

Presentation of the Intercoll Working Group: Common Goods

Wednesday 15 February 2017, by [SULTAN Frédéric](#) (Date first published: 2 January 2017).

PRESENTATION OF THE WORKING GROUP COMMON GOODS

“We speak of ‘common good’ every time a community of people is driven by the same desire to take charge of a resource that they’ve inherited or created and this organises them in a democratic, convivial and responsible manner to ensure access, use and longevity in the general interest and concern of ‘good living’ together and for generations to come.” [1] The ‘commons’ chart a new horizon that rebuilds these social practices to emerge into a collective story based on the values of cooperation and sharing for the emancipation of the people, the solidarity and respect for our environment.

Today, most of the population is born into a world dominated by an ultra-liberal ideology. This ideology, because it rejects the value of collective action and solidarity, is destructive to the social link, but also to that of the people and our environment, the Earth. Global businesses dominate the USA and control the territories.

Civil society reacts to the difficulty in at least two ways: by protesting and extreme voting, but also by inventing and reinventing forms of solidarity and reciprocity, of property and collective governance that beat at the rate of technological, demographic, ecological and world transformations. Old alternatives resist and new ones are invented. It’s no longer even necessary to list emblematic example or underline the diversity of the concerned domains. Farmers, city dwellers, young and old people, women or men, workers or volunteers actively work for their community on a daily basis. Of course, lots of these people don’t use this term to describe their actions, but recognise their connection to this notion and easily understand what they gain from it to be able to express themselves at certain times.

However, we must consider the fact that the accumulation or juxtaposition of local initiatives doesn’t have the same transforming effect on society capable of replacing the ultraliberal ideology and narrative that accompanies it.

The world economy is driven by forces that are fed by everyday people. A significant part of the economy is founded on the production of wealth by people networking, whose subordination relationship with the capitalist firm becomes more distant. But a very big part of this wealth, if not the main thing, is captured by multinationals in the digital realm, who reproduced and emphasised the shortcomings of capitalist firms in terms of exploitation of people, their data, their bodies, their culture, of the monopolisation of wealth and domination of public institutions and states.

The ESS is involved in this economy of division. Of the course of its history, it has constructed solutions to the needs of society based on the solidarity and emancipation of employees. It is used to thinking and acting collectively and inviolably (organisation without individual ownership), part of the added value is put in indivisible reserves, distribution of zero or limited profit, reinvestment in social projects, double quality of participants (employee and corporate, or corporate and client etc at the same time). But it couldn’t or didn’t know how to empower the capitalist economy or of course

print a brand that transforms it dramatically. The ESS cuts the risk of being blown away by the power of financialised and net-archival capitalism.

The activists for an economy based on common interests also have allies with local communities, interested by a renewed ability of citizens to work with them, to bring initiatives that stimulate the local economy and sometimes also strengthen their civil and democratic capabilities. The meaningful experiences spread from the 'sharing city' (Seoul) to the 'ville en commun' (Barcelona) via the 'co-city' (Bologna). But then again, the difficulties aren't impossible to overcome. The power relationship between capitalist businesses and citizens is unbalanced most of the time.

Therefore, continuing the question of how to move the focus of the economy away from a niche logic, or compensation for the misdemeanours of capitalism, a field permanently eroded by the social merchandising of the environment and the complex public goods: health, education, training/qualification, accommodation, digital technology, infrastructures...

This will not be able to happen without investment in political fields and public authority. It must be noted that the ways of representative democracy and bureaucratic institutions who dominate the functioning of the state, harm the movement. The practices inferred by the designation/representation system of the elected contradict the project based on the forms of subsidiarity and distribution more level than the power. They waste their energy on activists. Trying to slide progressively into laws, amendments, propositions remains a huge test of patience which happens at such a slow rate, reducing the risk of being proved inadequate by the right and extreme right. How do you show an interest in politics, i.e. act on behalf of institutions to change policies, with an individual attitude in compliance with the collaborative project of the common man?

An answer to this question is to make the movement of municipalities the crucible of political ideas that result in solidarity work between people and the supporting groups of defence groups and municipality development. It isn't about so many spreading the word amongst the elected, to convince them of the worth of our propositions, that give value to collective action and its methods as a way of transforming politics and examining and reforming institutions on different scales.

Such a process is easier to carry out on a local scale which offers a greater closeness to the elected and civil servants, but it's not possible to miss out on the larger areas of the state and supra-national that influence the local areas. It also by teaching in the municipalities that not only allow the sharing of practices, also legitimises a way of life in line with the values of municipalities. With the municipalities, the worldwide social movement is thus positioned ahead of this challenge to:

- understand this phenomenon and improve the individual experiences that enhance it together.
- fix the practices in a shared account that can be substituted for an ultraliberal ideology.
- contribute to its structuring to renew political practice and forms of democracy.

Frédéric Sultan

P.S.

* <https://www.facebook.com/AlHusseini.Waleed/posts/1556913147669919>

Footnotes

[1] Definition proposed by Alain Ambrosi in “Le bien commun est sur toutes les lèvres”
http://wiki.remixthecommons.org/index.php/Le_bien_commun_est_sur_toutes_les_l%C3%A8vres