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EDITORIAL

Troubled times. Global scale, rural scale

“My thinking is now completely a Voltairean cosmopolitanism. Every national circumscription appears barbarous to me. A united states of the world, a united world economy. This has nothing to do with cultural uniformity and certainly nothing to do with Communism. Voltaire and Montesquieu are more than ever my essential guides”

Klemperer, October 9, 1938¹

We are immersed in a prolonged series of openly regressive processes in which increasing inequality, poverty, precariousness and social exclusion have been gradually affecting sectors of the population (the so-called middle classes) —especially in the developed world— that hitherto appeared to be safe. In the developing countries the effects of armed conflict, environmental disasters and economic collapse have led to forced migration flows with catastrophic consequences for individuals and societies. Across the globe, the impact of mechanisation and automation in the primary and secondary sectors of the economy, together with widespread relocation, has dramatically reduced the opportunities for populations located away from the cities. The volume of migration flows from rural areas to the cities —accelerated with industrialisation— is always difficult to manage. As an example (and deliberately avoiding the disproportionate case of China), 43% of the 2.3 million inhabitants of Accra (Ghana) live in slums, the vast majority of which are rural migrant settlements. The social contract, which supported a precariously stable social peace for many years, has been blown apart by the State’s failure to meet its side of the agreement to provide the majority of the population with the conditions to live a decent life (social justice), thereby destroying the bases of the democratic system. The rise to power of individuals who oppose the very democratic workings of the State represents a danger to the societies that have elected them to office, and to the rest of the world, and has led to increased emotional, irresponsible and inflammatory demagoguery and the eruption of conflict where none previously existed. The upsurge of these populist approaches eradicates any possibility of a shared language that allows us to understand the other and reach the agreements necessary to find solutions that can be accepted by all. The end result is the general crisis of governance in which we are now engulfed, and that will be extremely difficult and costly to overcome and reverse.

We urgently need to abandon negative, combative interpretations and proposals, and replace them with positive, favourable ones. We must develop and deploy monitory mechanisms which give citizens guarantees of compliance with the law, transparency and accountability in all institutional spheres. We must recognise that the rapid proliferation of intermediaries and, subsequently, of bureaucratic management processes is inherent to the development of society. And that it is impossible, therefore, for either individuals or societies, however powerful they might be, to go back to autocratic positions. The current situation is marked by the staggering growth of globalisation at every level —economic (property, trade, etc.), knowledge and technology, environmental— in which abuse of power is rife among those tasked with safeguarding the balanced respect for and compliance with the rules of the game. Only if we treat the land —the planet as a whole— as an organically integrated entity can we guarantee citizens (wherever they might live) equal access to the resources and services generated by the advances of humanity and that are currently only enjoyed by those who live in cities, and above all, cities located in the developed world.

1 Klemperer, V. (2003): *I Will Bear Witness, Volume 1, A Diary of the Nazi Years 1933-1941*. The Modern Library, New York. Translated by Martin Chalmers, pp.260-261.



Today, internationalisation is a pragmatic demand to guarantee the survival of the human race and the planet, but we must continue to appeal to the ideological principles of the historical traditions in defence of freedom and the emancipation of all people to guarantee the fundamental rights of every inhabitant of the planet. In this regard, we already have well-established supranational institutions, movements and platforms with a focus on interconnectivity and interdependence that have achieved—despite numerous shortfalls and difficulties in both design and workability—notable outcomes in the last seventy years. Some examples of these are:

The broad backing—from both countries and non-governmental organisations—for the United Nations Agenda 2030 for sustainable development, launched in 2015, and its evolution over the last three years allows for certain optimism. The definition of the 17 general goals, divided into 169 more specific targets, takes into account both the structural reasons for the deficiencies to be overcome, and the interactions—positive or negative—among the goals. Linking development to sustainability increases both the value and the impact of the measures to be taken in a holistic view of human presence on the planet. The plan is extremely ambitious, its costs are undoubtedly very high, and cultural changes will be needed in the way it has been implemented to date. In these three years, the sectoral and regional plans to monitor target achievements have proved to be effective. The fact that interregional cooperation alliances have been established will, in turn, increase the chances of successful compliance with these agreements.

The recent binding agreement signed by the European Union sets a target share of 32% for renewable energies to be reached by 2030 (in support of the United Nations Agenda.) Additionally, the equally binding agreement on measures reached at the Paris Climate Conference (COP21) in 2015 among 195 countries, setting out a global action plan to limit global warming to below 2°C, despite failing to include the most stringent criteria and suffering some delays in its resolution, is finally moving in the right direction. But in this interconnected world, greater commitment is needed from citizens. Rural parts of the world have traditionally been disfavoured, compared to their urban counterparts, and increasing depopulation calls for greater efforts to redress this imbalance. The series of initiatives and analyses related to these questions in the present edition of *Àgora* aims to contribute to this effort.

At this moment in time, we must be clear once and for all that the consequences of failing to normalise and regulate any human activity can work against the general interests of society and will always benefit the powerful few. We need solid structures that coordinate the interdependence between states, societies, and ultimately, citizens of the planet in all the ecosystems—physical, economic, social and political—that make possible not simply individual survival, but enable them to live freely. We need to restore a solid strategy that justifies and legitimises democracy: developing informed citizens, capable of reflecting through the critical interpretation of relevant political information; the detailed description of “the ways” of fulfilling ideological principles, or achieving the objectives of the political programme in question, and not responding viscerally and emotionally to inflammatory slogans.

We have gone from emphasising the fluid nature of reality to the radical subversion of the meaning and sense of our way of speaking about the world. The lies and insults transmitted in tweets by public officials and institutions leave us in the firing line and at the edge of the abyss. Only conscious committed citizen action can reconstruct and improve the bases for a system of global coexistence that, despite its fragility and imperfection, has in the past adequately proved to be the best we have been capable of creating.

Castelló, December 2018