

Article

Understanding Progress: A Heterodox Approach

David Barkin * and Blanca Lemus

Department of Economics, Metropolitan Autonomous University–Xochimilco, Calzada del Hueso 1100, Villa Quietud, Coyoacan, Mexico City, DF 04960, Mexico

* Author to whom correspondence should be addressed; E-Mail: barkin@correo.xoc.uam.mx; Tel.: +52-555-483-7100.

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Abstract: This paper examines the possibility of understanding and measuring well-being as a result of “progress” on the basis of today’s dominant epistemological framework. Market criteria distort social values by allowing purchasing power to define priorities, likening luxury goods to basic needs; in the process they reinforce patterns of discrimination against disadvantaged social groups and women, introducing fatal distortions into the analysis. Similarly, because there are no appropriate mechanisms to price natural resources adequately, the market overlooks the consequences of the abuse of natural resources, degrading the quality of life, individually and collectively, or—in the framework of Latin American indigenous groups—foreclosing the possibility of “living well”. We critique the common vision of the official development discourse that places its faith on technological innovations to resolve these problems. The analysis points to the need for new models of social and environmental governance to promote progress, approaches like those suggested in the paper that are inconsistent with public policies currently in place. At present, the social groups forging institutions to assure their own well-being and ecological balance are involved in local processes, often in opposition to the proposals of the political leaders in their countries.

Keywords: progress; sustainability; epistemology; alternatives; autonomy

1. Introduction

The dominant epistemological framework in the social sciences, shaped by the neoclassical paradigm of economics, responds to the question “What is progress?” with statistical indicators based on market valuations of advances in material well-being, modified by other quantitative measures of the quality of life [1–5]. The definitions of the concept are conditioned by the political contexts in which we operate, or, in some cases, by the proposals of new strategies that we would like to use in order to (re)build the world. In this short essay we focus on the latter: those proposals that can guide us in moving forward to overcome the growing socio-political, economical, and environmental obstacles that prevent current societies from advancing towards good living or “*buen vivir*”. We focus on the underlying factors that define the way in which we can advance towards an improvement in the quality of life.

To begin, it is useful to present an alternative proposal for measuring well-being, in contrast to the measures of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or its components. We refer to the 1972 proposal by King Jigme Singye Wangchuck of Bhutan, to implement an alternative system of assessing a country’s well-being, according to an index of “Gross Domestic Happiness” (GDH). This concept proposes to measure the richness of nations by evaluating the real well-being of their citizens, their happiness, measuring smiles instead of money or material possessions, as does the GDP [6,7]. The initial idea was to assure that “prosperity is shared by the whole of society and well-balanced concerning cultural traditions conservation, environmental protection with a government that responds to the needs of those being governed”; rather than proposing an ideal system, a “utopia”, the proposal aims pragmatically for success: “an economic system that maximizes the capability each person has to “be” and “do” what they value and have reason to value...” [8].

Although personal income in Bhutan is one of the lowest in the world, life expectancy increased around 20 years from 1984 to 1998, from 43 to 66 years; the literacy rate jumped from 10% in 1982 to 60% today, and the infant mortality rate fell from 163 deaths per one thousand inhabitants to 43 [8]. This change in approach to development has been reinforced by the country’s strong commitment to environment conservation. Bhutan’s legislation defines 70% of the country as “green areas”, including 60% as forests. Although this small country faces high unemployment, the perception of its inhabitants concerning their quality of life as “good” has been significant enough for the indicator GDH to be considered seriously in many other countries.

Since Bhutan’s initiative became well-known, interest in the problem of well-being has become quite widespread. The “economics of happiness” has become a burgeoning field [9] and the incorporation of well-being as a complementary policy goal, to complement orthodox economic management instruments, has become significant. Evidence of this is the “blue ribbon” Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, convened by President Sarkozy and headed by Stiglitz, Sen, and Fitoussi, to offer suggestions for alternative ways of “advancing the progress of society, as well as for assessing and influencing the functioning of economic markets”, considering that there is a “marked distance between standard measures of important socio economic variables (...) and widespread perceptions” [10] (Executive Summary). In efforts to measure the phenomenon, the World Values Survey reports that Latin American countries, for example, recorded much more subjective “happiness” than their economic levels would suggest [11]. Likewise, a

multinational team organized by the Inter-American Development Bank, using a different methodology, concluded that individual perceptions and values in a variety of countries of the region reveal huge discrepancies with statistics concerning living conditions or the opinions of government agencies [12]. In fact: “The evidence suggests that once people have their basic material needs adequately met, the correlation between income and happiness quickly begins to fade” [13]. This is because measuring happiness includes subjective aspects, not material ones, such as the influence of social relations, autonomy, and self-determination, among others; for the poor, the problem exists because increases in national output often do not generate corresponding changes in well-being. Of course, sustainability indicators are an integral part of these measurement efforts.

