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Rethinking the Social and Solidarity Society in Light of Community Practice

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Abstract: Building social alternatives is necessary to resist the destructive impacts of the capitalist organization on well-being, social organization, and the planet. This paper offers an analysis of the ways in which peoples are mobilizing to build organizations and to define social movements to move beyond current crises. The lines for constructing an ecologically sound and social-solidarity society require mechanisms for mutual cooperation based on alternative systems of decision making, as well as for doing work and assuring well-being to every member of the community. These depend on forging a process of solidarity among the members of a society as well as building alliances among communities; to assure the satisfaction of basic needs while also attending the most pressing requirements for physical, social and environmental infrastructure and to assure the conservation and rehabilitation of their ecosystems.

Keywords: community; sustainability; solidarity; conservation; cooperation; social economy

1. Introduction

When the accumulation of wealth is no longer of high social importance, there will be great changes in the code of morals… The love of money as a possession…will be recognised for what it is, a somewhat disgusting morbidity, one of those semicriminal, semipathological propensities which one hands over with a shudder to the specialists in mental disease... I look

forward, therefore, in days not so very remote, to the greatest change which has ever occurred in the material environment of life for human beings… the nature of one's duty to one's neighbour is changed. For it will remain reasonable to be economically purposive for others after it has ceased to be reasonable for oneself.

J. M. Keynes [1]

Keynes' prediction about society's future is quite striking: he foresaw: "mankind solving… the economic problem within a hundred years" [1]. As we see it, this reflects a profound misunderstanding of the institutional context in which he lived (and in which we continue to live), a telling naiveté grounded in an unbounded optimism of the power of technological advance and private accumulation that would fuel a process of compound economic growth. Clearly we have reached the state of overall abundance that he foresaw, an economy that has the productive potential to satisfy all of our basic needs –"those needs which are absolute in the sense that we feel them whatever the situation of our fellow human beings"– and yet poverty is a greater scourge than perhaps at any time in modern history. Unequal development deepens, as much on a global scale as locally, creating islands of wealth in a sea of poverty; an extraordinary waste of human and material potential accompanies devastating processes of ecological destruction. Today's triple crisis—economic, social, environmental—is the most recent manifestation of our collective inability to meet the challenges that Keynes thought could be readily met. Thus, society continues to be incapable of finding solutions that do more than heighten the contradictions and further deepen the crisis. Unfortunately, the various explanations and policy solutions offered by heterodox scholars are not being given serious consideration and the orthodox "solutions" continue to prolong and further deepen the crises; their paradigmatic conflicts reflect political and philosophical differences that are not even acknowledged by the latter group [2,3].

In contrast, numerous peoples around the world are finding alternatives that offer them more opportunities and a better quality of life, while also contributing to environmental preservation. Their communities are realizing that alternatives are necessary to create space—political, economic, and social, as well as geographic—in which they can effectively resist the destructive impacts of the spread of capitalist organization of production on well-being, social organization, and the planet. This process is of enormous significance globally, as communities are collectively searching for means to: (1) appreciate the significance of diversity within and among themselves; (2) accept the necessity of coordination and cooperation emerging within the diversity that their projects offer; (3) develop new means for concerted political action for socio-economic and environmental governance on a supranational scale; (4) recognize the need to compensate for the asymmetries that exist on a global scale, accepting responsibilities for assuring the well-being of those unable to undertake significant initiatives on their own; and finally, (5) (re)construct their own sense of identity.

This is the broader context within which "social and solidarity societies" (SSS) are emerging locally; we insist on SSS in this formulation rather than "social and solidarity economies" because it is essential to move beyond the materialistic aspects of social life to incorporate all dimensions of collective life within this construction. Underlying this dynamic is an understanding—oft-times implicit—that their full insertion into the world market is a mechanism of impoverishment. Their experiences in the market economy—be it as wage laborers, as independent workers, or even as small business people—have clearly demonstrated the difficulty of assuring a reasonable income to support

their families, much less improve their lot, create opportunities for the future, and attend the needs of the planet. In this framework, it is clear that the search for SSS involves more than attempts to produce goods; that is, moving beyond the market dynamics that depends on private accumulation and generates profound inequalities. The point of departure for a SSS must be a commitment to the ethical organization of society and all of its activities: ethical in the sense that the needs of all people in the community are attended to, while also making provision for the well-being of future generations.

