

Final Report

Diagnoses and Challenges from the perspective of “Cono Sur” countries

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Workshop carried out at the Heinrich Böll Foundation Southern Cone's offices in Santiago city (Chile), from 20 to 23 January 2013. There were 24 participants, representatives of following countries: Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Peru and Brazil.

Diagnoses

First of all we agree that is necessary in ours countries the transition to a non-extractive model, leading to a new economy, a new way of understanding state power adapted to a globalized world (not only in economic way, but also socially and culturally) and to a new relationship between man and nature. Nevertheless, in order to be able to do that properly, we have to recognize the complexity of the current socio-environmental crisis, understanding the environment as a complex system in permanent interaction with other spheres of our globalized society. This entails on one hand, the need to identify the combined effect of multiple crises (environmental, social, economic, etc.) in order to grasp, from multiple and inter-disciplinary perspectives, the linkages between the causes and effects of these different crises.

The main debates in ours countries, that took place in the future workshop in Santiago city (Chile), were:

- Territorial management, including water resources, conservation and restoration.
- Participation and democracy, including environmental education, justice and ethics.
- Energy and climate change
- Development models, involving economic, social and environmental aspects.

The debates were around the "capitalist system" or "capitalism" broadly understood as a macro-process that currently operates globally. This system both in its nature (a form of exercising power between those who hold the means of production and those without access to them) and in its logic (the relentless pursuit of capital accumulation), raises a number of significant

limitations to the process of building and deepening democracy. Accordingly, one of the most relevant obstacles is related to the centrality that has acquired the market in our societies in the last decades. Operating as the priority instance of social coordination, the market, while allowing an increasing access to mass consumption to our middle classes, has also enlarged the pressure on our natural resources and favoured a widespread “individualism”, leading to the loss of old solidarities between different social groups. Moreover, the inequalities (economic, social and cultural) of our own societies are another element that disturbs an active participation of citizens, especially of those majorities that do not have the necessary means to make it effective. All these features may be understood as concrete hindrances to associative processes that are indispensable to any deep and participatory democratic construction.

Other consequence of the current development model is the excessive demand of raw materials from the Latin American countries to be exported to industrialized countries. The production of raw materials requires large amounts of energy and natural resources with high nature and local community impacts; while handling them in developed countries generates higher returns and lower environmental impacts. The over-production of energy is also caused by the current consumption levels and the off-shoring production. Generally, the products consumed in a given region are produced in far places from there and a lot of energy for transportation is demanded. There are big cities concentrating huge numbers of people and inevitably a large flow of resources from other sectors are necessary (both from rural and other cities).

Another important problem of the current model of socio-economic development is the existence of a conception of development like if it was the same that economic growth, this growth is suggested as unlimited; capital is one of the highest values, there exists a logic of the constant debt and every resource (natural or not) is quantifiable in monetary terms; which turns into a feeling of individualism in the population.

Challenges

The critical and permanent diagnosis of the crisis constitutes a requirement to challenge the primary political and systemic causes of current environmental issues. The group has agreed to give certain preeminence to the current socio-economic model, which operates at a trans-national scale, as one of the main systemic causes of the increasing environmental degradation, overconsumption and inequality.

We also recognize that political power plays a major role in the shaping of environmental and social justice. In the current context, political power is expressed throughout different actors (and their relationships) and mechanisms. We believe that environmental change is the outcome of socio-institutional interactions and decision-making processes. Thus the focus of any accurate political diagnosis rests on the subjects that drive these changes and the ways

in which – through discourse and use of science, social relations and alliances, strategies and actions – these social actors are able to shape their environments in specific ways. Preliminarily, we identify as key actors both private corporate power and state-owned corporations as forces of exploitation of territories. In the region, it is important to admit that these forces act together in many cases. This allows us to understand the current geopolitical shifts in power, for instance, the emergent and increasing economic and political power of Brazil in the region. We also identify the power of knowledge, in particular the predominance of “expert” knowledge, associated with powerful actors, in the processes of rule-making and decision-making

In order to build public policies in the short, medium and long term (not just “reactive” or “emergency” policies) we highlight the fact those solutions must combine the economic, ecological and social aspects of the crises. This requires a profound restructure of our institutional design mainly linked with the operating logic of nations-state, increasingly unable to deal with the multiple and combine effects of a globalized crisis. In others words, in order to give solutions we recognize the centrality of politics. This is a framework for action which accepts some minimal normative consensus on equity, pluralism, sustainability, universal human rights and transparency.

We do not think that, in the current context, political solutions must identified just one course of action. Instead we believe more in a combination of multiple policy measures, acting within different realms (social, economic, trade and environmental), but oriented to the same political objectives. We consider that it is more appropriate (both conceptually and politically) to speak of “territory” instead of the reductionist notion of “resources”, fundamental in their proposal. The concept of territory enables us to better understand the set of dynamic dimensions (social, geographical, cultural, and economic) expressed within a local context. Certainly, territory management requires going beyond nation-state boundaries. Local management could be re-scaled on the basis of territory properties (for example, through an adaptive management and holistic basin approach).

We also agree that defining the process of rule-making and decision-making in accordance to stringent democratic criteria is fundamental to our territory management proposal. Indeed, territorially located participatory processes are vital to begin the changes we need to deal with crises. Certainly, we recognize that, compared to the pressures by powerful actors, such as business and trade associations and government officials, social and environmentalist actors are weak in many other types of power resources that are important for effective participation. This includes making a real impact on which sustainable policies are established, formulated and implemented and how. These power resources include not only material features, but cognitive, social and symbolic as well. Thus, as suggested above, it is important to consider a bundle of measures that strengthen altogether social and environmentalist actors within their local contexts.

We agreed that, in all cases analyzed, the first step is to conduct a network of citizen participation enacting democratic decision-making processes on all the topics. Besides, we considered necessary a multi-sectoral participation where the government, the NGOs, the academy, the private sector and the citizens interact. This first step consists in making a diagnosis of the situation to tackle it and then proposes solutions.

Finally, as a direct and concrete measure, the group proposes the construction of a map of socio-environmental conflicts by country, oriented to identify socio-environmental conflicts existing in the region. Understood as an expression of the tensions and contradictions of the current socio-economic model, our initial purpose is to build a common knowledge of these conflicts within activist groups and progressive actors, in order to enhance such conflicts as a first motor of change. Socio-environmental conflicts are considered to be the backbone of research and development of this proposal, for which it would be sought to establish connections and links between conflicts of similar characteristics and simultaneously between the social classes that are immersed in them, with the purpose of sharing strategies and developing the construction of alternative knowledge in the course of the conflicts.

The main aim is the construction of conscious and critical subjects to the social-environmental situation, looking for the development of multiple tools of transformation to territorial level which are capable of replacing the diverse elements based on the logic of the "Top-down", towards a logic more nearby to the "Bottom-up". The time assigned for the development of the idea, in this case, implied that this one could not be set out completely, due to the fact that major periods of years were necessary. The group considered to be fundamental to link the environmental crises with the social conflicts, in relation to the different forms of appropriation of the natural resources, as well as the process of the unequal distribution of the risks and the impacts of the environmental degradation (at local and global scale). The critic to the current ways of production and consumption, which are based on believing of an unlimited economic growth, the need to transform the model of current "development" (ecological, social and economically unfair) from the point of view on the affected, to stimulate the processes of production of shared knowledge (dialogue between the specialist and the local knowledge) in order to identify solutions and to understand the affected sector ones as the principal reason of the transformation we want.