This effort to measure happiness has become so ‘mainstream’ that even in Mexico, a bulwark of orthodox economic management and measurement, the National Statistics Institute (INEGI) recently (November 2012) published the results of a sample survey used to construct such an index. Supporting the results mentioned above, the organization reported that in spite of the fact that more than one-half of Mexico’s families have incomes below the poverty line, 84% of families said that they were satisfied (or moderately satisfied) with their lives. Using a methodology adapted from the “European Social Survey”, the Mexican study clearly reflects the profound contradictions that the population faces: on the individual level, the results indicate a high level of satisfaction with their family life (8.6 on a scale of 10), autonomy (8.5), and health (8.2), while considerably less satisfaction with the economic situation (6.5), the country (6.8), and the education system (6.9) [14]. As we will show in this paper, this distinction between the individual and the collective is a striking feature of these data; they reflect the inability of the market to attend to peoples’ needs and the public sector’s inability or unwillingness to provide the basic social services required by the population. As a result, the decision by many communities to implement alternative collective strategies for assuring their welfare is an interesting social development that points to the existence of significant social capacities, once they decide to build their own institutions.

2. The Concept of Progress

This is not the place to review the endless discussions about poverty indicators or their meaning. In many other circles, scholars are trying to understand what makes people happy and the determinants of a good quality of life. The academic community seems incapable of defining the concept, because of the difficulty of recognizing that it is the very structure of society and the operation of the global market that creates inequality and limits the possibilities for generating opportunities that would allow people to progress [15]. Furthermore, current definitions dominant in the social sciences do not contribute to an appropriate understanding of either poverty or progress [16].

In this situation, then, new definitions of progress are more urgent than ever. An essential question is: What elements would offer an advance in our understanding? An answer would include some of the GDH’s index components, such as education, health and medical services. This would require a change in emphasis of social policy; as in Bhutan, where life expectancy increased as a result of the new priorities in public policy. Similar results were achieved in Cuba, demonstrating the lack of correspondence between social benefits and economic growth [17]. It is now clear that our efforts to advance towards a better quality of life cannot be limited to the instruments of the social policy tied to

the market economy; in spite of improvements in education and medical care, it is evident that throughout the world we are suffering environmental degradation and a deterioration in our quality of life, resulting from the weakening of the social and solidarity networks (with a direct increase in personal and social violence) [15]. The inability to guarantee a basic package of social services and economic assistance, accompanied by a shocking deterioration of environmental quality, have extreme effects on the quality of life everywhere, exacerbated by the prospects of a further deterioration occasioned by the intensification of the process of climate change [18]. This is a multi-factorial theme and, for this reason, questioning the essential meaning of progress requires a multidisciplinary vision and revaluing some of the fundamental elements that we normally associate with the “traditional” society.

Generally speaking, when problems such as well-being or progress are being discussed, we must refer to the development policies that create the social dynamics that prevent improvements in the quality of life. These policies are promoting a form of development that distances society from its stated objectives. It is evident that the advances offered by orthodox economists do not offer appropriate solutions. This is clear once we examine the process of development; Gilbert Rist describes this process with an enlightening definition of development in his classic work:

“Development” consists of a set of practices, sometimes appearing to conflict with one another, which require—for the reproduction of society—the general transformation and destruction of the natural environment and of social relations. Its aim is to increase the production of commodities (goods and services) geared, by way of exchange, to effective demand. [19] (p.13).

It is not necessary to analyze this definition in greater detail -as Rist did in his classic analysis of the concept- to realize how inappropriate the present development policies to promote a better quality of life are. Rist offers an interesting explanation, starting by pointing out that although cooperation and international help are necessary and often valuable, they “have little impact, compared with the many measures imposed by the implacable logic of the economic system” [19] (p. xi). He identifies three suppositions underlying development practice that impede progress: social evolutionism, individualism and economism [19] (p. 9).

