

The Anarchist Library  
Anti-Copyright



# The Communard Manifesto

Las Indias Cooperative Group

Las Indias Cooperative Group  
The Communard Manifesto  
9 May 2016

Retrieved on 11 July 2017 from  
<https://lasindias.blog/the-communard-manifesto-html>

[theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)

9 May 2016



- Ask for a room at the library or cultural center in your neighborhood, and invite your friends and acquaintances over the net. Put up posters on bulletin boards at the same library and other places you may know where interested people may pass by.

## Prepare to “make community”

In the “las Indias Club“, you’ll find events and activities throughout the year that you can participate in. There are cultural and social activities: from poetic soirees and historical expositions to projects in free software, P2P production, and the direct economy. Also, once a year, in the second week of October, we organize an international conference in which we interview and learn from people from across the world who have created or implemented all kinds of projects with small scale and large scope: energy cooperatives, hardware products, agricultural egalitarian communities...

We have also a space for permanent conversation, “La Matriz“, which we invite you to join, and which is fed by posts from our blog and the blogs of a good part of the members of the “las Indias Club”.

And, of course, there are hundreds of egalitarian communities throughout the world, including ours, that await your visit with open doors. Write us and share your concerns and ideas with us.

# Contents

<b>The dilemma of our time</b>	<b>6</b>
Abundance within reach . . . . .	6
Inequality, unemployment and demoralization . . .	7
What is decomposing is not only the economic system, but what the human experience means .	8
<b>Capitalism and its critics</b>	<b>10</b>
Capitalism shaped the world because, before changing the State, it was able to create a new form of human experience . . . . .	10
Revolutionaries that loved crises and large scales . .	12
<b>La historia que no nos contaron</b>	<b>15</b>
The new world will be born and affirmed inside the old	15
New relationships, here and now . . . . .	16
<b>Scale and scope</b>	<b>19</b>
From the era of economies of scale... . . . . .	19
...to the era of the inefficiencies of scale . . . . .	21
Today, capital is too big for the real productive scale...	23
... and the optimal scale is approaching community dimensions . . . . .	25
<b>Building abundance here and now</b>	<b>27</b>
Abundance has to do with production, not with consumption . . . . .	27
A scarce product in a decentralized network is abundant in a distributed network . . . . .	28

The “P2P mode of production” is the model for the production of abundance . . . . .	29
The two faces of productivity . . . . .	31
Artificially creating scarcity has become a way of life for over-scaled industry . . . . .	33
Abundance is the magic that shines through the “hacker ethic” . . . . .	34
El camino de la abundancia no pasa por producir menos	35
What will we do about the overuse of natural resources? . . . . .	37
Connecting the dots . . . . .	38
<b>Conquer work, reconquer life</b>	<b>40</b>
To be unable to access work is to be in social exile .	40
There’s no self-realization without work . . . . .	42
To conquer work is reconquer life . . . . .	43
<b>From adding to multiplying</b>	<b>45</b>
The scene will be urban . . . . .	45
The tasks of the communards . . . . .	47
You are the protagonist . . . . .	47
<b>Appendix: concrete things you can do with this manifesto</b>	<b>49</b>
Expand the conversation . . . . .	49
Prepare to “make community” . . . . .	50

## Appendix: concrete things you can do with this manifesto

If you’ve found ideas in the preceding paragraphs that agree with your state of being in the world and your understanding of relations with others, there are many things you can do, starting now. You don’t have to immediately leave everything behind and organize an egalitarian community, it’s more about using this Manifesto for what it’s intended to be: a tool to empower you and your community.

### Expand the conversation

- Do you have a blog? Publicize your reading notes and the opinions you’ve formed. Don’t forget to link to <https://lasindias.blog/the-communard-manifesto> so your readers can access the complete text in the format they prefer.
- Publish a link to this manifesto in social media wherever you have an account.
- Email the PDF version to people you usually discuss social and economic matters with, and the EPUB version to people who normally read electronic books or on a smartphone, who will appreciate it more than the PDF.
- You can organize a presentation of the Manifesto. If you write us an email, we’ll be able to send you copies on paper, and we’ll do everything possible so that at least one of us can accompany you at the presentation.

You're not alone. Thousands of people joined communard initiatives throughout the world over the last year: egalitarian communities, kibbutzim, cooperatives that unite work and housing... Not too far from you, there's a community already underway. You can participate in its activities, collaborate in its development projects, or join it as another communard. With other enthusiasts, you'll build productive urban communities that are able to create effective abundance in their settings, which is to say, to compete with the market.

