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## 5. INTRA-COOPERATIVE AND INTER-COOPERATIVE SOLIDARITY

The matters related to this section have a close relationship with those that correspond to the previous chapter on participation. Therefore, in both sections there are reflections that have the same starting point and which point in the same direction. As a first step in this reflection, we will make general and theoretical considerations, in order to later move to more specific aspects in intra-cooperative and inter-cooperative solidarity.

### KEY CONCEPT

Solidarity is a key concept, or maybe *the* key concept, in cooperative and Arizmendiarieta thought. The union of certain people in a collective action for the resolution of an aspect of personal and community life requires the integration in the group from a minimum level of empathy and recognition of others, i.e. of solidarity. Solidarity provides advantages to the individual, to the extent that the group offers protection, but at the same time solidarity also implies investing individual effort to the benefit of the community, and on occasions it implies knowing how to subordinate the individual desire to the benefit of the group. To act with solidarity, and hence, to be a member of cooperative, is not, therefore, an easy task.

From its beginnings our experience has developed this attitude in multiple matters: in the salary scale; in the relationship with the rest of the society (restrictive regulation of salaries to the average for the area, support for social projects, job creation, etc.); and in general terms, with regard to the marking of personal promotion to the demands of community development.

### SOLIDARITY IN TODAY'S WORLD

With this document, through the different chapters, we have been carrying out a diagnosis of the world that surrounds us, understanding that this task is indispensable if we want to situate and give meaning to our experience in the context in which we are inserted. Also with regard to a key principle of our experience as is solidarity, it is a good idea to carry out this exercise.

It is a good idea, therefore, to superficially remember the agreed diagnosis that is carried out on **the nature of the social bond in advanced modern capitalist societies** from the different social disciplines: it is the hegemony of the aforementioned **economic-egoistical rationality** and the domain of the search for **self-interest** as a universal form of existence and the promoter of the collective good. The form of coexistence governed by these criteria produces isolation, the atomisation of the individual, and it promotes a kind of a regression of the unequivocally social nature of the human being. There is load of non-solidarity that is inseparable from the modern capitalist order. At the same time, in the face of the lack of community warmth characteristic of the modern era, of the atomising western civilization, we are witnessing a compulsive need to meet with others, in the heart of which dangerous illusions and totalitarian desires are germinating. This then leads to, the reinforcement, under these conditions of existence, of collective phenomenon that derives into fundamentalisms of all kinds. They are attempts to overcome the insecurity, threat and anguish of a completely individualized existence, and attempts to search for a collective compass that orientates the individual and gives meaning to its existence.

Another of the basic characteristics of the modern condition is **pluralism**. The typical society of the privileged side of the planet is a more and more plural society as regards the diversification of the sources that provide meaning, ethical and aesthetic stances, lifestyles, etc. In the face of this plurality and due to the lack of secure and totalising compasses that orientate towards human communities, each individual ship should tend to choose, to manufacture its own gyroscope to be able to find its way around the world. The pluralism inherent to advanced modern societies and the more and more individualized life of people, are two phenomenon that can be understood as two sides of the same coin.

The current social crisis, which for many is a civilization crisis, could also be qualified as **crisis of human solidarity**, closely linked to the hegemony of the neo-liberal thought that is moving around the world nowadays.

## THE NEO-LIBERAL MODEL OF COHESION

In the light of the hegemonic installation of the neo-liberal assumptions and practices, all projects that are based on different conceptions and aspire to different goals need to be constantly reaffirmed, reformulating and clarifying their differential nature. Therefore, it is also important to reflect on other views that are acting with such strength.

Indeed, the actual neo-liberal project has a certain *pseudo-solidarity* project, for the creation in certain forms of community. It builds the encounter with others from the exclusive aims of the subjection of the person to the objectives of profit. The **business identification of the worker** and the **internal cohesion of the company**, are exclusively understood in terms of economic growth. The group feeling is built and guided towards the maximization of profit. The starting point is the following: how to redesign and program the person to be subjected to the idea of competing, with the smallest resistance and greatest possible satisfactions, with the final objective of continuing to grow. The idea is to build human subjectivity that in any situation opts for gaining maximum profit, which accumulates and is never satisfied in the desire for goods.

This logic develops the community dimension of the human being to subject it to the standardising force of rational calculation, impoverishing and restricting the wealth of the different logics that cohabit in individual and collective life. We have repeated that the neo-liberal order is in fact characterized by the standardisation of the human being, through the one-dimensionality that it promotes. We have pointed out that the capitalist society is defined by two processes that have propitiated an economic and material development very superior to that of other human civilizations: the extension of economic rationality, overcoming limitations (religious, ethical, social, cultural, etc.) which until then delimited this rationality, and the individualization process. Two ideas that are perfectly included in the liberal maxim that defends the search of interest and one's own (singular) welfare (economic) as a formula for the common good. The current phase of capitalism, neo-liberalism, is precisely characterized by a reinforcement of these two processes, outside of any idea of solidarity.