3. Alternative Paradigms

In this section we introduce two paradigms offering alternatives to “development”; they are philosophical and analytical approaches that are stimulating the intellectual work that must accompany the search for new ways of understanding. Even though these notes are limited to the academic literature, important social movements are underway, motivating and triggering scholarly work in spite of the resolute resistance from official institutions to any exploration of alternative models. These two important alternatives are: *Degrowth* and “*Good Living*”, as it is called by the Andean groups where the term originated (in *Quechua* and *Aymara*). Other areas of academic work related to these two paradigms include ecological economics and social and solidarity economics. While they are not the only alternatives being proposed and implemented by communities around the world, and their practice reveals the substantial hurdles to be overcome as well as the difficulties in implementation, the

description offers some insights into the steps that might be taken to forge different kinds of societies capable of generating a better quality of life along with social and environmental justice [20–22].

3.1. Degrowth

The “new” field of “degrowth” emerged from the critical diagnosis of the current situation:

“An international elite and a “global middle-class” are causing havoc to the environment through conspicuous consumption and the excessive appropriation of human and natural resources. Their consumption patterns lead to further environmental and social damage when imitated by the rest of society in a vicious circle of status—seeking through the accumulation of material possessions” [23].

During the international meeting where this statement emerged, its proponents offered a critique that extended to transnational corporations, financial institutions and governments, insisting on the profound structural causes of the crisis. Likewise, they indicated that the measures to confront crises by promoting economic growth will only deepen social inequalities and accelerate environmental degradation, creating a social disaster and generating economic and environmental debts for future generations, especially for those who live in poverty.

Those attending the Conference declared that the main challenge is how to conduct the necessary transition (as they see it) to economic degrowth, transforming production to attend a smaller consumption package requiring fewer resources and less energy with beneficial effects for the environment, in a process that would be implemented in an equitable manner at national and global levels. The proposals offered by participants in this school of thought embraced all the dimensions of productive and social activity. A significant portion of the persons proposing these alternatives are optimistic with regard to the possibility of implementing changes in life styles and community organization to reduce the ecological footprint of the different social groups. In their critique of the current model there is a clear tendency to protect and strengthen individuals’ rights and to reduce the scale of social and productive activity, emphasizing the local over the global. At this Second Conference on Economic Degrowth, however, there was a persistent effort to focus on the design of reforms that could be discussed and implemented within the current organizational framework of rich societies from which most of the participants came; the few efforts to question the possibility of implementing these changes in the current system of capitalist organization came to naught [24].

Although this school of thought takes its intellectual impulses from the field of ecological economics, it does not propose mechanisms to challenge the fundamental contradictions arising from current organization of society and its economy. On the basis of their ambiguous commitment to reduce the scale of production and consumption of the wealthy in the “advanced” countries, their proposals are committed to the possibility of a soft transition towards a “de-scaling”, towards a “stationary state” economy. This school of thought proposes the possibility of reorganizing “rich” societies to release resources that would create political and productive spaces so that they could redeploy their energy to their own social fulfillment and guarantee appropriate living standards for their people. Many of their proposals are technological, offering new physical and productive solutions that ignore institutional and corporate structures that would prevent these changes, while also

completely ignoring their dependency on the countries from the “south” for even a more austere lifestyle.

3.2. Good Living (*Sumak Kawsay*)

The concept of “Good Living” is a translation or adaptation of the expression in *Quechua* and *Aymara*, the languages of descendants of the Incan peoples in Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia. It is defined in the preface of the new Ecuadorian Constitution as “a new form of citizens’ coexistence, in harmony and diversity with nature, in order to achieve a good life, or *sumak kawsay*”. Elevated to constitutional principle in Bolivia and Ecuador [25,26], *sumak kawsay* recognizes the “Rights of Nature” and a new complex citizenry, “that accepts social as well as environmental commitments. This new citizenry is plural, because it depends on its multiple histories and environments, and accepts criteria of ecological justice that goes far beyond the traditional dominant vision of justice” [27,28].

As expressed by Alberto Acosta, one of its important protagonists in the Ecuadorian scene, the basic value of an economy, in a Good Living regime, is solidarity. A different economy is being forged, a social and solidarity economy, different from economies characterized by a supposedly free competition, that encourage economic cannibalism among human beings and feed financial speculation. In accordance with this constitutional definition, they hope to build relations of production, exchange and cooperation that promote efficiency and quality, founded on solidarity. We talk about systematic productivity and competitiveness, based on collective advances rather than individuals who are arbitrarily added together as is often the practice at present [29].