You'll be the leader of an adventure that will demand—as it did of the generations of communards who preceded us in centuries past—effort and commitment in exchange for making life useful and significant. But in contrast with those generations of pioneers, who lived in an era in which abundance remained out of reach, you can aspire to something more than living better. Today, it's our turn to demonstrate that the best life serves to create abundance for everyone, and is already preparing to be able to offer a place and a meaning to everyone.

Las Indias, May ninth, 2016

Translation to English by Level Translation

To the friends in the Club de las Indias,  
because we owe them the most valuable half of this manifesto.

To the communards of all times,  
because their mistakes left us with the right questions.

To the new communards across the whole world,  
because their enthusiasm brings us closer to the spirit of a  
time to come.

# The dilemma of our time

## Abundance within reach

Never before in History of humanity have technical capacities been as potent and accessible to common people as today. The massive development of the Internet through the '90s profoundly changed ways of socializing, sharing, and working. Wealth was created in places that were socially and geographically peripheral by the hands of millions of small producers that, for the first time, could effectively access other markets and knowledge. In Asia alone, we saw hundreds of millions of people escape misery, more than in the rest of the history of humanity.

As technological change became generational and social change, there appeared more and more environments of abundance, free goods, new forms of collaborative work and, above all, a new work ethic based on knowledge, the creation of goods, and “de-alienation.” The “hacker ethic,” as it was termed at the turn of the century, inspired the birth of first universal public good to be intentionally constructed by our species: free software, which, by itself, has meant a transfer of knowledge and technology greater than all developmental aid from rich countries.

And, yet, not even the other great crisis of the last hundred years—the one that started with the “Crash of '29”—created such discontent, such a dark spirit, and so much widespread pessimism. Neither admonitions nor hope work any longer to create attractive narratives. Well-being has ceased to be a credible expectation of analysts' predictions or political parties' op-

plication of knowledge is closest to production. And generally, the setting for that is the city.

## The tasks of the communards

Egalitarian communities should undertake a path that allows them to go from the current model, based on the resistance and resilience of the “small community,” to another that starts from a large network of egalitarian and productive communities. We must feed the new sprouts, which are capable of maintaining themselves in the market, and at the same time, create more spaces of abundance and decommodification. Additionally, we need to take decommodification beyond our interior, and make it permeate all our surroundings. It's time to begin the competition between systems.

A time is coming when we will have to learn to grow in many new ways: incorporating new members, incubating communities, teaching community techniques in neighborhoods, or creating popular universities of a new kind, that give tools for multispecialization.

We have to confront a gigantic problem created by over-scaling—from smallness, with smallness, and step by step. We have to use diversity and abundance to break out of the traps that a culture in decomposition tends to constantly fall into, which magnify defeatism, pessimism, and the idea of “every man for himself”. It's not going to be a stroll through a rose garden, and we're certainly not going to be able to make headway without encountering serious resistance.

## You are the protagonist

Imagine yourself as a new kind of pioneer, as the leader of a large collective adventure.

tial to communitarian approaches. However, in Kassel, Washington, Nazareth, or Madrid, the new comunards no longer buy fields to work. They buy apartments, offices, and shops. They're building autonomy for a new generation of communities in sectors based on knowledge and in urban settings. Their range is expanding more and more: intelligence and data, training, specialized hardware, free software, restoration, cultural objects, ecological products... These are all services and products created on a small scale but with large scope, which are focused on the direct economy as a form of relationship with the market.

Since the middle of the nineteenth century, communitarianism has survived because it was able to demonstrate how egalitarianism and idealism pay. In this last decade, it has grown globally because it learned how to add. It learned to add very diverse people and build a life experience, a glimpse of abundance in daily life, that many already openly call "post-capitalist." Now our challenge is learning to multiply. We know how to offer an alternative, the "conquest of work," to the generation exiled from the productive system by the crisis.

And that challenge will be faced, above all, in cities, among other things because, from the point of view of the human experience, the relationship with nature is measured by the ability to transform our productive activities. A software developer today has a more intense relationship with nature than a medieval peasant ever had.

It's true that this relationship remains hidden from participants in most overscaled industries, where deliberation is replaced by sets of rules, practices, and "procedures"; where reflection on the best objective is substituted by decisions on the best method, and the coordination of wills is substituted by checklists and task-completion oversight. But in community, purposes and tools are part of a design and knowledge that everyone is aware of and agrees to. And above all, the position of advancing abundance, the front line, is wherever the direct ap-

tions, whether old or new. All lines of contention have been shown to be futile for the common people. We're entering a time in which no narrative can be believed if can't demonstrate, here and now, that it successfully allows a new generation to develop and live decently through work.

