



COMMONING AND DEVELOPMENT

Dobbiamo capire la complessità che gira intorno al piatto.

—CARLO PETRINI

Trying my best not to dilute in the ocean of knowledge this module brought, and to grasp the experience of being part of the UNISG community in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, I couldn't be more grateful for developing a tighter relationship with the possibilities of food as an impactful tool to inhabit the common world.

I cannot start this writing without mentioning our first encounter, as new masters students, with Carlo Petrini; whose life vision has been an inspiration for many around the world to stay curious whilst trying to understand the complexity of food, the cultural, ecological and emotional aspects our daily choices have and impact the world on a local and global scale. This first encounter, besides being him talking about the importance of communities, politics, seeds, power, empowerment and encouragement of curiosity that are characteristic of his philosophy, Carlo Petrini took the time to meet and listen to each one of us –as he does when he meets producers, friends and politicians around the world– making a clear statement of how there's no knowledge without community, and there's no community without people.¹ Although it was a brief encounter, this gave us the opportunity to express ourselves, listen and understand our peers, and open a door to exchange perspectives and knowledge *with* this diverse community.

The Commons perspective looks specifically at a type of shared living in which people have a great influence on their own living conditions and choose the activities they pursue mainly according to how much pleasure they give, and how crucial they regard them to be. The aim is to **realise** rather than **valorise** one's own potentials. For the long-term the self-organising Commons point of view can be the foundation of a society beyond market economy and state. Core principles are: contribution instead of exchange; actual use instead of property; share all that you can (Habermann 2015); use all that you need. (Euler & Gauditz)²

Acknowledging the importance of every single holon in the system and the agency each one of us have to inhabit fully this planet, some important questions arise in this quest of understanding the concept of commoning: How can I participate in this common world? What can I offer in order to contribute to my community? How can I question myself better to be an active part of a transition

towards a regenerative society that includes the health of the planet, the soil, cultures, water, air, environment? When I choose to buy something, what system am I supporting? How can I share my systemic privileges with those who have been systematically oppressed in my community? How can I participate in this world with purpose?

I believe these questions are much bigger than a personal reflection, these questions are a call to action to create awareness and embrace a curiosity mindset capable of challenging the idea of development and growth in which a big part of the world –including myself– lives, where we have been told that success is a mere reductionist way of progress, that has been built within a framework of economic development, domestication, colonialist and hegemonic narratives based on exploitation of other living beings for one's personal growth.

The rise of development economics occurred in the 50's, after the Second World War, where the dominant paradigm pushed countries towards industrialization, economic growth, income inequalities and segregation of the rural. It wasn't until 1987 that the notion of development shifted to Sustainable Development on a global scale with the *Brundtland Report: Our Common Future*, written by the former –female– Prime Minister of Norway for the UN, introducing environmental issues to the political agenda. This publication will set the base to shape, first the Millennium Goals, and later the UN Sustainable Goals (2015) with three dimensions of development and sustainability: Social, Environmental and Economic, placing at its center five areas of critical importance: people, planet, prosperity, peace & inclusive societies, and partnership.³

Even though the global idea of development and sustainability has been changing and improving over the years, especially since the UN was created, these paths towards a better future are still on an institutional awareness level, and unfortunately awareness is nothing if someone has to deal with daily systemic insecurities of daily life that have been built for centuries. By making this statement, by any means I want to undermine the work of many technicians, scholars and policy makers that, with their research and field work, have been provoking and pushing systemic oppression to change realities for those who have been victims of segregation and cultural imposition. Certainly the world needs international policies, indicators and laws to walk towards a sustainable future, rather than mere recommendations. Otherwise we can get lost in this awareness, favouring the systemic exploitation of communities, ecosystems, resources and the planet.