In contrast to current policies for facing the problem of the existence of growing segments of society that require charity or official transfer payments for their survival, this approach towards a social and solidarity economy offers a stark contrast with the proletarian organization of community life. Its approach far exceeds the reforms proposed by many participants in the debates based on economic visions which do not consider abandoning individual or corporate accumulation at the expense of collective well-being. *Sumak kawsay* requires reorganizing social life and economic production, transforming the essential function of the market, shaping it so it can serve society rather than determining social relations, as it does at present [30].

Sumak kawsay proposes a holistic integration of economic, social, and political processes to support a different organization of society and its relationship with nature. The new social dynamic is expected to generate equality and freedom, social justice (productive and distributive) as well as environmental justice; it is evident that dramatic actions are required to reverse the currently existing inequalities [29]. If this principle were applied, it would constitute a solid base for reorienting the productive apparatus and political and cultural relations, reversing inequalities that violate rights and prevent the possibilities of an effective democracy. Progress, in this sense, would be defined in terms of a social and productive organization that generates equality directly, that produces social justice through direct democracy.

4. Constructing a Different Way of Life

The principles examined in this text are integral part of a long tradition of social movements challenging the elites that shape institutions preventing the fruits of progress to improve the lot of the

majority. They take us back to the dawn of the French Revolution in the Paris Commune, to Richard Owens' commune and to the intentional communities of Protestant and Jewish sects, as well as to the workers' struggles in the 19th century. Most of them were suppressed in one way or another with tragic massacres committed by forces at the service of a particular model of the concept of "progress" that has betrayed humanity and the planet.

Today, individuals who are looking for another model of progress realize that Schumacher's "*Small is Beautiful*" still has a lot to teach us [31]. We are also obliged to consider that Marshall Sahlins' affirmation might now be truer than ever: hunter-gathers offer a model of a really affluent society.

The world's most primitive people have few possessions, but they are not poor. Poverty is not a certain small amount of goods, nor is it just a relation between means and ends; above all, it is a relation between people. Poverty is a social status. As such it is the invention of civilization. It has grown with civilization, at once as an invidious distinction between classes and more importantly as a tributary relation that can render agrarian peasants more susceptible to natural catastrophes than any winter camp of Alaskan Eskimo... Sahlins concludes by asking, rhetorically: "Might we not ask, as do some scholars and critics: Did medieval peasants work less than today's industrial working-class?" [32].

Although these reflections can provide some indicators, they certainly raise many questions. In order to document the fruitless dynamic of current efforts of programs such as the Millennium Development Goals, or the destructive effects of society's current organization, we can turn to measurements of life expectancy, educational levels, morbidity and mortality rates by age, social or gender groups. Similarly, we can include diverse indicators of economic and geographic inequality, and of indices of access to social and cultural infrastructures. We can add diverse efforts to identify the relationship between production and human well-being; for example, variables related to the freedom of association in unions and their effectiveness to protect internationally recognized working rights; the quantification of measures of healthiness and work safety, and a welfare system after workers retire, would also be associated with this dimension.

Most of these measurements, however, avoid the fundamental criticism of alternative visions; in other words, a description of society's current organization and its productive apparatus, with all measurements already mentioned, does not consider the way in which the process contributes to the enrichment of a few at the expense of the majority. After all, while this concentrated (and dynamically growing) control persists, the possibility of reverting the deepening poverty and exclusion of huge social groups will be minimum (or null). Perhaps one of the greatest barriers to improvements in the quality of life so deeply engrained in the present discussions of "progress" is its emphasis on the role of the individual and the absence of any analysis of the benefits of collective action for a society's advance [32].

In our search for alternative explanations, we focus on how many societies continue to persist in their stubborn ties to the land, to their traditional structures of production and reproduction. Although some of our colleagues who work within the dominant epistemologies are convinced that these societies are condemned to disappear, to sink into a miasma of sub-proletarian misery, our research suggests that what appears as poverty in many rural societies is the result of deliberate collective choices made by their members to shape or reshape their communities on the basis of different principles [34,35]. The communities focus on satisfying their own basic needs and assuring

an ever more effective ability to govern themselves and negotiate their autonomy in the face of intensifying efforts to integrate them into global markets and the logic of rationalities based on individual benefit and monetary valuations of social relations and natural resources [36].

