

Redefining sustainability, resilience and Buen Vivir in a Social Knowledge economy context: The Ecuador experiment

The global context

Sustainability and resilience of human societies and ecosystems are the result of the complex relationships, in ways that strive towards an ever changing equilibrium through constant adaptation to changes in the environment. When one condition in the environment changes and affects one structure, dependent structures must adapt accordingly, achieving a new state of balance, producing a new balanced whole. If an imbalanced situation persists, then this may end up in various types of environmental, social and political crises, in some cases leading to collapse. *Sustainability*, a relative, normative, dynamic and contestable, rather overused and heavily discussed term, is being approached through many different disciplines and in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework (Birkeland 2002; Norton 2005; Edwards 2010). Sustainability indicates the capacity of being maintained in existence without interruption or diminution. *Resilience*, a term which indicates the capacity of a system to tolerate disturbances while maintaining its structure and function, has become a critical scientific term in various fields such as economics, ecology, psychology, sociology, risk management, etc (Fiksel 2006; Hopkins 2008). *Systems* and *Complexity* theories help to conceptualize the ways that buildings, communities and cities work. They are all composed of elements, have interconnections and a function or purpose, those characteristics which serve for identifying systems. (Bossel 2007; Meadows 2008). In order to better understand cities and the components that cities are made of, (buildings, infrastructure, information flows, signs, goods, etc. as well as environments in their interdependent complexity) it is useful to perceive them as systems. Human societies, especially in urban formations, may be viewed as *Complex Adaptive Systems* exhibiting self-organization, emergence, relationships, feedback, adaptability and non-linearity affected by positive and negative feedback loops and co-evolving with their environment. They may also be perceived as *Viable System Models*, capable of independent existence, maintaining their identity, while remaining in touch with, and adapting to a continuously changing environment (Espinosa 2011; Miller and Page 2007). Most theories and concepts relating to sustainability and resilience in the west, tend to overlook the political, as if in a historical vacuum with the exception of political ecology. From a Latin American perspective current theories treating definitions and strategies for sustainability and resilience, offer a useful framework, yet, they appear to inadvertently bear the birthmarks of their origins, in need to be contextualized. *Permaculture* for instance, hails from the Australian vastness of the land and *Degrowth* expresses best perhaps the de-industrialization that European states experience during the past decades (Latouche 2010).

The Latin American paradigm

The Latin American experience significantly differs from other continents. Universal concepts of sustainability and resilience bear a special significance here. In Latin American countries and in Ecuador in particular, resilience has a special meaning and resonates in a much more profound way which is connected to the recent and distant history, to the indigenous cultures and to the *political*. Latin America offers an exciting alternative perspective today, which introduces such concepts as '*buen vivir*', the '*inalienable rights of mother nature*', *Pachamama* and the indigenous wisdom. (Ramírez 2011; Harvey 2012; Acosta 2013). Many of these concepts have been embraced by constitutional reforms, (Ecuador, 2008 and Bolivia, 2009). Furthermore, world class research, conducted in countries such as Chile (Maturana 1980; Beer 1985) and more recently in Colombia, (Espinosa 2011) is beginning to set a tradition of thought worthy of closer inspection.

The Ecuadorian context

A favorable political and social climate currently allows Ecuador to attempt visualizing radical changes in its economic matrix. *Plan Nacional Buen Vivir* of Ecuador (2013-2017) places special emphasis on sustainability at all levels, as expressed in the twelve National Objectives for Good Living, including the Guarantee of the Rights of Nature and the Promotion of a Healthy and Sustainable Environment: social, environmental and financial. (86-430 and Objective 4). Research undertaken by FLOK Society, (Free, Libre, Open Knowledge Society) in Ecuador is an experiment of global significance which addresses a restructuring of the economy of Ecuador towards a *Social Knowledge Economy*, promoting *P2P production* and the commons. This is being implemented through a process which involves the creation of a research team comprising of experts in the fields of collaborative economy, P2P production and sustainability, internet trends and the commons, collecting information through research and through an open call, from best examples worldwide and within the territory and the experience of Ecuador. A branch of FLOK Society's research (Stream 5), introduces theories of sustainability and resilience and degrowth is understood as a tool towards sustainability. Securing and promoting urban and rural sustainability and resilience, healthy ecosystems and vibrant local communities, cultures and economies against an otherwise volatile global environment, is a major challenge, given the interdependence of economies and bioregions. Research being undertaken in Ecuador (in collaboration with FLOK Society and as an independent researcher), examines strategies of securing and promoting urban and rural sustainability and resilience, healthy ecosystems and vibrant local communities, cultures and economies against an otherwise volatile global environment. It also searches for the conditions needed within a commons-based and cooperative economy framework, explored by FLOK Society and the *Buen Vivir* principles for the development of resilience and effective defence mechanisms, in the context of Ecuador.

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