

ISSUES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION BY THE CREATION OF A PROTOTYPE TEMPORARY CHILDREN'S COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

Scientists believe they can drive the discussion on the environmental impacts of human activity by encapsulating them with models and equations. But societies, economies and their environmental aspects are extremely complicated and unpredictable systems. It is practically impossible to calculate their evolution with deterministic models as we ignore many other stochastic parameters which are included in the capitalist economy and make the environmental science an "equivocation of a sophism".

Nevertheless we feel that the blind and catastrophic way of the devouring capitalist growth leads our natural habitat to a certain future disaster. Moreover, we know that in order to prevent environmental disasters we have to find ways to avoid their genesis. This can be approached by not choosing a way of living based in greed and overconsumption in the developed world; the first area to focus for the achievement of this goal would be the general education of people in young ages.

This paper presents the basic ideas for the creation of a temporary prototype children community and the education of its young occupants in sustainable living. The main elements of the project are: man, nature and civilization.

The presented pillars of this activity are: the model of coexistence of children, their main activity for the use of earth architecture to create their world, a disciplined life in the area and the ecological footprint of the activity.

This activity can also be seen as a social experiment of a possible way to approach sustainable development with economic and ecological issues in a larger scale.

Keywords: society, over consumption, autonomy, education, earth building, economy, ecology

1. INTRODUCTION

Many scientists still believe that the evolution of development/consumption as we determinate it today in the globalized economy market and the obvious social/environmental problems that appear can be identified/analyzed and faced by means of technological solutions/applications. They are confident that the future survival of mankind on Earth is possible within a logical contradiction: To continue the implementation of the current devouring model of capitalist development and yet lie within the constraints of a stable and sustainable equilibrium, "blushingly" avoiding though to determine and quantify the model's limits.

Others argue (Xanthopoulos 2010) that the historical truth and brutal reality of everyday life reveal a decadent image and pessimistic perspective: "The political and economic life of our societies organized pulsating over time in the chaotic and frightening pattern of aggressive individual and collective aspirations, leaded by an explosive combination of greed and arrogance that unfortunately characterizes the human species, at least since the time when agricultural and livestock goods began to be produced in surplus."

"The forces of the global empire of today's capitalist market are continuously strengthened and navigate or subordinate parts of the political power at an increasing frequency. Using the scientific advances in telecommunications and information technologies, the "Market" brazenly promotes a totalitarian overconsumption, clogging the mind with rubbish, and stimulating the humble parts of the ego, distorting reality and weakening our resistance."

"Most of the financially backed people participate in the consumption of damaging for the environment and for our mental health useless fashion products, trivialize our free time into the existential vacuum, the mental-stupid-faction and the immersion in convenient but meaningless to paralysis, daily habits."

"We try to avoid viewing that around us is the constantly increasing number of "human waste," of our fellow citizens who are marginalized because they are excluded from the socioeconomic environment, but also "human remains," of those who are marginalized because the production system has burned them and has thrown them out as useless matter without ensuring for them decent living conditions.

To stop this descent a first obvious goal is to educate citizens of the future to build and live with an alternative model of development. This paper proposes an educational model activity, which, if proven successful, will distract citizens of the future of the brake calliper and insatiable consumption Market.

Therefore, a social experiment is proposed, in order to create a system outside the community of the market, by educating children during a summer camp cycle. The aim is to build a different life Model, free from the stereotypes of the one-dimensional world of the market, capable of proving that it can select and implement in practice a balanced quality of life, covering independent and responsible individual and collective needs.

2. PREPARATING THE ACTION

2.1. The children's needs

Modern man is addicted to many and varied needs. From the perspective of environmental management, their coverage already causes major environmental problems, since it leads (in general) in the "overconsumption" of non-renewable natural resources, not only producing difficult to manage wastes, but also introducing us to the use of fancy and useless products.

Therefore, the challenge is to define the essential needs of young people. In this regard, Prof. Th.P. Tassios, observes that these are:

1. To build their own conscience, and
2. To survive

"For the same reasons, therefore, we offer to children and adolescents the two constituents of education, i.e., Cultivation and Training, for the Consciousness and the Stomach, respectively. It should be noted that they must meet both the needs of "being" at the same time (Self-assurance and self-preservation)." It is also defined that culture refers both to the ability of evaluation and to the artistic sensibility, while education refers to the knowledge and to the skills (Tassios 1993, Tassios 2007).

2.2. The preparation of the children

To achieve the application of these observations we have to train new people to have universal learning «mathesis universalis», that is, the foundations of the Cartesian system for durable approach towards the problems and their solving.

The holistic and rational approach (first level) is the best individual defence against the prevailing principles of «homo economicus» (Human of the Market) and the lifestyle offered by the market's empire.

For the preparation of the children's action, a series of lectures was initially implemented for "... the development of people, instead of the development of useless products... a true democracy that would involve everybody in a decision-making system, another organization of the education, so that citizens are shaped to be able to lead and to obey, according to an Aristotle's quote" (Kastoriadis 2000).

The lectures demanded an investigation, artistic editing and processing of figures and speech, so that proposals are formatted in plain and intelligible words without any deduction of the meaning.