2. Results and Discussion

2.1. The Principles of Social and Solidarity Economics

One of the crucial elements in the construction of a SSS is the joining of the components of social responsibility with those of environmental accountability; without an integral connection between these dimensions, any program would fall short of its ambitions. This process involves exploring the ways in which five fundamental principles are incorporated into social and political organization. These principles are: (1) autonomy in governance, including self-management; (2) solidarity among community members and with other communities cooperating in a similar process; (3) self-sufficiency in so far as it is feasible, given the resource endowment and ecological conditions; (4) productive diversification for trade with other communities and in the market; and finally, (5) sustainable management of regional resources. These principles are so important that they merit a careful explanation:

(a) **Autonomy** encompasses the capacity of self-governance or self-management within the communities, although it cannot be restricted to this realm, since it must extend to forging alliances among communities and negotiating with authorities in the various levels of government, many of whom perceive the local autonomy movements to be a threat. This facet of community consolidation involves an explicit recognition that in most cases the community itself is too small a body for effective operation, since the need for skills and goods is frequently greater and more diversified than the resources that it can muster from within. Self-governance also implies developing the knowledge and skills required for developing the capacity to evaluate proposals for further development, for incorporating new technologies when needed and defending inherited traditions and productive systems as part of the process of determining the best ways to improve well-being and protect the region's ecosystems.

(b) The second principle, **social solidarity**, is a logical derivation of the first one. This involves a rethinking of the dominant patterns of entrepreneurial organization of community life, to encourage and facilitate broad participation in all aspects, including productive and social activities. Social solidarity requires a new conception of decision making, since the dominant approach in the nation state is based on electoral processes of representative democracy that are widely discredited, mainly because of their capture by wealthy or powerful groups that frequently betray broader community interests. In place of this structure of indirect governance, the principle of solidarity would call for more direct forms of democratic participation that involve a different concept of political responsibility of the local people in decision-making and participation in the various administrative posts required by self-governance; not coincidently, it also includes the possibility of revoking the mandates of leaders in the case that they do not

fulfill their obligations. In this context, solidarity cannot be limited to interactions among people, since the alternative model also takes into account the needs of the ecosystems on which the society depends for its very survival. As we will see below, solidarity is not a simple declaration of good intentions; rather, it involves assuming the risks created by supporting people and movements challenging the institutional nexus generated in the globalized market economy, a risk associated with creating societies that inherently offer an alternative response to ever-intensifying crises.

(c) **Self-sufficiency** must be an essential part of the program, not a simple declaration of good intentions, but rather a profound reorganization of the structures of production and consumption to satisfy its own needs with a rising standard of living and attention to the cultural and nutritional needs of society. Local provisioning, however, is not limited to foodstuffs, but rather extends to all aspects of community life, including construction, infrastructure, clothing, and collective health and social services. This requires a concerted effort to prepare people with new skills and to create new capacities for producing and distributing goods.

(d) **Productive diversification** is another essential factor for creating the social economy. If the participating communities are to depend exclusively on the goods they could produce themselves, they would be condemned to a form of subsistence that would offer their members little prospects for a rising standard of living or a better quality of life. Limiting people's consumption or a community's activities to those that depend on the resources and goods at hand would inevitably threaten the viability of the project, since the pressures to abandon the strict limitations that this imposes would induce people to leave, as we have seen in many intentional communities throughout the world [4]. Productive diversification also requires developing local markets for barter and exchange as well as for exploring other means of exchange, such as fair trade and solidarity markets regionally and internationally

(e) Of course, this set of principles would not be complete without including explicit consideration of **sustainable regional resource management**, since the organizational and productive activities of a SSS must also contribute to environmental balance. In this conception, the word "regional" is crucial and requires that any strategy for environmental management involve collaboration among communities, since it is rare that the territory of one community encompasses a whole natural environmental unit, like a water shed (river basin), where upstream and downstream groups should collaborate to avoid contamination and resource depletion. Frequently, this requires a deliberate effort to rehabilitate deteriorated ecosystems that suffered from a devastating history of abuse as a result of colonial and/or capitalist exploitation. Today, more than ever, these efforts to create spaces for the SSS pose difficult issues due to intensifying pressures from international capital to take control of valuable mineral resources or agricultural lands, pushed by market pressures and international competition.

