

EXPANDED ABSTRACT

«Democratic Goods» in the Economy for the Common Good: four ways for conceptual delimitation

OBJECTIVE

Through this work, with an introductory intention, we will try to find a line of argument that will serve to delimit conceptually a new economic category that specifically accounts for the ideal management mode for the most indispensable assets as economic rights, within the large type of property known as commons or communal goods. How could we identify such goods? Which guidelines or guiding principles would guide our search? With what terms could we refer to the new category?

APPROACH

The Economy for the Common Good (ECG) was formulated by Felber in 2010. We will develop our proposal within this general theoretical/reflexive framework. After synthesizing their core lines, we analyze their possible repercussions as a model of political economy and pay attention to their role as a vector for domesticating, eroding, and finally transcending the capitalist ways and practices and the serious imbalances it causes. We start from Communities for the Common Good, as civil society entities, that manage a small set of assets in community that assures them resilience: guaranteeing more autonomy, self-sufficiency and own initiative; at the same time as less dependence on other instances like market or State, with their unsecured wages or their subsidies. Resilience truly represents and constitutes the helm in advancing our purpose: communities for the common good must be unequivocally resilient communities.

Common sense quickly gives us the list of indispensable goods, of which we daily face a massive and continuous consumption: housing, food, clothing, mobility and electric and internet access bills. We leave aside common sense pre-notions to proceed, as Bourdieu explains, to the epistemological break with which to be able to achieve them in a more rigorous and scientific way. We propose to approach this rupture through four ways:

1. The sociohistorical way involves a journey through the Humanity's greatest socio-cultural transformations. It is a History of Great Changes within the evolution of human culture, paying attention to the goods that have had a vital and foundational character during the journey, marking each of the moments of transformation (discontinuities) between each historical or cultural continuity and its immediately subsequent. There are four discontinuities we identify as fundamental:

- a) the passage from Paleolithic to Neolithic, with the discovery of agriculture that made possible the first settlements, which we update operationally as homes or housing.
- b) the transition from Neolithic to complex societies (Mesopotamia, Nile Valley, Indus Valley) characterized by the incorporation of irrigation systems that multiplied agricultural production, forcing the need for a graphic system for accounting, which will later become more complex as a writing system.
- c) the passage from complex societies to industrial society. The large quantity and density of energy that allowed the massive and systematic use of fossil fuels and their ability to vectorize themselves to promote mobility play the same role as agriculture, housing and water distribution had played in the two previous discontinuities.
- d) the transition from industrial society to network society. A leap that is marked by the emergence of internet with all its potential in terms of massive intercommunication between peers in the network, revolutionizing the economic modes of production (3D printing) distribution (peer-to-peer) and consumption (collaborative economy).

The goods that have functioned as triggers of these great transformations, properly establishing themselves as the material conditions of possibility of these human realizations, currently provide the material conditions of human subsistence and dignity according to the civilizing paradigm that is taken into account as life context. On them lies resilience of civil society as such; when the communities of which it is composed are empowered with the control, leadership and management of these resources. Putting together all the stages studied we obtain six sectors, which for all above can be called foundational goods: housing, agroecology, water, energy, mobility and the internet.

2. The economic path is another channel towards the new category that we aim to achieve. The broad field of commons -communal assets from ECG's perspective- is already consolidated after Elinor Ostrom's laureate works. We recognize its importance in setting up a format for community ownership. Civil economy and basic needs economy are theories that complete the essential axes to concretize the premises in order to justify the incorporation of civil society in the framework of the economic management modes. They can be called community goods: the assets to be managed through this type of community-based property.

3. The political path begins with the awareness of the scarce institutionalization and functionality of civil society, to which is added the hitherto unknown knowledge of the role of communities in the whole of an Economy for the Common Good, as the subject on whom all possibility and responsibility for social or community resilience lies. When civil society organizes itself for the management of these goods, it elevates itself as the third pillar -along with the market and the State- of social order, expanding the space of political possibilities as it opens the door to governance relations. The main character to be enshrined by the new mode of management for the goods on which human dignity and subsistence depend, and hence its community resilience, is democracy. Now, from this perspective, we can call them democratic goods.

