Why a Virtual Model of an Ideal Sustainable Society?

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Despite the invaluable work being done by thousands of environmental activists around the world, the bulk of the world's population is not aware that humanity is advancing inexorably towards its destruction, either by an environmental collapse generated by the occupation, exhaustion and contamination of the natural spaces and resources, or by wars. Unfortunately, the vast majority of citizens are victims of an incessant brainwashing campaign aimed at creating avid consumers in favor of a praised economic growth. Ecology and sustainability seem to be for them nothing more than a fad.

Is there a different strategy, complementary to those that environmental activists carry out, that could lead mass amounts of citizens to finally open their eyes and change the ominous future that awaits our species? I think so.

It has been demonstrated that people assimilate messages better through images. Researchers from the University of Waterloo, Canada (Wammes, Meade and Fernandes, 2016) proved with experimentation in 2016, that drawn information is better memorized than written information. "A picture is worth a thousand words" the saying goes. It has also been shown that the development of virtual or scale models assist the public in understanding architects' and industrial designers' creations better.

Therefore, why not design a virtual (or scale) model of a society depicting citizens who can achieve a state of well-being equal to or superior to that obtained by the citizens

of the so-called developed nations, a society that does not compromise the preservation of the environment nor foster human conflict?

A prototype, like the one I propose, would consist of a self-sufficient and sustainable city-state, presented in the form of a movie or TV series with real or animated actors, and complemented by mock-ups and theme parks alluding to its characteristics.

Designing a society with these features is a monumental task. We must dispense the contaminating and traditional waste disposal techniques and material resources that have become an important part of our daily lives, such as fuels, plastics and chemicals derived from petroleum as well as atomic energy. Most importantly, to avoid the collapse of humanity, we have to radically change our way of thinking and open our mind to effective long-term solutions, different from the half-hearted ones usually offered.

Some of the following characteristics should be present in a model society:

- Community property. The means of mass production of goods and services would be community property (never an almighty state's property) of all its citizens. This would allow society to produce according to the real needs of its people and, in no way, based on the profit motive of a private owner. Some consequences of this would be the limitation on economic growth dependent on the tolerance of the environment, and the end of the alienating advertising campaigns issued by mass media whose function would be solely to educate and entertain.
- Accepted family planning. In a model society, population control and choice around fertility would not be taboo. Families would have complete freedom to voluntarily use all available contraception methods and sufficient education would be readily available to assist everyone in understanding the consequences of their use.
- More efficient ways of handling the remains of the deceased. In our model society, the mortal remains of the deceased ones would not continue to be buried or cremated with methods that occupy and contaminate large amounts of land and pollute the air. Instead, those remnants would be treated with sustainable techniques (that turn them into sterile and eco-friendly compounds) such as alkaline hydrolysis and freezing with liquid nitrogen, and kept at home in recyclable or biodegradable coffins or returned to nature to give life to plants.
- All education would be free. We should not risk losing the talent of potential excellent professionals who can't afford to study, constituting a possible intolerable waste of human resources.
- Free health and justice services for all. As a simple humanitarian action, no city resident should have to pay for health and justice services.

- Increased ability for citizens to dismiss public officials. All voting age citizens, through a majority vote, would have the power to dismiss any public official, at any time during his or her term in office. The bureaucrats would be mere representatives of the people, the true repository of the power. This method would force officials to do their best at all times, because people would be able to dismiss them at any time before the formal elections. It would be done via an electronic vote.
- All inhabitants of the city would have an equal treatment to each other. Veneration is a domination technique that makes people submissive to authority; therefore there would be no reverential treatment for any official or citizen in general. This behavior would be the result of an intensive formal and informal education process that would help people understand that equal treatment to each other increases self-esteem and prevents abuse of power, whether this comes from parents or any other person with authority. Of course, a respectful treatment to each other would be strongly encouraged at the same time, because that is the mark of civilized persons. All the reverential titles such as "your highness", "your sanctity", "your honor", "your excellence" and so on, would not be used anymore. In a more advanced stage of that future society, even the titles of "Sir" and "Mrs." would cease to be used, and everybody would call each other by their first names.
- An education system that teaches and promotes logical and scientific thinking. Religion and practices that promote hatred, violence and discrimination would continue to be debated through the freedoms of thought and speech granted by the irrefutable rights of citizens. However, scientific thinking would be encouraged as a source of truth, accompanied by a moral and civic education that instills the positive values which identify 'good' citizens.

Carrying out the design of a sustainable virtual society with the proposed characteristics requires the assistance of numerous professionals of all specialties gathered with a common objective.

I repeat, it is a titanic task, not only because it implies a substantial change in the way we use our natural resources, but mainly because it involves opposing a system of economic, political and religious manipulation that has been entrenched for centuries in the minds of people, forming part of their cultural heritage, but which inevitably will lead us to catastrophe.

Who dares to undertake a duty like that to protect the future of our children and grandchildren?

I dare.

P.S. Given the critical situation my native country Venezuela, a materially rich nation whose inhabitants suffer from famine, lack of medicines, repression and blackouts (like the 96 hours one that affected us a few days ago), is facing nowadays, I am totally convinced that the so-called developed countries are more prepared to cope with the global challenges successfully. They put emphasis on scientific knowledge, freedoms in general, and have respect for rules and meritocracy, which are essential ingredients to build the sustainable world of the future. Unfortunately, the so-called Third World Nations, specifically the Latin-American ones, including Venezuela, have a longer way to go.They are victims of their history. A past which goes back to the moment they were colonized, mostly by European barbarians that took by force the native women, later enslaved women from Africa and engendered children to whom they transmitted their uncivilized way of life and so on until our days. If we add to that the ancient superstitions and the religious dogmas that were instilled in them later the outcome is the ignorance, corruption, negligence, fear and authoritarianism that characterize these nations. This moves them further away from the path of what a modern sustainable society should be. I am proud of the many brilliant Latin Americans who have shown their talents around the world, but I regret that they are a minority.

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César Valdivieso lives in Venezuela and is a retired English teacher. He has a strong vocation to unravel the mysteries of human happiness to which he has devoted himself to for decades with a totally open mind. He as arrived at the conclusion that while the meaning of the existence to individuals is the pursuit of contentment, in order to achieve an acceptable and sustainable degree of well-being it will be necessary to correct the many defects humans have evolved with. Currently, he promotes the idea of creating virtual models of ideal societies to serve as examples of how humans can change their mentality to overcome ignorance and individualism to achieve sustainability, while still being happy!

The MAHB Blog is a venture of the Millennium Alliance for Humanity and the Biosphere. Questions should be directed to joan@mahbonline.org