However, in the heart of the neo-liberal model the term cooperation is being increasingly used. There is a great paradox here. The company is "a community of people" that should cooperate, only because it has been demonstrated that correct collaboration improves performance. Cooperate to compete more effectively. This way, by obviating the straightforward exploitation of the cooperation and the subordination of its ethical-moral components to the purely economic objective, they have found one of the contended alibis that justify the characterization of business work to the use as "humanists". The possible blurring of the frontiers between our model and the prevailing model should push us towards a positive attitude of surveillance and deepening.

## THE COOPERATIVE MODEL OF COHESION

The absorbent hegemony of the neo-liberal model requires us to make an effort to first conceptually clarify our idea of solidarity, and this way, to promote a practice that comes closer to this idea.

One of the dimensions of collective life is centred on the community effort aimed at the production of the necessary wealth for the members of the community. It is an absolutely necessary dimension. This means that the productive and economic action is an integral part of human existence.

It is very clear: **economic profitability is inseparable from the cooperative project**, and this fact cannot be changed.

At the same time, the cooperative company is a project that goes beyond the purely economic aspect to be established in a **collective action for integral personal and community development**; this concept will be treated in depth in chapter eight. Therefore, the danger resides in the absolute subjection of the other dimensions of individual and social life to the prerogatives of productive logic. This is the difficult and complicated balance of the Arizmendiarieta cooperative experience.

Therefore, because in the light of the dilemmas that are difficult to solve it is easy to assimilate logics that are not our own, it is important to keep it clear that the models of community, cohesion or solidarity that promotes the paradigm of the Cooperation are substantially different from the neo-liberal model. The economic aspect and rational-instrumental aspect that characterizes it, are at the service of the human being, and not the opposite. This maxim, which is possibly too idealistic and rhetoric for many (this valuation is still a symptom of the plumb line that our world is following, according to which, all projects that do not abide by the prevailing logic are irrational), results in the cooperative order being characterized by defending a project of social transformation and the **determination in achieving a stage of more human and solidarity-orientated social development**. And this objective does not constitute the collateral aspect, but rather the substantial aspect, and to carry it out we must undoubtedly provide ourselves with competitive capacity. Therefore, the forming of a solidarity-orientated community may be the way to compete, but it is above all the objective to be reached; it is the organizational formula and it is the goal.

## FACING THE WEAKNESS

The Arizmendiarieta experience has created multiple expressions of intra and inter-cooperative solidarity: the creation of its own formula of social security, reward policies, community funds, the capitalization of returns, the treatment of unemployment, etc. Therefore, it is not, by any means, comparable to neo-liberal formulas of pseudo-solidarity that aim more towards creating sensations of active participation in a collective project (symbolic or purely existential participation) than tangible truths and realities.

However, and still applying the analysis on general tendencies, we could agree that the diagnosis is not completely positive, regardless of the intensity of self-criticism: internal cohesion, the feeling of belonging to the cooperative community, the solidarity (intra-cooperative and inter-cooperative) after all appears to be showing certain tendencies to weakening.

There are many causes, but reasons appear to exist that also have a lot to do with the **weakening of the project of social transformation and the loss of utopian tension**. At the rate of the weakening of

awareness and collective spirit characteristic of our societies, at the moment we also live a cooling down of collective illusions that have historically mobilized the Arizmendiarieta experience. The spirit of union can suffer damage if a minimum common encouraging project for social transformation is not visualized.

All of this has to do it with aspects that we will go deeper into in other chapters (the other dimensions of solidarity, taking root, integral development, education). After all, the more powerful and encouraging the social transformation project that the Cooperative Experience develops, the more natural and stronger the feeling of solidarity of the current and future cooperative members.

## TO UNITE: RENEWING ENCOURAGING VIEWS

What meaning does the Arizmendiarieta project and its cooperative formula acquire in the context that surrounds us on the threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? This is a question that we must all respond to, in so far as reaching a minimum common denominator on the place that our experience occupies in the Basque Country and in the world seems to be vital for the success and health of our project.

The Arizmendiarieta experience was created with a **non-conformist vocation**, in an economic world guided by values and ways of operating that are far from the humanist-individualist (ethical-religious) view that served as a base to the Arizmendiarieta project. The reformulation of this view, adapted to the new context in which we are moving, the renewal and reconstruction of the emancipating project that resides in the base of our experience, is the direction that could situate us in the correct meaning of reflection.

On their own, pragmatism and exclusive economic calculation do not appear to constitute devices that activate illusion and generate transforming utopias. The constant articulation of a balance between the economic aspect (the sense of reality) and the social aspect (ethical project), seems to continue being the great challenge of the future, also in the path towards the revitalization and recovery of the feeling of internal solidarity and the attachment to a shared common objective. The idea is to recover the **uniting and inspiring idealism** of the Arizmendiarieta experience and its non-conformist nature, not from ingenuousness and charm, but from the not merely adaptive critical realism that is characteristic of the Arizmendiarieta project.