The evidence for this peculiar situation is the concerted efforts by societies throughout the Americas to forge solutions on their own, or in alliance with other communities or in collaboration with outside agents. What seems clear is that these efforts are not exceptional cases of peoples trying to do things differently; rather they are rooted in alternative visions of how the world operates and their relationship to the planet. This is poignantly examined in a detailed methodological discussion of the implications of being indigenous, of the need for learning about different epistemologies already available and being used to better understand these alternative proposals [22,37]. The relatively recent recognition of the significance of these non-western epistemologies reflects their legitimacy in international academic institutions; unfortunately, this recognition has not extended to their incorporation into the methodologies of “orthodox” social science analysis. Throughout the world, however, there are numerous social movements in defense of their territory, in proposals for building alternatives that lead to a better quality of life, although not necessarily more consumption that are derived from these epistemologies. What is striking is the volume of literature documenting these efforts, both those that are “bringing up to date” long traditions of many groups who tenaciously defend their ideological and cultural heritages [38] as well as those who are searching out new paths, directly controllable by themselves, such as the Zapatistas in Mexico and the MST (Landless People’s Movement) in Brazil [39–41].

The process is not limited to ethnic communities [42–44]. It is interesting to note the significance for many peasant communities of the consolidation of one of the largest social organizations (and movements) in the world, *Via Campesina* [45,46]. This group integrates local small-scale farmer organizations from around the world, with a view to promoting local capacities for self-sufficiency based on technologies that combine the benefits of organic cultivation where appropriate with intensive use of the producer’s own equipment and knowledge to increase production, with an important focus on food self-sufficiency. This approach, that combines agroecology with the reorganization and strengthening of local institutions, is widely acknowledged to be appropriate for overcoming many of the considerable obstacles impeding the successful expansion of small-scale farming in the third world [47–49]. Evaluations of the implementation of these strategies reflect the benefits not just of the productive gains from a production system reoriented to local needs and distribution systems, but their contribution to strengthening local communities and environmental balance [50,51].

There is no space in this text to delve into the details of these innovative strategies, many of which do not offer material solutions to poverty when measured by ownership or access to a certain package of commodities. Instead, they address a much more thorough-going re-conceptualization of the possibilities for a different meaning of the concept of “quality of life”, and therefore of the social and material significance of poverty [52,53]. In this different context, then, it might be that much of the poverty to which most of the literature is addressed, has its origins in the individualism and the alienation of the masses whose behavior is embedded in the Western model of modernity, a model of concentrated accumulation based on a system of deliberate dispossession of the majority by a small elite [54,55]. The collectivism implicit in the proposals offered by the communities implementing their

own areas of conservation is accompanied by the social concomitant of solidarity that pervades the processes inherent in these alternative strategies. The realization of the importance of people becoming involved in identifying and protecting their territories is an integral part of a complex dynamic that examines the importance of the place-based nature of cultures and their survival. As a result, peoples around the world are finding accompaniment in their efforts to protect these areas by a global alliance of such communities and organizations seeking to promote this effort; similarly, the communities are organizing their own circles for mutual support and broader understanding of their capabilities to improve measurably their living conditions as part of processes that enables them to govern themselves more effectively while also contributing to ecosystem protection and rehabilitation [52,56].

In this context we have distilled five underlying principles for this construction—derived from the practice of many recent experiences—that contribute to avoid the “syndrome” of poverty: autonomy and communality; solidarity; self-sufficiency; productive and commercial diversification; and sustainable management of regional resources [50]. In many of these circles, the collective commitment to ensure that there are no individuals without access to their socially defined basic needs implies a corresponding obligation of all (and of each one) to attend to the strengthening of the community’s productive capacity, to improve its infrastructures (physical, social, environmental), and to enrich its cultural and scientific capabilities. Poverty, in this light, is an individual scourge—created by the dynamics of a society based on individualism and its isolation—that is structurally anchored in the very fabric of society. To escape from this dynamic, the collective subject that is emerging in the process offers a meaningful path to overcoming the persistence of poverty in our times.

But true social and environmental progress will also require taking note of societies’ growing dependence on the extraction of natural resources, both renewable and non-renewable. The increasing intensity of the organized protests against the social and environmental degradation that this expansion has wrought is part of the same process of collective construction of alternative organizations and productive structures [44]. Communities’ actions make it evident that the present patterns of territorial expansion and resource use are not viable; together with changes in consumption patterns and energy use, it will be necessary to reduce our dependency on these natural resources, to reduce the generation of diverse pollutants, and especially the most toxic, in addition to the emission of greenhouse gases associated with climate change. Alternative models of community organization, involving collective commitments to social reorganization and respect for the planet with a deliberate reorientation towards guaranteeing basic needs and attending the demands for the quality of life rather than the amount of consumption, will have to guide our search for more effective paths to sustainability.