## **Inequality, unemployment and demoralization**

And, if anything has been really global over the last ten years, it's been the experience of social decomposition. It's the same whether we look in the most developed regions in the world or at emerging nations, in the Mediterranean or in the South China Sea, in the English-speaking world or in South America: society is more and more unequal, and the differences quickly become cumulative. If you miss the train, you don't reach the destination.

In the most developed nations, the middle class has rediscovered unemployment. New generations don't even have access to work, or if they do, it's so precarious that it doesn't let them experience the meaning real of what they do. Work has ceased to be considered the center of collective action, the origin of personal autonomy, and each person's contribution to society. In today's popular culture, work is a scarce good. There's no lack of start-ups and NGOs that speculate with it, as if it was a precious metal. Work, the necessary link between personal effort and collective effort, is devalued to the limit, not only in the market—reducing its piece of the pie compared to capital—but also morally, in its public consideration and in its internal organization. It has gone from being universally considered the center of social organization to being perceived as facing extinction, from being experienced as the basis of personal realization to being seen as a source of anguish.

In a world where being able to contribute to the common well-being, work is talked about as if it was a privilege, and the only way of building a life seems to be getting rents. Rents are not just any income, but an opportunistic and undeserved position, an extraordinary benefit produced outside of the value that one contributes. Rents are the benefits created by big businesses thanks to made-to-fit regulations or monopolies that only exist by legal imposition, like intellectual property. Rents are “incentives” that are decided on and inflated by the same directors that receive them, or the consequences in cold, hard cash of belonging to certain social spheres where certain positions and contracts, public or private, can be accessed. Rents easily become cumulative and create a spiral of inequality when access to information and education depends on personal income, or when competition to assure them is systematically restricted, as the State routinely does in key sectors like energy, telecommunications or the media.

In a world of rents, everything looks like a zero-sum game, where one wins because others lose. Distrust of everything and everyone, institutions and people, is the norm. It shows an individualism of the worst kind, for which life is senseless, and mere survival.

## **What is decomposing is not only the economic system, but what the human experience means**

It's not just social cohesion that's decomposing. The rules of the economic system are decomposing, and with them, the human experience and what it means to be human in our time. It's the inability of the economic system to create a future for everyone that produces loneliness and distrust of everyone; it's the pettiness of a system in which businesses depend on the benefits they get thanks to rents more than selling their

## **From adding to multiplying**

Communitarianism has no paradise to sell, and does not spout admonitions or threaten skeptics with a catastrophic future. “To reconquer work”—for and with one's own inner circle—is a path that will surely interest many people who propose a rebirth in the midst of the crisis, perhaps without knowing that what they are doing, with their community and its affections, would ensure the rebirth of an entire world.

The time has come to carry out what the bourgeoisie was able to do to overcome feudalism: turn the expulsion from work created by the system into an alternative society. The medieval bourgeoisie grew its first cities with servants who had escaped from bondage to their lord's land and joined the first small commercial societies. The new egalitarian communities had to expand with those expelled from the productive system to give rise to the first transnational networks of communities oriented towards abundance. This is an alternative world beyond the borders of command pyramids and the law of the jungle that we experience in so many companies, and also beyond the omnipresence of commodification and the alienation of labor, a world where “everyone shares everything” through communal ownership and savings, and “everyone receives according to their need”.

## **The scene will be urban**

The community experience has historically been centered in rural areas. Rural settlements provide a space for a direct relationship between work and nature which continues to be essen-



in the fraternity of learning, to be rediscovered as valuable and valued in shared work. To be a communitarian is to put the values we believe in into action, not compete to shout them the loudest or wield them like a menacing weapon. To be a communitarian does not give the static tranquility of the yogi or the mystic who seeks the silence of loneliness, but the serenity that listens to and seeks to include others, without using outrage as an excuse to do nothing or hiding behind the disdain of supposed superiority. To be a communitarian is a way of living, learning, and building by sharing it all with others.

We need grow with others to be able to reconquer real life. Every “individual escape” is no more than a form of “every man for himself.” Of course, when you find yourself in decomposition, you can try to accumulate a little money, find a house far away from everything, and live without knowing anything about anyone; or land a stable but low-paying job, interact as little as possible in it, and relegate life to what’s left of the day after work hours. But these strategies aren’t really satisfactory, they’re just different ways of beating a more or less orderly retreat. In the medium term, they’re a way to condemn yourself to melancholy. Isolating yourself, marginalizing yourself, even if it means living without constantly prioritizing financial survival, would mean renouncing growth, development, and carrying out personal ideals in life. It’s another form of exile.

So, existing egalitarian communities should open themselves up and become a launching point for the experience of a new generation. To be empowered is to also discover through practice that in a community, troubles, annoying as they may be, are muffled rather than being upsetting, and joys and victories have echoes that are impossible to hear alone.

products, or on eliminating competitors more than improve themselves, that produces lives of dependency, begging, and voracity.