In this sense, in the context of an atomising world like the current one, cooperativism can form a agglutinant, a mobilizer of illusions, an element for rational human cohesion, a device that provides meaning and guides human desire and behaviour in a direction of transformation and social and individual emancipation. The cooperative community is in fact just that, a community, an area for **personal development** and the construction of **collective life** based on a rational project to create **wealth-welfare** guided towards social transformation. The cooperative project has

the necessary elements to create and practice its own social bond. It can be conceived as an element of strategic value in the multiple and diverse response necessary, in the task of building a community self. A self that plays down the compulsive search for self-interest and egoistic rational calculation, in favour of the common good, that is the ethical aspect. And at the same time, a self that escapes from desire for totalitarian ways of coexistence.

In fact, the cooperative paradigm lies in the idea of a union of people that have known how to accept certain limitations of their own will in favour of the common good. The cooperative project could set the direction of being constituted in a group of individual itineraries that project a community desire and propose a collective destination, starting from Arizmendiarieta's rational balance between the individual and the community. This direction will have multiple, deep difficulties, especially when powerful forces orientated in the opposite direction exist. However, it constitutes an encouraging challenge, from the realistic assumption of our own limitations.

Only from an encouraging project can we reach the union of people that have wanted and known how to accept the limitations of their exclusive desire for individual promotion in favour of the common good. It is difficult for this encouraging project to be exclusively for economic growth without going deeper into an ambitious multidimensional project of social transformation for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is probably the only way to guide the cooperative social body towards a true cooperation that is not simply instrumental.

As processes of social change are generally promoted by conscious minorities that impregnate this spirit in the social body, it is a must to make a reference to the special responsibility that people nowadays have to guide the designs of the Arizmendiarieta experience. The interiorisation of the project of social transformation by people with greater responsibility, and the coherent action with this project, constitute basic levers to configure an encouraging view of the future. This task is complicated at a time like this, in which the urgency of market figures and demands seem to relegate all ethical projects to impracticable ground. A complicated but necessary task.

## SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF INTRA AND INTER-COOPERATIVE SOLIDARITY

After the most theoretical reflection, below we will synthetically show some more specific questions in relation to the two solidarities that are being dealt with in this chapter. The Arizmendiarieta project, in comparison with other projects to create wealth-welfare, has developed a deep system of internal solidarity with different ramifications: a more equal distribution of the economic results, a social security system, a fairer rewards policy, the treatment of unemployment with solidarity (relocations), cooperative employment, etc. However, let's point out some questions which could be the subject of discussion matter.

- **The wage scale.** The wage scale has been extended in the last few years. It is evident that we are all the same as regards dignity but different as regards talent, and the company needs to satisfy people who are qualified for high responsibilities. However, even though the wage scale of our cooperatives is more equal than those of capital companies, it is necessary to reflect on the direction that this type of measures sets and the future perspectives on this matter.
- **The question of rewards.** From its origins, the Arizmendiarieta experience has aimed its trajectory at the service of society, rather than in favour of each member's individual interests. However, in the last few years the tendency toward the capitalization of rewards has weakened.
- **Community funds.** In the last few years, in the face of the reality of a globalised market, our experience has opted for combinations with non-cooperative groups and the economic expansion to foreign markets with a non-cooperative format. The use of community funds in this direction contrasts with the weakening in the creation of cooperative business projects. This tendency brings us up against a historical challenge: the difficult balance between the adaptation and maintenance of the essences in a context of globalisation.
- **Members-workers.** Also over the last few years there has been a substantial reduction in the proportion of members in favour of employees and the progressive increase of temporary workers. The hyper-competitive market that we must face collides with some of the basic assumptions of cooperativism and the Arizmendiarieta ideal, and as regards the regulation of work, this market demands flexible, dynamic recruiting. As this is true, it is necessary to reflect on why we have a certain number of temporary workers, for example, bearing in mind the economic success that our companies are achieving. Limiting the recruitment of staff that are non-members and temporary workers to what is strictly necessary is an indispensable reference if we want to continue maintaining the character as a people's society, and not a capital society.

#### Questions for debate:

- What are the most important aspects today in our experience as regards intra and inter-cooperative solidarity?
- What reading should be made on the evolution that these aspects of solidarity have experienced over the last few years?
- Does our wage scale adjust to the concept of solidarity that we propose?
- Does the weakening of the capitalization of reward mark a direction in which the members' interest prevails over serving the society?
- What future is presented to us as a cooperative project in a context of globalisation? Is the denaturalisation process unstoppable and irreversible?
- In the light of the economic process of globalisation, is there a certain abandonment as regards the creation of cooperative business projects?

- The regulations in force accept a total of 30% of temporary employees in our cooperatives, how is this figure evaluated? How is the practice of the cooperatives valued in this aspect?