What I mean to say is that there's still a lot of work to be done, policy makers need to zoom in and out to give agency to those who don't have it, and a great place to start creating change is using food as a tool, a medium and a system. It's precisely here where the Slow Food movement (which was born also in the 80s), and many other community based movements around the globe have been cru-

cial for shifting the development economic paradigm to a local, sustainable and human development that goes beyond the UN Sustainable Goals.

In order to rethink the way we produce, consume, and relate with the planet and with our communities I will borrow Cinzia Scaffidi's concept of *Economy of Relationships* to the food system. Globalisation has placed food as any other good in the market, where the only regulation is money, with this approach we are "cutting" our relationship with the system. If we think of money differently, perhaps we could shift the power dynamics of our society. Such is the case of a few alternative currencies like the *Totnes Pound*, having been created to be usable in the local market only and to prevent cash leaks in a globalised market, as featured on the documentary *Demain*.⁴

It's up to us to decide with our consumption choices. If we do *transactions* allowing the very few to profit and exploit people and resources I will be supporting a system whose only objective is the market, and measures its success on the distance between production and sale, bringing uniformity and anonymity. This trade-agreement market of what we eat has grown into a technical economical space where the need of free circulation of goods has cancelled the productive vocation of single areas, leading us to ignore the objective differences in quality and cultural identity.⁵

Whereas if we rebuild a relationship with the system that holds our food, making ourselves accountable for the shared responsibility we have in our communities, we use our agency to change the world bottom up. Being part of an economy of relationships supports a dynamic balance in a community, creates a sense of belonging and it's ruled by the natural laws of abundance and gratitude. By sharing this responsibility we promote diversity, social justice, and culture, we invest in our common world, and more importantly we acknowledge the value of time to improve and enrich our communities.

Of course there's no black and white, nor a simple solution to the complexity of the world we inhabit, but I believe that actors of progressive societies can start reflecting and questioning the impact of their actions, opening up to possibilities of valuing community, sharing, relationships and time instead of personal success, progress and economic growth. After all how much social time has been cancelled with labour during the past 70 years? How are we impacting our relationship with the planet with our lack of time and care? Who has been left behind so that a very few can keep holding tight privileges?

Questioning and embracing complexity as a living system that is in a continuous change is a gift of awareness, and I want take this gift and expand it with more questions, thinking of coexistence and coevolution as the core of unpredictability, exploring the connections among the elements of the system from different points of view. This unpredictability on the one hand can easily become a struggle,

on the other can be transformed into a source of creativity that happens at *the edge of chaos*.⁶

The edges of chaos, the impure and contaminated zones, are those in which a system processes its strategies for survival, where solutions to problems are found. The peripheral zones of a system are the most mobile and difficult to define, yet they are the regions from which you can see a long way, it is precisely in these peripheries of the system where self-organized and resilient seeds are transformed into fertility, thriving and protecting the center.⁷

I cannot help but perceive myself as part of a community immersed in the current chaos, which means to thrive as a set of interconnected holons, purposely leaving ourselves open in vulnerability and adopting, interchanging, exchanging, providing and most of all: participating. For it might not bring clear answers, but ways of finding common quests.



REFERENCES

1. Petrini, Carlo. 2009. *Terra Madre: Foraging a New Global Network of Sustainable Food Communities*. Slow Food Editore. Italy.
2. Euler, Johannes and Gauditz, Leslie. 2016. *Commons Movements: Self-organised (re) production as a socio-ecological transformation*. <https://www.degrowth.info/en/dim/>. Germany
3. *Rural economies and sustainable development*. Notes by Prof. Saccone Donatella
4. <https://www.ic.org/tomorrow/>
5. Scaffidi, Cinzia. *Integrated systems and linear systems in relationship to different production and distribution models in agriculture*.
6. Scaffidi, Cinzia. 2006. *Complexity, Chaos and Love*. Slow Magazine. Italy.
7. Scaffidi, Cinzia. *Contemporary Issues in Food Studies*. UOC Open University of Catalunya. Spain.