Never has there been so much wealth or so much knowledge as now and, yet, far from feeling like both things give hope of abundance for everyone, more and more people are afraid that this is a threat to Nature, the same way they feel, day in and day out, like it’s a threat to personal survival.

## Capitalism and its critics

There were a time when capitalism transformed the world, bringing our species closer to the abundance that, today, scares it so much. The “cancer of business” took over from the old European societies, feudal first and colonial centuries later, and smashed them from within in a long process of almost six hundred years. Capitalism, which started off as marginal—urban in a rural world, dynamic in a traditional society, equalizing in a system in which identity was based on lineage and origin—was revolutionary right from its first steps. In the city and its markets, it created new lifestyles and mentalities, new forms of knowledge, new freedoms, and new collective belongings.

### **Capitalism shaped the world because, before changing the State, it was able to create a new form of human experience**

Capitalism created a new form of human experience and, by doing so, dynamited established relationships, its castes and its classes. It wasn't the work of a generation. It could only deploy its full potential after centuries of evolution and entrenchment, of turning fairs—temporary markets—into a large, permanent urban workshop and, later, turning the guild craftsman into a factory worker under the thumb of the merchant investor, who bought the materials and carried the products to distant markets. It was only then that industrialization made a profound social transformation out of what, until then, had only

## To conquer work is reconquer life

Taking the things that fear and insecurity would have us think are impossible and making them visible is the first way to empower those who have been exiled from work and deprived of its meaning, which will encourage them to take responsibility for their own communities. The generation that was expelled from the productive system is called to conquer work and, with it, life.

Abundance is the goal we move towards with the development of knowledge in our species. It's not just a question of numbers, math, or accounting, but also of ethics, desires, feelings, and aesthetics. We create technology, and it, in turn, transforms us, transforms what it means to be human in the new time that we ourselves have established. And from there, we can imagine and build abundance with renewed strength.

The time has come to take the initiative, to begin to build egalitarian and productive communities, and not as experiments or “islands” in a ocean of large scales. In the beginning, they will only be “examples.” But examples, accompanied by the idea that emulation is possible, are more powerful than any form of propaganda.

The communal alternative does not provide the gregarious confidence of the political hooligan or the empty pride of the racist. Belonging to a community is recognition through work and learning, not an “essence” inherited from national culture or birth, or the result of insubstantial adherence or an ID card. It's not the product of the permanent imagination of confrontation with some universal evil. You are building constantly with others, making things so we can all grow together, sharing more and more responsibility, and giving and receiving trust. It's the opposite of the feeling of impunity that “frees” the “follower” who is protected by a leader, a flag, or a political brand in the din of street fighting, online bickering, or media “smack-downs.” To be a communard is to gain autonomy and security

## There's no self-realization without work

And, precisely because of that, the old communitarian slogan of the “conquest of work” is more current than ever. “Conquering work,” recovering it as central to society by way of the community, leading it and creating it, is the only thing that can turn back the drift towards the void of the consumerist narrative, the rejection of differences, xenophobia, and the thousand and one nationalisms that arise, seeking to create even more borders and rents. It's the only thing that can recreate meaning and allow for self-knowledge and self-realization, which is to say, each person living their own values. So, work has an inevitable moral dimension, and that's why conquering work has the value of regeneration, of true personal re-empowerment for a whole generation and a great mass of people, which political activism or conformity will never be able to offer.

Never have technology and knowledge allowed so much well-being to be produced at scales as small as today. Never has it been so easy to become protagonists of production and of the construction of our surroundings; never have available technologies incorporated or developed as much knowledge as in our day; never have productive processes been as transparent about their relationship with their surroundings with so much facility and such impressive scope as today. And yet, despite it all, rarely before has the spirit of time been as disconnected from the possibilities of the historical moment. The cause is, once more, the impact moral of decomposition and unemployment. Unemployment is the expression of the destruction of productive capacity. In economic terms, it's the worst form of waste, the bloodiest of inefficiencies. And the effect on the mood of anyone who suffers it is a like millstone around the neck, or an acid that destroys self-confidence, security, and conviction about their potential to create. Unemployment feeds fear, and fear paralyzes and blinds.

been “tendencies.” It was the great revolutionary moment of the bourgeoisie.

