

III FORO INTERNACIONAL SABERES PARA EL CAMBIO

Manifiesto de la UNIA

I DO NOT HAVE TIME FOR SUSTAINABILITY

One of the phenomena arising from the modern era is a change in the conception of time. There is a move from the cyclical time set by the rhythms of nature to an abstract and linear time driven by mechanical clocks within the framework of a mechanistic paradigm. Added to this is the change in spatial scale brought about by transport and new urbanism, and instant communication impelled by new technologies. Distances have been reduced. Time has been compressed.

Are our times driven by the market or by the rhythms of nature?

Today it is clear that our models of uncontrolled growth have led to an imbalance between nature and society, creating the erroneous perception that it is possible to maintain our ways of life whilst there is a decoupling between human beings and the biosphere, a situation that is clearly unsustainable. Although it is obvious, it is essential to remember that human beings are part of nature and their wellbeing depends on nature's flow of services. The failure to take into account nature's limits and conditioning factors has led to the collapse of some civilisations that came before ours.

Now, there are two conflicting cultures of time: the instantaneous, accelerated culture, and the culture of respecting nature's time, including our own nature as living beings. It is evident that the former is a model for unsustainable growth on a global scale, which has brought us to a crisis of civilisation. The rhythms of nature clash with the short-term times of economics and politics.

Modernity, with its powerful technology, has allowed us to measure time, calculate it, observe it and enforce it. But are we its masters or its subjects?

The ecological and social impacts of economic globalisation are having negative effects. Although the principles of ecological

economics and alternative ways of life have the potential to transform things, they are silenced by most centres of political and economic power. Paradoxically, the life expectancy for future generations in industrialised societies is less than that of current generations. At the same time, life expectancy in the poorest countries is seen to have fallen considerably in the last decade.

Do we have enough time to keep getting it wrong?

The challenge for our societies is to overcome the current unsustainability in our resource management systems. Sustainable development does not only refer to the ways we use water, energy, and food, etc.; rather it means using time as a key axis around which we reorient our social and personal lives. It is a move towards simplicity, voluntary self-control, deceleration and fairness.

Taking into consideration the ways of living the different times of our existence as one of the indicators of sustainability allows us to deal with the bonds between human beings and nature in all their complexity, integrating their different aspects (social, ecological, personal, etc.).

Daily caring, maintenance and social relation activities, among others, take place in a cyclical time which produces and sustains the future. In our culture they are considered secondary, but without these activities there would be no life. To a large extent cyclical time is shared and versatile: being and doing are part of it. The time invested in caring not only involves the creation of a product; the fundamental value is in the process itself.

However, in modernity, time is viewed as a scarce possession for individual and exclusive use. Yet, it is our erroneous ways of managing time – such as multitasking and simultaneity – that make it scarce. Time expands when it is shared. A good example of this is the Time Banks experience, where skills and services are freely exchanged and value is measured in hours, not by money or the type of activity.

In our haste to obtain easily marketable products, we have come to believe that anything can be produced, without considering the duration and cost of the processes and the negative effects on the environment and on humankind. Each day we dedicate the best quality time of our lives to productivity, not to personal and social development. Consumerism forces us to work more. Years go by and we are not masters of our own time.

Intensive agriculture that does not follow the rhythm of nature turns out to be unsustainable in the medium term. In this sense, the Slow

Food movement represents an alternative based on traditional agricultural knowledge, where local production and biodiversity require and support appropriate times for production and consumption.

Children are losing their free time at the same time that adults are striving to regain their own. Childhood is perceived or is approached as a period when time must be planned and used practically in order to make the most of it. Children are introduced to the dynamics of doing at an early age; they lose their ability to play and to have their own experiences of adventure, discovery and taking risks with their peers. A shortage of time in childhood has lifelong consequences.

The fragile situation in which our children find themselves is comparable with the situation of the most vulnerable members of our society (disabled people, the elderly, the poor, immigrants, etc.) and with difficult stages in the life cycle of any human being.

Can we manage to live as though time mattered to us? It is a question of values, but also of resistance and opposition to unsustainable ways of life.

We are on the threshold of change. If we do not assert our opposition, the change will be traumatic at the time of crisis. We need a new paradigm which incorporates a new culture of time. Our responsibility is both individual and collective: by changing our way of managing time, we choose our priorities and apply values. Our ability to choose makes a difference and it can impact on the market and on political decisions. This ability stems from knowledge, and for that we need time. The personal is political.

We can see our giving up as something positive, something that enriches us. What we lose in material goods, we gain in time. It is not a backwards step to look after the family and social relations that we are losing because of our hurry. We can live better with less: give time as a gift, dedicate time to play, to the arts, to food, to friendship, to nature, to ourselves, to others... Time for sustainability.

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