2.3. The aim of the lectures

The aim of the lectures is to mature the idea of participation to the "village of the world" a laboratory where, with the assumption that children will go to live in a specific place and time, they will be asked to determine: the conditions of their coexistence, land use, its infrastructure, waste management activity and the ecological and economic footprints of their activities, that is to gain global environmental consciousness (Oram 1998).

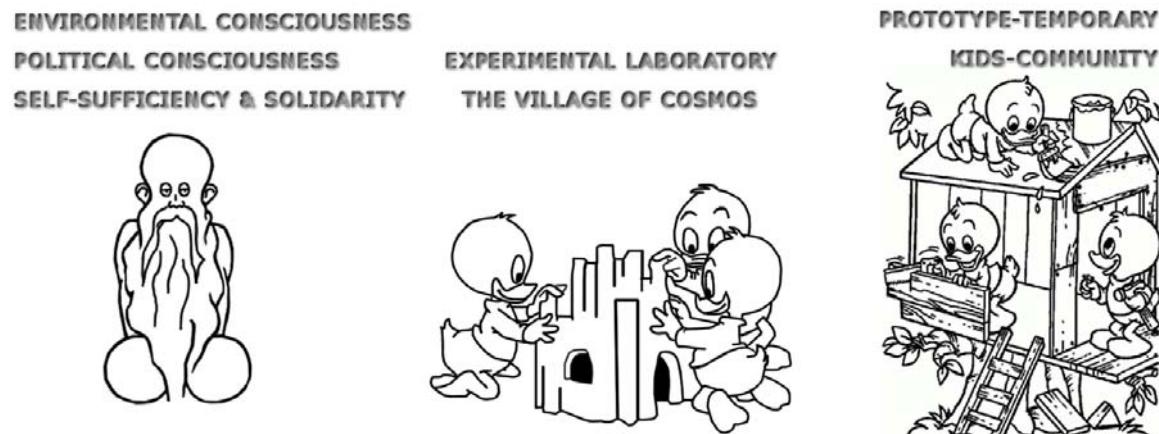


Figure 1: The aim of the lectures

The educational systems today give various stimuli, but do not propose a better and safer world. Probably maintaining guilt syndromes such as that a better world will be

discovered by each man/woman with his/her own evaluative capacity, the educational systems do not include in their programs any universal virtues (such as democracy, solidarity and self-sufficiency) which could lead to this better world (Bonnett 1999, Sauvé 1996).

Political consciousness: It has been shown that democratic deficits have delivered the world to the rule of the world Market and to the environmental problems it creates (Xanthopoulos 2010). Therefore, there is a need for the man to, somehow, learn since childhood to decide on the management of the world and to manage any positive and negative results of his decisions.

Democracy is a form of cosmic truth through a complex of authorities and decisions which have the agreement of the majority. The citizens must know how to get out of their (finite) selfishness and serve better themselves and the common good. Only if they understand the forms of power as something that concerns them (without necessarily owning it) can they understand its operation and "form" according to the (democratic) community.

Despite all the difficulties of the implementation of the proposed Model, it is crucial that the social and democratic characteristics are cultivated so that children **can manage the challenges of their community.**

But responsibility can be violating and is not always a suitable "teacher." It is difficult to find discipline in childhood. We cannot ask children who are naughty by nature to become the government, but we can ask them to put the rules that will maintain their choices.

So the challenge is how to combine a system of adult people with participating children, where the force is not (necessarily) deferred to the children but children can use their abilities to think on it.

Solidarity: The collectivity and the demonstration of the values that protect the interests of the group and the solidarity of community members is a prerequisite for the practical survival of the group.

Then the challenge is to cultivate the highest virtue of city-states of classical Greece: "... the collective, unified struggle and the sacrifice of the individual for the society of the city, above and beyond ideological dogmatism or superstition."

Self-sufficiency: Self-sufficiency in a social formation and community has nothing to do with an integrated closed-circuit production scheme. In seeks prove that this experimental system has the **capacity to produce**, based on its needs.

Understanding the facts of the current economic and political reality and seeing the devastating effects of deep and universal prevalence of greed, arrogance and cynical self-centredness, it is deduced that there should be practical arguments for a new clear socioeconomic proposal which will respond with realism in everyday problems because this is the only way to sever the ties with the dependence from the new "values" and especially the practices of the world Market.

When it comes to the ethical part of the means and priorities of the production process, a major intervention of ideological authority occurs at the beginning of the sixth century. St. Benedict claims both that manual work as a Christianity value is equalised to praying, and that the rule of economic self-sufficiency, i.e. the production of all basic living commodities, should be followed in ecclesiastical or monastic estates. This led to

communities resilient in times of crisis of the cosmic powers, decentralized and self-productive that fitted well in the pre-Roman history of Europe.