2.2. The Components of the Solidarity Society

A solidarity society can only arise in communities that consider themselves part of the commons. For them, the commons is more than the common pool resources such as air, waters, and other natural

resources shared by all that were the focus of the debate set off by Garret Hardin's "tragedy"; but it is "not an alternative economy, but rather an alternative to the economy" [5]. It also encompasses the social and cultural components of collective life and involves a profound reconsideration of the significance and extent of private property among the participants; recently, the concept has been further extended to include many facets of intellectual creativity that are the object of privatization efforts by capital in the international market. As such, the commons are social institutions for that allow for strengthening the assumption of collective responsibilities for assuring society's integrity and promoting social justice [6,7]. In this sense they go beyond Ostrom's characterization of alternative governance institutions to avoid the "tragedy of the commons" [8]. The commons, then, are not simply a set of things or resources; rather like many other aspects of the social and solidarity society, their role in the SSS is central because the society creates formal social relations around them as well as commitments to ensure their conservation and even their enlargement. This relationship reflects a collective and enduring transformation of the way in which society conceives and manages itself while also developing the basis for collective and communal management.

Building a solidarity society is a complex and risky process: Complex, because it encompasses all aspects of social and biological existence; Risky, because it involves challenging the *de facto* powers and questioning the legitimacy of their "rule of law". It is also significant because it supports "the sustainable development of [cooperative] communities through polices approved by their members" in each of their activities [9]. The SSS starts from a premise of solidarity within diversity, facilitating the task of extricating its groups from the dominant social and political institutions that are incapable of attending their particular needs. This is essential because the hegemonic order is based on the idea of a single "social contract" that presupposes the possibility of applying universal norms, like "social justice", "equality", or even "democracy", impartially to attend to the needs of all social groups. This "single social contract" generally operates in the interests of the most powerful, economically and politically, who mold policies and institutions to promote their interests, creating a profoundly unjust society, exacerbating social disparities and accelerating environmental destruction. The alternative SSS, with its variety of institutional arrangements, challenges the assumption that "authorities" can assume the right to transfer community resources to others for "national benefit", without regard for the well-being of the people, local decisions, or historical and environmental considerations, as is common practice in mining, forestry, and water management, although it now extends to complex issues of bio- and nano-technology.

Nevertheless, building the foundations of a solidarity society entails much more than undertaking specific activities or establishing appropriate institutions for governance or management. A solidarity society requires personal commitments from each member to assume responsibility for the well-being of others and for limiting individual claims for access to collective resources. To strengthen these foundations, it is essential to begin with a common vision of society as a whole whose point of departure is reversing the historical tendency for the personal enrichment of a few at the expense of the many; as such, they incorporate collective decisions to assure transparency and direct participation in decision-making and universal responsibility for administration or implementation of this dynamic. It challenges the presumption of the freedom of the individual within the group, obliging each member to carefully measure their impacts on others, and the whole, and be guided by reference to their impact on the collectivity in their decisions and actions. In historical terms, and specifically in light of practice

in today's globalized society, it calls for a redefinition of peoples' relationship with their society, rejecting the notion that one person has the unfettered right to withdraw from or even oppose the commonweal after having participated in the process of arriving at a decision.

This point of departure has important implications for the way in which priorities are determined and activities are organized. Perhaps one of the most striking and demanding of these is the need to reverse the hierarchical organization of the workplace: of course, people should be paid for their work, but they should not have to submit to demeaning and authoritarian social relations to satisfy their basic needs. The existing proletarian organization of society is part of an underlying condition of the helplessness of the workers, unable even to survive without entering the labor force; the alternative under construction here starts from the presumption that all members of society enjoy the legitimate right to a socially determined standard of living, independently of their contributions to production or output. Their participation in collective activities becomes rooted in a sense of duty and belonging to the community.

Another priority for the solidarity society must be a thorough-going break with national and international markets and with systems of exchange based on the price structures that they determine. As in the case of work, the admonition is not to entirely avoid markets, something that would not be either possible or desirable, but rather to avoid allowing the community's welfare to depend on prices fixed in international markets where corporate power and wealth play an important role. This aspect of the solidarity society is central to strengthening the community's economy, according priority to supporting local development and assuring that the very process of production itself does not become a source of health problems for the producers and consumers, or contamination of the environment, problems that frequently occur when the competitive pressures force managers to sacrifice safety, intensify the rhythm of production, or ignore safeguards for environmental protection in a struggle to prevail in the market. These market pressures present difficult challenges for managers of community enterprises, since the need to adhere to collectively determined social and ecological standards obliges them to consider how to participate responsibly in the market, a feat that is only possible if customers also accept the objectives of contributing to the strengthening of the solidarity society by agreeing to pay for the benefit of joining with the producers to assure well-being and planetary integrity; in this way the solidarity society gradually extends itself.

