typical phenomenon of our time such as anonymity and loss of community meaning. Individualism, in its narrow and perverse version, dissolves and weakens the community ties and makes it impossible for the development of creative and cooperative dimensions of the human being.

The individualistic values have a great social force, also in our cooperative social body. It is not a case, therefore, of closing ones eyes, and the starting point must be marked by the recognition of this reality. We are an integral part of a wider network of relationships and we are, therefore, permeable to their influence. However, at the same time, the cooperative experience that we form announces values like dignity, and it builds realities and behaviours with a community component, in an attempt to demonstrate that other articulations are possible among the social and personal aspect, between the collective and singular aspect. This complexity is given by the integration in a wider framework whilst maintaining signs of your own identity, and it is from this complexity that we should start and work. It is our task to study in depth, reflect, air the contradictions and identify the coherent elements, in order to constantly re-fuel the bases of the cooperation.

In his time, Arizmendiarrrieta diagnosed an evolution from *solvent individualism* towards *degrading collectivism*. He had more than enough reasons to come to this conclusion in his time, with the booming "real socialism" and the memory of the experience of the war (the civil and world wars) which, like all wars, showed the dark and, above all, gregarious side of human nature. However, the historical phase that we are living has made a considerable turn. We are walking towards an increasingly individualistic, atomised society. This social model, through the neo-liberal doctrine that governs it, demands individual responsibility, but it does not offer a community project as compensation. These are times, therefore, of growing disintegrating individualism.

As we have already pointed out, lately, the typically modern individualizing movement has been intensified and an ideal of certain individual freedom is still being built. Today's individual should *be free*: we must be able to break ties, to be freed from what constrains us and prevents us from acting, to put an end to the mandatory inhibitions in our lives. However, *being free* is something else, since at the same time as we are leading our own individual project we can find out the scope of our actions and know their consequences, and contemplate them in connection with a common project. Today's individual is not aware that our condition of being social implies that many of our actions cannot exist on their own, but rather they are interwoven with the actions of others to reach their purposes. Here is the model of self-management and the cooperation. A model that looks for a more balanced synthesis between the community dimension and the personal dimension, between the collective effort and individual responsibility. In this historical context, the self-management and cooperative model regains, therefore, a special value.

CHANGES IN THE BUSINESS METHODS

The large corporations are the centres where the power gravitates that maintains and regenerates the human situation and its development model at this point in history. The current thinkers, theologians and critical scientists point out the enormous responsibility of financial and business corporations (above governments and other authorities) in this great "silent crime" of a good part of humanity. They are the centres from which a multitude of threads diverge of the world economy, the dependence of many countries, the arms interests, governmental pressures, regeneration and maintenance of lines of economic theories, potentiation of "gurus" of excellence, distribution and control of information and a long etc. They are, in short, the key authorities of what many have called the "established disorder".

In turn, the business world has realised, with these large corporations as leaders, that its objectives (profit, acceleration of growth) require the adaptation of some methods to obtain competitive advantages. In this sense, over the last decades they have discovered the importance of activating **staff motivations** to increase profitability. Within the "company culture" we talk about participation formulas, which seek implication, corporate values are generated internally to draw the corporation together. All of this is planned as an instrument to optimise profits. We are up against a new irony of our time: important values like participation and implication are being increasingly placed at the service of lucrative logic, of the growing financial accumulation, of the unsustainable demonstrated development model, within the context of the largest holocaust known to humanity and maintained by the same mega-corporations that head "new business cultures" on the inside.

From our deepest principles, advancing in participation and implication is always positive, and with an open attitude, we can and should always learn from everyone, even from the most inhumane authorities. We should, however, realize that participation and other values from an individualist perspective actually have a deeper, realer, more demanding and very different importance.

THE TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCE

The constant development of science and technology, and the speed of this development are an essential fact in the current context. This fact offers new possibilities and demands constant adaptation. At the present time, the technological development accompanies the socio-economic system as a standardization force.

The **emancipating experiences must be situated in this context** of accelerated technological development and a global market. The capacity to

compete and develop in a reality like the above-mentioned will mark and judge the value of the experience.

THE COOPERATION IN THE FUTURE: FOR A NATURAL RESERVE OF DIFFERENT ANSWERS

Once the straightforward competition has ended between the large ideological systems with a totalising vocation, the challenge of all liberating projects of our historical time must be reformulated: the future of the emancipating project resides in the potentiation of different answers and experiences at a local level, rooted in a coherent relationship between values and practice. These are not times to set up the system in force against a total super-ideology as a contra-system. This does not mean that all emancipating experiences are impossible, but rather just the opposite: we are at an interesting time where the **multi-focusing** of alternative experiences is a key to the future.

The diversity of answers conforms the natural reserve of future answers in interests of greater levels of human liberation. The value and strategic nature of our cooperative experience is in fact based on this experience being perfectly situated in the diversity and multi-focusing of the necessary answers as part of them, without aiming to be established in a kind of a global alternative. However, in the event of not committing to a conscious, competent educational task, it runs the risk of being assimilated by the prevailing system of values and, therefore, of acting defensively.

The basic positions and principles of the Arizmendiarieta cooperative experience have an unquestionable presence in the present world situation. In the light of the fossilized variants of the great ideologies and the mere counterweight functions, the way of thinking and cooperative action has a vector or meaning that guides it: the intuition based on the **diversity of experiences**.

Besides being a source of economic, social and human development for the country that saw its creation, the Arizmendiarieta cooperative experience can be an interesting reference both for those who make up the south of the planet, and those who until recently were situated in the so-called real socialism, like any other experience of community development. Always from the perspective of exchange and mutual learning that the recognition of the diversity bears.

Questions for debate:

- What are the values and the essential principles that underlie our Experience?
 - How do we situate the meaning of our Experience within today's World economic context? What is our contribution?
 - To what extent do we feel like an organizational peculiarity within the prevailing development model and to what extent do we feel like the heirs of an individualist thought that goes (or should go) beyond this organizational peculiarity?
 - What are the characteristics of the "new cooperative man" to which we aspire?
 - The economic development that we are achieving that absorbs a great part of our energy and objectives... In what sense does it bring us closer to the "cooperative man" and a new socio-economic order, and in what sense does it take us away from Arizmendiarieta's ideal? What are the lines of action, changes of direction, dimensions to be developed, to bring us closer to this ideal from the type of man we have today?
 - Can caring for and fuelling a social cooperative project involve placing certain limits on the expansion? How can we weigh up the economic expansion appropriately on one the hand, and take an in-depth look into the authenticity of the cooperative project on the another?
 - In view of the global reality... should the creation of employment and economic growth be the greatest materialization of the impulse towards social justice? Should we review our priorities? What could the new human and social goals be today, from a individualist perspective applied to the global reality?