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Special Academic Session:

**Re-Embedding the Economy: Convivial Degrowth?**

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**What Kind of Economy in a Convivial Society?**

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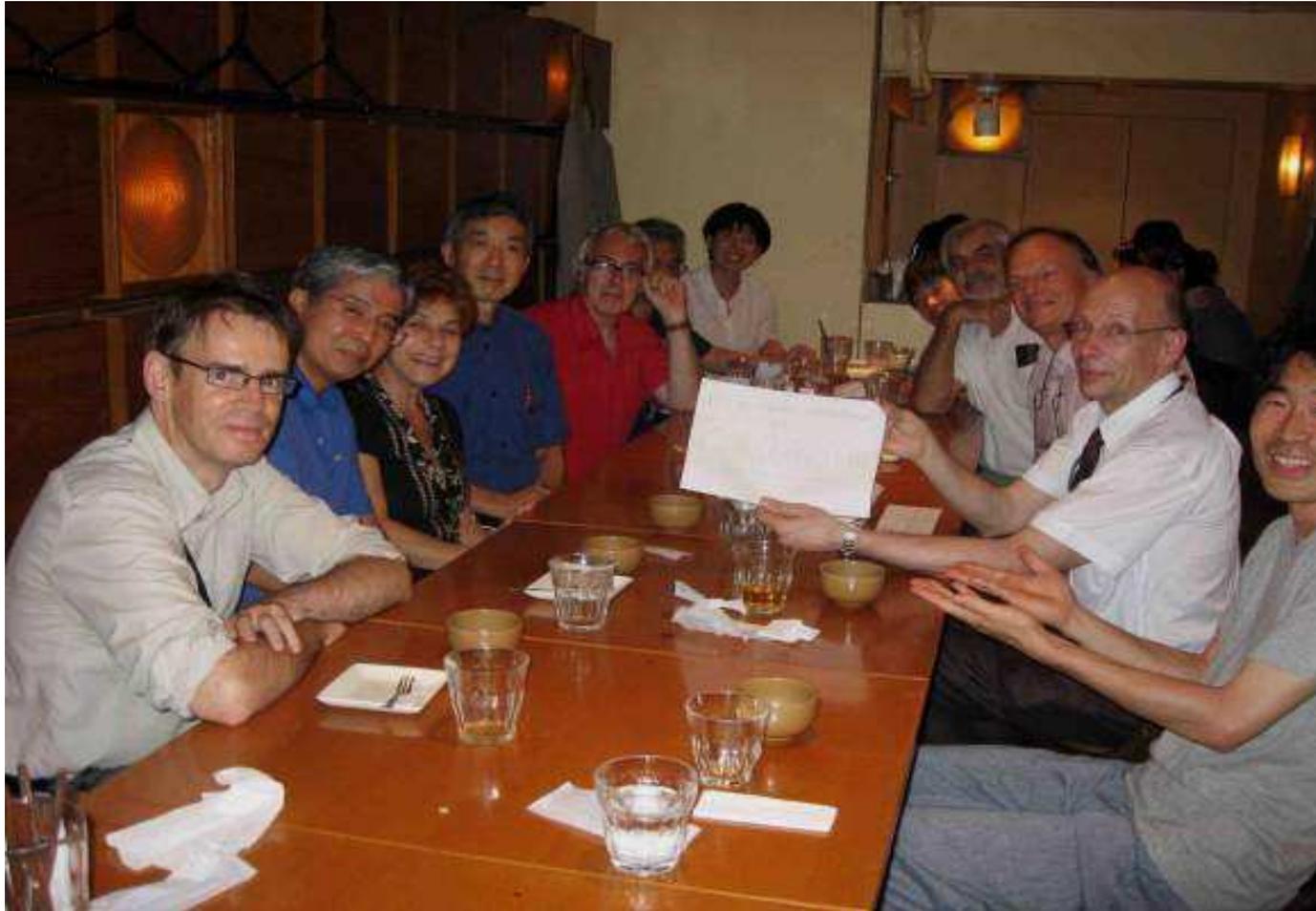
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MH-250- Economy in convivial society-2016

**Corvinus Universtiy - Room 336 - 31 August 2016 – 11h 30**

First let me introduce myself as an academic, activist from time to time,  
involved in a strand of thought,  
that I have contributed to launch in 2010  
around the ideas of conviviality, of convivial society.