In the first place, capitalism made a commodity of land, the principle means of production of the times. In the process, the agrarian and forest commons—the oldest and most widespread form of property—came to occupy a marginal place. And, with it, the real community of the family, the clan or the village, in which everyone knows each other by face and name, because they are linked to them by interpersonal relationships and affection. The vacuum was filled throughout the nineteenth century by another innovation: the imagined community of the nation. “Imagined” not because it was unreal, but because those who are considered its members don't know more than a tiny portion of the others, and have to imagine the rest through common attributes, practices, values, and memories, which are always debatable. Fraternity based on the friendship of personal relationships and shared work will give way to an abstract fraternity in search of a “common good” that the new social classes linked to wage labor make a permanent part of social discourse.

Secondly, work became indistinguishable from whoever did it, because of the homogenization of the processes in the new productive space of society: the factory. The new relationship with work and, through it, with society and nature, was impersonal and anonymous, and no longer had to do with “being,” with lineage, or with geography. The vacuum created by the dilution of the servant, the communard and the guild craftsman was filled by a new abstract human type: the “individual.”

Although it may sound strange today, that whole advance—which allowed humanity to grow in number, well-being, and knowledge like never before—was produced thanks to making a commodity of everything that, until then, had not been, like land, which hadn't usually been rented or sold, only possessed.

Even for the revolutionaries of the nineteenth century, it was impossible to deny the progressive nature of the great

works of capitalism. They were well aware of how the industrial boom brought Humanity towards abundance, increasing knowledge and its practical consequence, technology. They were witnesses of the formidable historical spectacle of a world in revolution where distances were cut, the population multiplied, energy and water flowed in people's houses for the first time, and the most distant and closed empires saw their walls give way before the onslaught of global commerce in manufacturing. For the first time in history, humanity as such took on a real existence: through new markets, we would all end up connected with everyone throughout the world; and in the factory, the immense majority of society would share a common experience—and therefore, would come to be the same thing—to the rhythm of the new mechanical geniuses. Capitalism, as they saw it, was preparing an egalitarian society through equality of living conditions, work, and social relationships that that it was, itself, expanding.

## **Revolutionaries that loved crises and large scales**

But those revolutionaries saw something more: the growth of capitalism, in the first place, wasn't the least bit linear. Its crises, like all prior crises, produced underconsumption (scandalous, miserable situations for those excluded from production). But, in contrast to the crises of agrarian societies, capitalist crises weren't crises of under-production, but of "over-production": it's not that the factories couldn't produce enough for the needs of all, it's that the very dynamic of the economic system made it impossible for them to sell it to the great masses that needed it, because they didn't have the money to buy what was produced. Additionally, the revolutionaries asserted that all this happened regularly, in cycles in which each decline necessarily led to a confrontation between an ever-more concen-

call young people who went to work in other places around the world "exiles." Meanwhile, according to official statistics, 40% of those who remained were unemployed. These were the true exiles: they were separated from productive life, separated from collaboration and from doing things socially, and separated from a relationship with nature.

The entire life of those who tried to enter the labor market at the beginning of the crisis is an anomaly. By being alien to the very reality they were part of, they became spectators, even of themselves; once, people used cell phones in demonstrations, and now they use cameras. The separation of work soon became evident in the emergence of (anti-)consumerist narratives; consumption—the only way they can participate in an economy that's alien to them—became, for many, the explanation for the whole social system and its failures. One of the ways of expressing that general alienation was substituting the traditional centrality of the demand for access to work with the demand for a rent guaranteed by the State.

To live outside the social space created by work is to go into social exile, to lose or never have had the position of a real member of a community: to not be among those who turn work into wealth, but among those who depend on rents.

Everything that has defined this crisis has trapped those who reached adulthood with it as permanent minors. Everything led to their solitary confinement as individual-consumer. That isolation is necessarily frustrating. It's alienation that is felt as such, as meaninglessness. But the search for meaning outside of work—which is to say: outside of community, society, and nature—can easily lead people to search for consolation in illusory communities that absorb us without providing what makes us a useful part of a real community: the ability to contribute to the well-being of one another by producing. That's why these have been years of growth in racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, jihadism, and political and religious sectarianism.

## Conquer work, reconquer life

The constant increase in productive scales over nearly two centuries, and with them, in the division of labor and of knowledge, has produced an erosion of the relationship between people and the concrete work they do. For more and more people, it became harder to understand what their work meant and contributed to their loved ones and to society besides a salary and a few days “off” per year. That’s what was called “alienation.” Gigantic scale, work so specialized and repetitive that seemed it insignificant, homogenization of everyone’s labor and the resulting perfect substitutability of workers, made meaning—the social and intellectual utility of the labor that each person did in society—something that was alien to people’s lives. “Work” became non-life, as opposed to “time off,” which was truly human and reserved for family and friends, which is to say, a community.

It would be reasonable to think that this phenomenon would fade with the gradual reduction of the optimal scales of production and the slow emergence—as industries became more independent from the incorporation of knowledge—of multispecialization. But the truth is that new generations are deprived of even alienated work.