By changing the nature and operation of their participation in the market, a reorganization of exchange relations on the basis of a mutual support of the participants also calls for new means of exchange, that is, monies. This poses yet another difficulty, since money itself is a source of State power as well as a means for imposing this power over all members of the society (and on all participants in the global marketplace to the extent that the currencies are freely exchangeable among themselves) [10,11]. Thus, a community that decides to supplant the "coin of the realm" for transactions within its limited space is, in fact, challenging this external power's ability or even its right to control crucial social relations within the community, as was demonstrated by the emergence of local currencies in Argentina during its economic crisis at the beginning of the 1990s [12]. The question of alternative currencies continues to be the object of considerable controversy; some critiques arise because of their limited usefulness while others cite this quality as a source of their strength, channeling demands that stimulate local production of goods and services, while supporting

local commerce and service providers altering personal decisions, stimulating local activity and promoting community solidarity, engaging even some who do not use the currencies [13].

These fundamental components of a solidarity society have far-reaching implications for confronting central questions in community organization and in the very meaning of the concept of progress and well-being [14]. Perhaps the most notable and unexpected of these is the virtual disappearance of the problems of poverty and unemployment. Once a society establishes its commitment to assure a basic package of consumption goods for all of its members, along with a program to produce locally as much as possible and implant mechanisms for their distribution, then the pressure to participate in community activities will be transformed from one of survival to one of "belonging". In this new setting, the questions facing the community also change from how to create sufficient "productive" employment, to how best to employ the members to improve well-being and upgrade the various infrastructures that can offer a more secure and comfortable existence for everyone as well as to provide responsibly for future generations.

In the SSS, the emphasis on community organization and social mobilization reduces or even eliminate the imperative for growth, characteristic of the capitalist economy. Since the competitive struggle to accumulate among the wealthy is at the center of the internal drive for growth, generating poverty in the process, the assumption of collective control over surplus in the solidarity society changes the focus of the crucial problem of its disposition and creates a basis for reducing the sharp inequalities that characterize capitalist society. The collective organization transforms the debilitating competitive battle among the powerful into a socially challenging problem of generating and managing the surplus, determining its appropriate collective use to attend to the various social, material, and environmental priorities as well as to distribute some part of the resources to individuals for their own use. As a result, growth is no longer the product of the imperative of producing ever more products for an apparently insatiable consuming population; instead, progress is redefined to track the satisfaction of a community's basic needs and its commitments to improving infrastructures and social capabilities (including attention to planetary concerns). This is only possible in a world in which the community itself assumes control over the fierce struggle among some groups of individuals that promotes invidious comparisons of their consumption patterns; that is, the growth imperative itself needs to be controlled not only by reigning in the endless drive for private accumulation, but also by the adoption of a broad consensus for a new "frugal" life style, a change based on the acceptance of a common cosmology, or vision of the world, that requires accepting membership in the community as primary.

3. The Paths to a Social and Solidarity Society

The preceding section outlines conditions that might be considered utopian, or, in other words, principles that seem so unlike those prevailing in many existing societies as to seem absolutely unachievable and, perhaps for many, even undesirable. As a result, many initiatives are proliferating to incorporate people into a "Third Sector" and the "popular economy" [15,16] and even the "informal sector" as alternatives that might offer opportunities within the context of existing capitalist societies; these approaches have become popular in policy circles in Latin America where governments are trying to shift responsibility for reducing poverty from the public sector to the poor themselves through forms of collective organization or, even worse, microcredit programs [17]. These recent policy

initiatives are directed |towards people marginalized in the "formal" economy, where new employment is limited and wages are often below the poverty line; unfortunately, most of these "so-called" SSS opportunities are proving ineffective as they deepen the participants' dependency on short-lived programs without creating a solid basis for assuring their own basic needs. Just as troublesome, the participating individuals are generally excluded from the management of these new activities which often implement programs that do terrible damage to the environment, threatening the very survival of future generations. As a result, this new popularity of the "solidarity economy", as a means to counteract the terrible effects of globalization, is not generating the institutions or mechanisms to counteract market forces or the avarice of individuals and environmental degradation that still dominate [18].