Today Bauman urges us to diverge from the consumer society of today's late and liquid modernity that creates human waste, the society of "liquid fear" that feeds on insecurity, abandonment of the have-nots by the welfare state, the nightmare of atomic economic destruction and subsequently breeds the greed of the market and finds it necessary to return to the first modernity of the society of products. (Bauman 2007, Bauman 2008)

3. THE FIELD OF ACTION

3.1. How to activate children today

In general, the holiday activities of children away from their urban daily life, take place in constructs like "children's cities" where there are all the related facilities and operations of a small town while the child lives there subjugated by adult people. This way, a child from a city goes to another city-type of similar structure and adapts to the ensued actions.

In many cases, attempts for an alternative management of the free time of children are made (with outdoor activities, etc.) but even though the complex approach (environmental, political, aesthetic, etc.) required for the holistic environmental education of children (Palmer 1998, Anastasiadis *et al.*, 1998, Flogaiti *et al.*, 2007) has been determined, the Model of social challenge that will involve this social experiment has not been developed yet.

3.2. Initial conditions of the prototype children's community

The area of the action is specified as a field that will be prepared so that it can cover (basically) the nutritional needs of children with appropriate (agricultural) actions and the needs for their accommodation with suitable infrastructure to start implementing earth architecture by building on their own (Figure 2). In this field there will be a repository of materials and drinking water.

The inventory of stocked materials is as follows:

- appropriate timber and construction materials
- farm tools
- cooking utensils, generator, cooking appliances with gas and some fuel
- bikes, selected games and artistic tools (brushes, paper and clay), etc.

In the field there will be:

- space for the cultivation of agricultural products
- pets, farm animals, bees etc.

The field is designed to be -as much as possible- a closed and self-managed system because each person develops an environmental conscience when confronted with the waste he or she produces.



Figure 2: Initial conditions of the sustainable children's community

3.3. Activities in the prototype children's community

The activities of the children will be defined by the concept that children should be able to live **self-sufficiently** in a place where they have established and are managing themselves. In order to do so they should be able to function in a coordinated way. **As a result, their collective work will produce all the output for their survival.**

All the adversities and the difficulties that may arise should be made clear to the children that partake in these activities from the very beginning. **Their task would be to evaluate the circumstances and make their conscious choices in relation to their participation in this project.** As this process moves on, the children will decide the context of their activities in the “Village of World,” i.e. the workshop of the last cycle of lectures (see also section 3.3) (Pilon 2011).

Architectural Activities: The children will be responsible for building the essential infrastructure of their habitat. Therefore, they should create their accommodation premises, communal area and facilities as well as a basic infrastructure for their small community (Sargentis *et al.*, 2010).

Agricultural/livestock activities: The children will have to live with a limited provision of resources and be as much self-sufficient as they can. Thus, they should be able to look for their food and know how to naturally renew it for future purposes (sustainability).

Environmental management: The objective of this activity is to distinguish the so-called “entries” and “exits” of the community system. To fulfil this criterion, waste will be stored in a close distance to where children live, as a reminder for them to take appropriate waste management decisions. Furthermore, energy consumption, which will come from various resources, will be determined from the very beginning of the project. Finally, any other needs that may arise and can only be satisfied by the wider market will be assessed and evaluated by all children to investigate their characteristics.

Games and Entertainment: The games will be utterly different and distinct from all the games of an urban lifestyle. In parallel, the children will be engaged in various cultural activities and entertainment.

3.4. Supervision of the action

The importance of remaining in discipline, as an integral element of public lifestyle and normal social living, was noticed since the ancient times. In fact, Aristotle taught about the importance of laws and that “the existence of designated authorities which will supervise and implement the law, are essential for the effective administration and sound management of citizens.”

Children will often perceive self-organising as a form of disorder, the community model of this project will be formulated by the children themselves (as it is defined in the “village of the world”, see section 3.3) and it will be supervised by adults, also known as the “observers”. The “observers” will be part of a well-trained team, which will co-exist and follow the children as a member of their community and make sure that the health and safety rules are applied.

Therefore, in this project, the adult must be “diminished” and the young must “grow”. (Rickinson 2001).

4. CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this social experiment is to achieve the organisation, the order and the perception of community of the children through the creation of a collective vision (production of the collective work of survival), which is generally conflicting with the more established “values of the individual”. This will definitely depend on the preparation of the children, on their experiences, on how well they will perceive the new reality that they will face and on whether they will be able to coexist with different individuals in a realistic, therefore harsh natural environment. Under these circumstances they will be required to demonstrate emotional maturity, to develop policy perception, to exercise manual work and other features.

Nevertheless, it is a fact that the consuming society of the Market has “trained” children in a profound and universal prevalence of greed, arrogance, egoism and cynicism. This project will attempt to function under a completely different mindset, where is very difficult to predict in what manner and to what extent it will affect the children. This project however may trigger thoughts (maybe a new beginning) for them to consider and discuss.

So, waiting the awakening of the critical mass that will spawn the "event of the history" for the reversal of this suicidal path from the dead-end under the domination of the Empire of the Market, it is hoped that the proposed project, which has already been given positive samples during the first phase of preparation at the pilot training of a group of children, may awake old memories (today forgotten) of ecologically balanced models and sustainable societies. In any case, the application of the project will lead to a self-improvement function in order to discharge from practical and theoretical errors and utopias, a necessary step to improve the application of its foundation.

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