## To be unable to access work is to be in social exile

During 15M [widespread anti-austerity protests that began on May 15, 2011 in Madrid] it became fashionable in Spain

trated group of owners and an ever-more global and uniform class of workers. Everyone would struggle in a large global revolution for control of the States that held the social structures in place until, similar to what the bourgeoisie of the eighteenth century did in the French Revolution, the proletariat would take control of the State with one purpose: to direct a massive process of decommodification, giving way to a society of abundance where the essential purpose of production was to serve this or that need, instead of being sold as objects and services for a price.

Marx and Kropotkin never proposed to close the factories. They thought that crises of overproduction signaled a limit of capitalism, the limit at which the logic of the commodity clashed with human needs. But they saw in the technology of mass production and in the ever-greater scale of the businesses a reflection of the progress that would lead the working class to “change the world from underneath.” They thought that by eliminating the commodity nature of objects, the “productive forces would be released,” which is to say, that productivity would be developed even more, and with it knowledge, well-being, etc. The very scale of production would also develop, until it constituted a great global factory-State, so productive that it could satisfy the material needs of all humanity with nothing more than volunteer work.

Nothing of the sort happened. No “global revolution” took place. Since 1871, there were local and national revolutions in which communists and anarchists looked for its first signs. Most were overthrown; none was able to produce on a larger scale during the following cycle of growth and crisis; and those that triumphed never brought about the decommodification of production. On the contrary, they gave power to repressive, totalitarian regimes, with very hierarchical and inefficient nationalized economies and such low levels of well-being among workers that they belied every delusion of the “liberation of productive forces.” When the Soviet Union fell and China took

its first steps towards capitalism controlled by the Communist State, communism and socialism were discredited as alternatives. In the '90s, their place was taken by “anti-capitalism,” which fluctuated between affirming that another world was possible and denying that capitalism and the human species could survive together, but avoided explaining how the former would become real and what made the latter inevitable. To a certain degree, this was the result of the sense of profound failure of “alternative” thought that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. But, lacking a theory of its own, it would become an invertebrate socialism, a “big no” into which anything and everything would fit. It was, in a certain way, a leftism chastened by false socialist paradises, hesitant when it came to describing any future society, and far removed from any pretense of building functional models in the present.

to arrive. In its time, the scale of change could be accepted by self-organized egalitarian communities. From that time forward, distributed networks of communities would be able to lay the foundation for real competition between systems, just as capitalism did with its feudal and land-based forerunner.

We think that time is arriving. But to be able take advantage of it, we first need to conquer something that the narrative of decomposition is grinding down: the centrality of work.

tricity. The process was, and is, a festival of rent-capture and corruption that has even drawn in Mondragon, the group of cooperatives that, for years, has been a global model precisely because of its excessive scale and its distance from community models.

It couldn't be any other way. For years, adhering to the ecologist narrative meant choose between two false options. The first: ignore misery and the hunger for the majority of the world, and advocate for reducing productivity. The second: join the list of those who want to take away even more sovereignty from people and communities and give more rents to monopolies. Obviously, it's a no-win situation.

## Connecting the dots

If we connect the dots of economic change in our time, certainly the first thing that comes into view is a great crisis of scale in which large funds and companies of dysfunctional volume are asphyxiating the two main institutions of the system—the State and the market—and accelerating their global decomposition, decomposition that has enormous human and environmental costs. But if we expand the framework, we also see that the “globalization of the small,” free software, and distributed networks have created the first system of technological non-commercial innovation—the “P2P mode of production”—and a growing industrial sector—the direct economy—which is supported by it, is competing face to face with overscaled agrarian and industrial businesses, even though it has communal dimensions.

And if we dig a little, still we'll find something more: we'll discover that communitarianism is a parallel, underground movement, which has accompanied capitalism since its youth, exploring the paths of a new life experience and planting the seed of a society of abundance, while it waited for its time

## La historia que no nos contaron

Decades before the first socialist and libertarian groups of any weight were formed, an alternative trend had started down a long path with a very different focus: communitarianism.

### The new world will be born and affirmed inside the old

The basic idea of communitarianism is that the new world will be born and grow inside the old. Profound changes in social and economic relationships—system changes—are not the product of revolutions and political changes. It happens the other way around: systemic political changes are the expression of new forms of social organizing, new values, and ways of working and living, that have reached enough maturity to be able to establish a broad social consensus. As of a certain point in development, a “competition between systems” is established. The new forms, until then valid only for a small minority, begin to seem to be the only ones capable of offering a better future for the large majority. Little by little, they expand their spectrum and their number, encompassing and transforming broader and broader social spaces, and become the center of the economy, reconfiguring the cultural, ideological, and legal basis of society from within.