These ideas were drawn from a book published by Ivan Illich in 1973  
where he introduced these concepts of conviviality, of convivial tools and that  
of convivial society  
- to which we added the concept of “convivialism”.



Tokyo, 2010- 07- 11, the very first day when the concept of convivialism was born. Some of you may find on the photo a few people they know, as Alain Caillé in a red shirt and in front of him, Serge Latouche in a white shirt. I hand a sheet of paper with the signatures of the co-founders.

Illich published in 1973 a book entitled “Tools for conviviality”

We need not only a theory of the working of convivial tools, in order to maintain the conviviality they are supposed to bring in, but also we need a state of mind, to be willing to promote the use of this kind of tools and to do the necessary research to master them.

In a nutshell, we do need a theoretical and doctrinal basis. To meet that, we pointed out the fundamental importance of four principles – drawn from existing human wisdom - which we have presented in a Convivialist Manifesto.

In the simplest manner, we may say that convivialism is related to conviviality which expresses a way to live altogether in a peaceful ambiance, even in a joyful manner.

It is a civilisation, i.e. *a total culture and way of life* where people are feeling well with themselves, with others and with Nature.

But we think that the present world is far from nice, and that this is the outcome of the cultural hegemon imposed by irrelevant and dangerous theories and doctrines.

Thus, to stand for convivialism is to be involved in the building of “something” radically new...

Convivialism is a “life word”, an attempt to build a world where it is good to work and to live altogether within Nature.

Convivialists have the ambition to bring to reality “the shared insight of people that they would be happier if they could *work* together and *care* for each other” as Illich put it [1973, p.50 ].

There is a gigantic lot of research to do in order to enlighten how a convivial society can work.

Questions as the following ones are of importance.

What is necessary or not as a model of government,  
what is necessary or not as a collective dynamic, narrative, imagination,  
what are the necessary or not guides for personal behaviours,  
what are the necessary or not, changes in the existing structures and  
institutions?

I will try to deal here, with one general perspective raised by the last question, and I will bring only a few simple ideas on that.

Assuming that in a convivial society it will be still necessary to work and to produce and to have a distribution of goods and services, we must find out the kind of economy we need, this is necessary to decide about the change to make in most structures and institutions in which, nowadays, we have to live.

The central point for this perspective is the following.

We have to get out of a situation of centrality of the Economy. A French philosopher (Emmanuel Mounier) expressed this urgent task in 1949 “The primary place of Economy is an historical disorder and we must get rid of it”.

Thus, not only The Economy must be at the service of The Society, but this means too, that the way Economy is working must be consistent with this service. In other words, The Economy must work accordingly to its duty. Let discuss these two imperatives.

They make the two parts for my presentation

**1- The Economy must be at the service of the Society**

**2- The Economy must work accordingly to its duty**

## **1- The Economy must be at the service of the Society**

What does mean to be at the service of the Society?

It means

- (i) that the Economy must meet the Society's expectations and
- (ii) that the Economy must help the Society to pursue its aims.

## **1- The Economy must be at the service of the Society**

(i) The Economy must meet the Society's expectations

To recover a basic autonomy in deciding what Society should do, should produce, should research, should innovate, there must be an Economy that reduces its dependence vis-à-vis the market and its dependence on the use of money.

What really counts for us, for our society? What are the priorities? We cannot let the markets decide.

It depends on the aims the Society wants to pursue.

(ii) The Economy must help the Society to pursue its aims.

The goal of society is to pursue the *Common Good* – singular, which is a different concept than the one used to speak of one among several concrete, *common goods* - plural.

The Common Good is explained in the following terms by Aristotle.

The feeling that we exist is inseparable from the co-existence and from relations of affection and friendship that make it a valuable Common Good.

Our primary task and our ultimate goal is to maintain, to sustain and to improve what constitutes our Common Good.

**How can Economy help the Society to pursue the Common Good?**

A crucial point about changing the role of Economy is that a large number of the common goods, that are all of primary importance to contribute to the Common Good, have become invisible and that there is no one to take care of them.