4. The juridical way aims first to raise awareness of the relationship between the list of assets obtained by the development of previous channels of analysis and the realization of human rights, thus pointing to the establishment of economic rights. Secondly, he stresses the importance of extending to the economic order the division principle that separates the fundamental right from the ordinary one in the legal order. In this way, the goods grouped in the previous lines of reasoning could be called as fundamental goods, or rather, by the legal place that would correspond to them, constituent goods.

RESULTS / IMPLICATIONS

Of the four possibilities that we have obtained for its denomination, namely: foundational, communitarian, democratic and constituent, the attribute of "democratic" is the only one that is in permanent revision. At any historical moment, the modes of practical management of assets may undergo changes that enable or improve, for example, collective intelligence flow, due to advances in technology. In that case, the format used for its management should be updated so that it always coincides with the one that offers the highest levels of codecision, democracy and transparency of its time. This need for constant updating is the reason why we are finally inclined to preferentially denominate them as democratic goods, although the other three denominations are perfectly compatible and acceptable.

To facilitate the understanding of the concept, we offer a first formulation of its definition, along with some other important features. Each of Galtung's basic needs –survival, welfare, freedom and identity– suggests a paired function among the goods we have found. The last step (identity) allows the incorporation of health and education, closing the complete scheme of democratic goods with eight sectors, as shown at the end, on the last page.

PRACTICAL CONCLUSIONS AND ORIGINAL VALUE

The Economy for the Common Good contains two nuclei for practical work –communal goods and communities– that allow us to progress substantially towards a new concept for the establishment of economic rights as part of universal rights. Although Felber's manual does not initially envisage a specific structure or function of its own for the communities, nor does it specify a certain format for the management of communal assets, those are, clearly, the active subject that is to manage the minimum package of indispensable goods, which we have called democratic goods. Communal goods provide the type of general management –with a marked non-specific character, as Ostrom argued– that is viable for a community. It is through the most democratic mechanisms, such as self-consumption and cooperation structures oriented to basic needs –democratic goods cooperatives, very similar in their operations to consumers cooperatives– how communities gain resilience.

The substitution of oligopolies by self-organized communities in the most indispensable sectors also offers a landscape of remarkable reduction of the total carbon footprint of our civilization. In the calculation of the economy's decarbonization both direct and indirect effects should be added.

The political and economic repercussions of democratic goods, managed as such, are not restricted to the environment, but rather enter into the already abundant discussion of the inclusion of universal basic income in our economic systems. A kind of management like the one proposed with this new concept immerses us in the possibilities of a basic income in resources, without prejudice to a possible complementation in currency, also softening some of its classic points of friction.

KEYWORDS: Basic human needs, democratic goods, economic rights, urban commons.

1.- Introducción: la Economía del Bien Común como modelo

*A pesar de las dificultades,
a pesar de las señales de horror de nuestra época,
el paraíso está aquí, tan próximo, que nos cuesta percibirlo*

Rolando Toro

De manera equilibrada, en su más reciente artículo, Erik Olin Wright (2015:1) reconoce al capitalismo de nuestras sociedades ciertos elementos de fuerza, como el aumento de la productividad, la innovación tecnológica o la amplia difusión de bienes de consumo, al tiempo que enumera los copiosos daños que ocasiona, entre ellos, la destrucción de los medios de vida para una gran cantidad de personas, la precariedad para la zona inferior del mercado de trabajo o los tediosos y alienantes empleos que ofrece para la mayoría, perpetuando formas innecesarias de sufrimiento humano, por no hablar de la masiva destrucción que ocasiona al medioambiente. Concepciones como *crecimiento ilimitado* o *sociedad de consumo* que anteriormente habían sido asumidos como presupuestos casi incuestionables, hoy se consideran mitos. Y se adentra de inmediato en la búsqueda de tipos alternativos de economía, descubriéndonos cuatro grandes tendencias, con potencial para encaminarnos hacia la superación del modelo capitalista:

- a) *Aplastarlo*, como pretende el socialismo revolucionario, que aprovecha el poder del Estado para destruirlo, tomando a su cargo una planificación para la economía.
- b) *Domesticarlo*, como ha ensayado la socialdemocracia en Europa, tratando de compensar con impuestos sus graves desequilibrios.
- c) *Evitarlo*, escapando de él, como practican quienes se recluyen en micro-sociedades contraculturales o marginales.