In sharp contrast, for millions of people living in many other communities around the world more radical programs are starting from the premise that there is a need to escape from the bonds of proletarian organization and private accumulation. These myriad examples of "concrete utopias" [19,20] demonstrate some of the ways in which communities are creating their own models of a SSS based on the principles discussed above; they offer rich experiences that suggest critical lessons and interesting models to others involved in defending their resources and their ways of life. The experiences range from isolated efforts to build cooperative enterprises from the ground up, or to take over factories abandoned by their owners to complex undertakings that encompass the totality of the activities and dimensions of community existence [21]. Now joining the list of these activities is the growing list of communities creating regional, national and international alliances involved in resisting official efforts to support the global spread of corporate mining and forestry concessions, along with land and water "grabbing" that has become particularly widespread [22,23]; activists from these communities argue that the very process of organizing for resistance is contributing to mobilizing people and generating skills that also enables them to become part of the SSS; resistance itself is proving to be an engine for forging the determination and the skills for moving beyond historical patterns of opposition to developing processes of construction [24]. The Venezuelan experience offers a case in point: "[T]he institutional resistance to workers' control and the conflicts between state bureaucracy and workers have contributed to strengthening the movement for workers' control, as well as creating and promoting class struggle where none existed before" [25].

The best known of the groups involved in constructing SSS are indigenous. Although there is an extraordinary diversity in their traditions and current practices, these communities generally share common forms of organization, of cosmologies, and even goals. It is remarkable that throughout the Americas they are strengthening their resolve to live apart from the national and globalized cultures which surround them, while many insist on participating in political movements to vindicate their historical and legal rights, such as those guaranteed by the UN Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization [26,27]. Even as each ethnic group maintains its own identity, shaped by inherited cosmologies, traditions, and a history of negotiations with, and resistance from, their colonized past, they are also engaged in complex negotiations to learn from each other and to form alliances within and across countries. They are reinforcing their abilities to prevail in spite of the ever intensifying pressures to limit and even sequester these territories and limit or coopt their differences. In these spaces, cohesive communitarian social organizations are emerging to shape unique productive strategies that allow them to recover and

enrich their cultural and productive heritages, supply their own needs, and care for their ecosystems while improving their quality of life. The variety of approaches and vigor with which communities are asserting their rights to create self-administered territories is been recognized and applauded by the international community, due to their significant involvement in the preservation and recuperation of diversity, not only biological but also ethnic, with important implications for the challenges facing humanity in this period of multiplying crises. Among the groups involved in these activities are many of the first nations in Canada who have organized themselves as "Idle No More" to better respond to the attacks of the State against their territories [28]; also, the tribal groups in the United States who are joining together and asserting once more the rights negotiated in treaties of a previous century [29]; the almost 200 communities who are collective members of the consortium of indigenous peoples and community administered territories engaged in conservation efforts to consolidate their ability to govern themselves [30]; the numerous indigenous communities who came together in the Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Ecuador (CONAIE) [31,32] and the National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu in Bolivia [33] to strengthen their ability to prosecute their own projects; and the Zapatista "Army" of National Liberation in southern Mexico that has pointed the way to consolidate their struggles for autonomy and their ability to forge a new society [34,35]; as well as the numerous other ethnicities whose collective efforts are also contributing to the groundswell of efforts to turn the cry for "many other worlds are possible" into a reality.

In a similar manner, peasant communities around the world are recognizing the importance of forging their own SSS. There has been systematic attack on small-scale farmers that is increasingly resisted by effective social movements like the *MST* (landless workers' organization) in Brazil and *Via Campesina* world-wide [36]. These communities are promoting projects for implementing agro-ecological approaches for increasing production to better satisfy local needs. The scope of this activity is growing as the groups engage in people-to-people collaboration and training. Their experience is particularly valuable because it goes beyond the productivist orientation of many such initiatives to include a holistic approach to social and political organization [37], accompanying the need to increase and diversify output; in rural production systems this has spawned the field of agroecology [38].