It is this disappearance that led to a large portion of the social and ecological degradation of our world.

The culprit is the kind of working of the Economy which must be put under critics.

Let me turn to this second imperative.

## **2- The Economy must work accordingly to its duty**

Since a convivial Society has to reduce the place of Market, it must find, for everything out of the market, a different process to organise the allocation of means, the distribution and the sharing of goods and services. We can make towards a solution with the principle of deliberative solidarity.

For the rest, the Market, that will be in operation, must be regulated so that the powers in this battlefield can be countervailed. The main point could be a question of size, that can be seized with a more general principle, that of subsidiarity.

**(i) The principle of deliberative solidarity**

**(ii) The principle of strong subsidiarity**

## **(i) The principle of deliberative solidarity**

The principle of Solidarity is the main barrier to resist the general extension of the Market.

It is still in operation, here and there, thanks to the resilience of the tradition of cooperatives, mutualism, associations.

Past and current experiences of solidarity are embedded in an economy mainly monitored by Markets Law. Thus they hardly keep the bases of their rules of working and despite their ever growing number, they are unable to upset the global evolution. They will deliver their potential when another kind of economy will be settled.

The principle of deliberative -open- solidarity faces a main obstacle to tackle with before it can be implemented largely : the size of the Tools that must be operated.

## **(ii) The principle of strong subsidiarity**

The principle of subsidiarity is a principle to limit and to regulate the size of tools, the size of enterprises and the size of institutions as well.

“Tool” must be understood with the general meaning given by Illich in his book which title is “Tools for conviviality”. A Tool is any device operated by Society to do something.

Illich claims that a Tool, beyond a certain threshold, from being a servant is becoming a despot.

It is clear that it is necessary to downsize a lot of Institutions and Enterprises.

We must focus also, for the economy, on short circuits.

This imposes to relocate production avoiding unnecessary national and international trade, we must flush away the non-sense of big banks as well as big firms, and take care of Nature.

We must focus in organising our lives, caring for each of us, which is not possible in too large communities; this leads to questions that are beyond the topic of this presentation, despite its link to the strong subsidiarity principle.

If we want to save our humanity, we cannot escape from what Illich pointed out (p. 107):

“The only response to this crisis is a full recognition of its depth and an acceptance of **inevitable self-limitations**”

These general guidelines I have proposed here to the discussion should help to design the outlines of what must be an Economy which is put at the service of a convivial society and which keeps working accordingly to its duty.

However, this is not time to conclude with a ready-to-use convivial economic model, at least not yet.

De Growth followers, activists, and academics are welcome and invited in the convivialist debate. I am sure that a lot of targeted research by De-Growth academics and also by academics involved in so many out-of-doxa fields, are of interest to help building a convivial society for the sake of humanity.

Provided that the bulk of their research be consistent with the idea that it is compulsory to avoid that Economy take a central place in the working of our societies.

Thank you for your attention!

## The four principles of the Convivialist Manifesto

### ***The principle of common humanity***

The Manifesto reads “the principle of common humanity”. Humanity is what we have all in common, but beyond that, we share also the lot of all that is around us in the universe: living creatures, the biosphere and the cosmos. This is in fact a *principle of common destiny* for anyone living within this common universe.

### ***The principle of common sociality***

“Human beings are social beings and their greatest wealth lies in their social relationships” [2014, p.31].

### ***The principle of individuation: individuals blossom by interdependence.***

“Always bearing in mind these two first principles, a legitimate politics is one that allows each of us to assert our distinctive evolving individuality as fully as possible by developing our *capabilities*, our potential to be and to act without harming others’ potential to do the same, with a view to achieving *equal freedom for all.*” [2014, p. 31].

### ***The principle of managed conflict or creative interdependence***

“Given that each of us has the power to express our distinctive individuality, it is natural that human beings should sometimes oppose one another. But it is only legitimate for them to do so as long as this does not jeopardize the framework of common sociality that ensures this rivalry is productive and non-destructive. *Good politics* is therefore politics that allows human beings to be individual by accepting and managing conflict” [2014, p. 31].