These measures would have to be accompanied by efforts to develop mechanisms to identify the need for ecosystem rehabilitation and the possibilities of effectively protecting some vulnerable areas and species in danger of extinction, incorporating processes to integrate local populations in these tasks, taking advantage of their knowledge and own organizations, with appropriate recognition that would allow them to live with dignity. These tasks are not readily quantified, in spite of our recognition of the importance of revaluing the significance of these environments relative to material production.

In contrast, there are other indicators in the process of development in international circles, to facilitate the challenge of identifying environmental problems. Some include the indicators already mentioned above, as well as the energy intensity of production and the volume of greenhouse gases generated globally and by different productive sectors. Among ecological economists there is an effort

to develop and systematize the study of these processes; among the most intensively studied at present are: the Human Appropriation of net Primary Productivity (HANPP), the ecological rucksack, and material balances [57–59]. Current mechanisms to control global emissions (such as the market for carbon emissions permits and the program for “reduction of emissions for degradation and deforestation”), however, are allowing major polluters to continue their practices and their customers to maintain their consumption patterns, by simply purchasing underpaid environmental services from producers in the Third World. It would be necessary to become much more critical about the use of current environmental quality indicators in order to try to establish processes to really advance towards “progress”. If we were to insist on a global ethic, it would not be permissible to postpone recognizing every human being’s moral right to satisfy his/her basic needs, to fulfill his/her wishes of having a better life, to conserve the necessary vital functions of ecosystems, and to have a fair access to global resources.

5. Conclusion

This reflection about “progress” introduces a critical, yet pessimistic vision of the possibility of understanding and measuring the concept within today’s dominant epistemological context. It rejects the orthodox evaluation of the growth of production, which equates basic needs with superfluous ones, accepting the discrimination against diverse social groups and gender, condemning most current indicators to a fatal distortion. We also criticize the tendency to underestimate the consequences of (ab)using natural resources and “sub-altern” groups; when the environment is degraded by human activity, it contributes to degrading individuals and their societies; in other words, this degradation limits the possibility of “good living”. We reject the vision of centering our hope to overcome current contradictions on technological innovations since this leaves us with insuperable difficulties.

The search for alternative strategies, such as those mentioned in this document, do not offer solutions that are consistent with existing institutions, shaped by global capital and served by accounting agencies and social and economic performance assessment agencies. For that reason, after all is said and done, an effort to measure well-being and “progress” would require people, their communities, and their regions to forge their own “niches of sustainability” in a sea of social disintegration and inequality plagued by problems of environmental degradation and define ways of quantifying the results.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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24. In fact, some consider that “degrowth” is a response to the disenchantment with the colonization of “ecological economics” by many analysts of a neo-classical (orthodox) tendency who “escaped” from “environmental economics” due to its inability to incorporate matters of biological diversity and social justice into its analysis; frequently, these analysts make this transition or academic migration without transforming their methodologies or even their paradigms. Similarly, “social and solidarity economics” is suffering from a confusion generated by competing or incompatible social and political objectives; the notions of solidarity and equality that motivated cooperative

and union movements of the past are being compromised by present-day social policies of the State, by community organizations at the service of corporations, and by religious charities. Recently, other academic and political groups have intensified their attempts to influence the evolution of these alternative approaches by accepting the participation of transnational companies that claim their own right to participate with their “social and environmental responsibility” investments that make them worthy of strictly controlled (by them) rewards as “socially responsible companies”.

25. The Bolivian counterpart, “good living” (from aymara language *suma qamaña*), is the foundation for its new Magna Carta. In Mexico, there are similar proposals by indigenous groups, such as “*Comunalidad*” among the Zapotec Indians of Oaxaca, and “*Mandar Obedeciendo*” (Govern by Obeying) of the Zapatistas in Chiapas, see: Barkin, D.; Fuente, M. Colaborando con Comunidades para la Justicia Ambiental, Paper presented at the meetings of the International Society for Ecological Economics, Rio de Janeiro, 19 June 2012).
26. Just as this article was being revised in early 2013, a series of declarations from the Zapatistas confirmed the analysis presented in the text that they are seeking to construct their own model of an alternative society, a development well worth following in the spirit of this special issue of the journal *Sustainability*. Up to date information is available at: <http://enlace Zapatista.ezln.org.mx/> (accessed on 5 January 201).
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43. It is of interest to note that there has been a keen recognition of the significance of this phenomenon among scholars working in mountain areas and in their analyses of the strategies of mountain peoples, see especially the recent issues of *Mountain Research and Development* (Vol. 20 (1,3,4) and Vol. 23 (3)).
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