On a more practical level, there are numerous examples of processes of technological innovation that are increasing output and diversifying production in ways that are consistent with inherited cultural traditions and ecosystem conservation. On the basis of our interactions with communities in Mexico, we have documented examples such as the inclusion of unsalable avocados in diets to fatten hogs, resulting in metabolic changes that produce low-cholesterol meat, improving incomes as they are being marketed at a premium in local markets; similarly, in other communities, a change in diets of hens, adding a common herb, can increase the content of omega-3 in egg yolks sold at higher than market prices [39]. In a different approach, a group of researchers are working with producers of a traditional Mexican alcoholic drink, mezcal, to modify agave cultivation techniques and promote cooperative production that is contributing to raising incomes and rehabilitating ecosystems. Another group of producers in Oaxaca continues to care for their mulberry trees, feeding their leaves to silk worms they raise to produce the traditional thread that they then weave into highly attractive and fairly priced garments; elsewhere, others are experimenting with new plantings of perennial indigenous cotton varieties (that were cultivated before the Spanish conquest) that are ideal handicraft weaving as an alternative to genetically modified cotton that currently dominates the industry.

In the urban-industrial sphere, initiatives to implant worker control of production have been a permanent feature since the onset of the industrial revolution. The original workers' cooperatives of the XIX century [40] evolved into a highly polished form with the formation of the Mondragon complex in post-war Spain [41]. A creative response to the onset of economic and political crises in the late XX century has been a continuing wave of takeovers by workers of installations abandoned by owners. The most significant of these experiences occurred in Argentina, with its beginnings in the graphic arts industry to now encompass several hundred firms in many sectors and parts of the country. In other countries, similar actions have also occurred; more than 100 in Brazil, 20 in Uruguay and two that have been able to survive in Mexico as well as numerous examples in all parts of the Venezuelan economy [42–44]. Elsewhere, workers cooperatives of different sizes are also being established in all productive sectors (and in some cases in public services like urban water management in Argentina), with the most important examples occurring in Cuba as a result of the economic reforms implanted during the past few years [45]. While the workers focus almost exclusively on solving production problems in the workplace, most of these experiences lead the participants to get involved in many issues related to solidarity with other groups involved in similar struggles and in mobilizations against the onslaught to implement economic policies that will directly impact their incomes and living standards [21].

The evolution of the SSS also requires critical evaluations of numerous other cooperative movements, some of which are proliferating to provide credit and organize consumers. Some involve generating new channels for collaboration and for assuring broad access to knowledge so as to better organize social movements for social and planetary balance [46]. While careful consideration is beyond the scope of this paper, suffice it to say that within the guidelines offered above for this kind of society, most of these organizations would not qualify nor could they be considered as intermediate organizations moving their members in the direction of creating SSS, since rather than encouraging mutually supportive social relations among the participants, they generally reinforce the mercantile and individualistic character of participation in the market economy, be it local or international. Perhaps the most telling evidence to support this claim is that a large proportion of the credit is granted to support small commercial endeavors for consumer goods that are not produced within the community [47]. In contrast, the Mexican Association of Social Sector Credit Unions (AMUCSS) facilitates production for the members of its 22,000 affiliates [48].

4. Conclusions: What Can We Learn? How to Move Ahead

This brief outline of the SSS points to the proliferation of a wide variety of experiences involving broad segments of the population in many parts of the Americas. From an institutional perspective, the most important experience in the hemisphere was the creation of the National Ministry for the Solidarity Economy in Brazil, under the presidency of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, directed by the long-time proponent of this approach, Paulo Singer; this development was a logical continuation of the long history of grassroots efforts to create cooperative enterprises, facilitate worker takeovers of abandoned factories, and strengthen the small-scale landless movement known as MST [49]. Rather than tracing the development of these movements here, we emphasize the unique character of the SSS and the importance of its contribution to creating a path towards a post-capitalist society, able to point to ways

to improve well-being for participants while also protecting the environment, assuring a continuity of the results for future generations.

The SSS represents a profound challenge to society as most people think of it in our world today. Perhaps the most important is the structure of social relations, based on a cooperative organization capable of guiding the community's development, as well as its relations with other communities and the State of which it is a part; the SSS also requires commitments for solidarity among all of its members, a process that we stressed involves considerable risk for all participants. A second, fundamental feature of the SSS is its assumption of responsibility to move towards more appropriate production and consumption structures, consistent with long-term equilibrium between society and the planet; for this to be possible, the SSS must consist in a thorough-going institutional change to break with inherited patterns of social behavior that inevitably deepen the social and ecological contradictions we presently face [3]. This institutional change will lead to radically different life styles and relations among people, changes that are only possible if we move beyond the pressures of "more", so engrained in the ideology of growth that dominates our present world [5,6].

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Author Contributions

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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