For communitarians, egalitarian forms should accompany capitalism in its evolution as a parallel society, not as a utopia—the promise of a society to come—except as a heterotopia: a different, alternative social place, with values and ways of its

own. At first, they do it from behind, through learning, utilization and re-elaboration of existing technology and, as of a certain point, entering in competition with it. This perspective was called “constructive socialism.”

The first objective was always to show the feasibility of a decommodified life, “here and now,” on any scale. Communitarianism is not centered on creating political parties, but networks of small productive egalitarian communities. The maxim of economic organization comes to be “from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs”: communities of goods, revenue, and savings are established, production is organized by consensus, and from the beginning, the highest diversification is sought to serve the diversity of personal needs and gain autonomy for all.

## **New relationships, here and now**

From 1849 to today, egalitarian communities have always been working: Icarian communities, Russian artels, Israeli kibbutzim, US, Japanese, or German egalitarian farms... They’ve been on practically all continents, they’ve had different names and nuances in different times and places, they’ve been through all manner of crises, and their members have made enormous sacrifices. In place of the centrality of the class nature of the collectivist narrative, they wrote a story of their community and their experience, which gave substance to the central idea of constructive socialism: building—here and now, within the community and between it and its surroundings—social and economic relationships that are desired or postulated as valid alternatives to the existing socioeconomic system, without delegating power to parties or organizational structures outside of the communities themselves. Without thinking of themselves as “experimental” or having detailed “roadmaps,”

## **What will we do about the overuse of natural resources?**

The end of the overuse of natural resources will not be reached by producing less or returning to outdated technologies, but on the path towards abundance.

This can be seen clearly in agricultural exploitation. In Israel, where the kibbutz and cooperative movement was the nucleus of agrarian production and the leader in technological innovation, production between 1948 and today multiplied by sixteenfold, three times more than the population. And while irrigated land went from 30,000 to 190,000 Ha, 12% less water is consumed. That is, technological development encouraged by the communitarian sector increased general productivity—by no less than 26%—significantly reducing the cost of producing one more unit, and, to that extent, approaching abundance. But increasing the productivity of the factor even more—we were told for decades—would lead to a regional collapse if production continued increasing. Instead, more productivity and more production, far from leading to a greater stress on resources, reduced the total consumption of water.

But strengthening communities and the productivity of the communitarian sector it is not the focus of the official narrative or the political consensus in Europe or among US liberals. In that narrative, fed for decades by catastrophism that ran through all messages, from the Hollywood blockbusters to official documents from the UN or the EU, it was all about justifying, at all costs, the way that States paid big, over-scaled businesses’ transformation costs to avoid a disaster that themselves had created and reported. In the name of the imminent catastrophe, we needed to pay car companies for their infrastructure costs as they moved to electric cars, and give crazy subsidies to big energy companies, assuring their centrality when technology was already pointing towards renewable, distributed elec-



technified agriculture for less productive forms would mean simply reducing productivity and, therefore, squandering even more human and natural resources than the inefficiencies of over-scaling already do. To renounce technological development is nothing other than adopting forms of production that are more costly in resources.

Quite to the contrary, we want to produce abundance here and now, on another scale and using another logic—those of the community and the needs of real people—developing more and more productive free technologies, because only with higher productivity will we be able to consume fewer non-renewable natural resources, fewer hours of labor forced by need, and less capital, while still taking responsibility for the well-being of others.

If there's anything we can't renounce without making things worse, it's abundance. It's hard, and will continue to be, to overcome the "fences" and "hurdles" that patents have put in the way of scientific knowledge. A lot of damage has been done by the evolution towards the artificial creation of scarcity in the chemical, agrarian, and pharmaceutical industries. We must not confuse scientific and technological development with the monopolistic and rent-seeking applications of it, which over-scaled technology, seed, and biomedical research businesses have made into their flagship products. In the application of genetics to agriculture, for example, there is the promise of abundance, though even its use by Monsanto today means a daily life of environmental destruction, artificial scarcity, and destruction of producers' freedom.

they have created a heritage and a culture themselves, little by little. They are the seeds of a society of abundance.

In the framework of the young and expansive capitalism of the nineteenth century, or the capitalism of technological revolution and permanent war that followed up through the present, if these "decommodified islets" want to maintain their autonomy and approach abundance, they have to enter the market: to live without needing money at all within the community, they must learn to think like merchants outside of it. It's no contradiction: being in the market is the only way to not lose the technological pace of the system they want to overcome. But, at the same time, it's the way to bring the first cultural and technological fruits of the new society to the old society. It is, in many senses—including the moral, since it aspires to expand the improvement in living conditions to more people—the first step towards a competition between systems.

The bourgeoisie, in its medieval infancy, introduced the revolutionary principle of equality of origin and a few technological improvements that expressed their vision of the world into some small spaces in feudal society. All of them happened far from the center of the production of value at the time, the fields. The medieval commercial bourgeoisie invented important things, but eccentric for the times, like the check, the letter of exchange, and double-entry accounting. In contrast, communitarianism demonstrated from the first day the feasibility of an economic organization thought of in terms of the needs. It was the first to make a reality of equality in spite of differences in gender or social or geographical origin, and across the 20th century, left a series of pioneering technologies: weatherization and sanitation in popular housing; the improvement of agricultural productivity, like drip irrigation, seed improvement, or the scientific management of dairy facilities; the development of free software for distributed networks; and the first analytical tools for public intelligence. These are innova-

tions that continue to be significant and closer and closer to the productive core of the economic system.

In what little we've seen of twenty-first century, that sense of a cultural and technological "membrane" between the past and the future, between capitalist society and the small, decommodified space of egalitarian communities, has become even more clear. The appearance of new ways of producing based on new forms of communal property—like free software—and distributed communication architectures—linked directly to de-commodification and the creation of abundance—put forth the notion that we are on the threshold of a new phase in which we will be able to change the nature of that competition between systems.

But, above all, what justifies a new time for the development of communitarianism is an irreversible economic change that has been imposed gradually: the reduction of the optimal scales of production. This decline in the optimal productive scale explains the deep trends that have produced the current economic crises, and why the political and corporate responses are often times counterproductive. And any alternative is not centered on social class or the nation, but on community.

of shared knowledge and, in in time, improve the life of thousands or millions of people.

For almost a century, capitalism has been incapable of turning increases in productivity into reductions in the workday. The "hacker ethic" connected with P2P production shows how the development of abundance leads, right from day one, to the progressive abolition of labor forced by need. That form of work competes with and opposes time dedicated to learning, living, and enjoying life.

## **El camino de la abundancia no pasa por producir menos**

Abundance has nothing to do with consumption and even less with consumerism. In reality, consumerism is not a "state of capitalism," but a compulsive form of consumption with which some people, reduced to isolated individuals when they reach the market, try to recover from anguish, loneliness, the anxiety of work without meaning, and an atomized way of life that, like the system that produces them, "aren't going anywhere." Part of the middle class practices consumerism with the same fervor with which it then talks about it as if it was a universal guilt. Some clamor to "reduce consumption" and "degrow" as a systemic alternative. It's a myopic view: consumerism is not the center of the current economic system. It is the spiritual symptom, visible only in a privileged minority, of a more serious and widespread disease—the same one that produces the chronic underconsumption in which the majority of humanity continues to live and the environmental disasters that move them.

To cure that disease does not mean producing less or "returning" to pre-capitalist technologies. To renounce the productivity conquered by scientific knowledge would mean more exclusion and poverty. To exchange industry for artisanship and

Capitalism was the greatest promoter of productivity in history, but it simply can't allow itself abundance. The community, on the other hand, needs it.

## **Abundance is the magic that shines through the “hacker ethic”**

Anyone who has lived or spent enough time in an egalitarian community has sensed how abundance advances through the reduction of work forced by scarcity and its gradual substitution by work understood as a personal and voluntary expression of the pleasure of learning and contributing. When everything is communal and responsibility is shared, there is no division between life time and work time. You can be yourself, and development in work drives us to learn new things, in new fields, and continue advancing. Then we stop being mere “technicians” or “specialists” and become “multispecialists.” This is a way of developing intellectually that fits naturally not only with the reduction of scale, but above all with the development of scope, the capacity to create many different things with the same productive base. Multispecialization is progress towards the end of the atomization of knowledge that paralleled the division of labor to the limit in the industrial factory.

Abundance is the magic that shines through the “hacker ethic” and assorted user groups. It's no coincidence that a work ethic based on knowledge and enjoyment is extending beyond the communitarian world—where it always existed—coinciding with the social expansion of the Internet and the first forms of P2P production. The first cultural manifestations of distributed networks cultivated the pleasure of discovering all those applications of knowledge that do a lot of good but are not commodities. They celebrated these being valuable, because, even though they have a zero price, they reveal to us the fraternity

## **Scale and scope**

The optimum scale is most efficient dimension of the productive units of a society, the size as of which inefficiencies created by having to manage the excessive size of those units exceeds the benefit produced by being a little bigger. For each dimension of the market and each technological level, there exists an optimal scale of production, and it turns out to be easy to understand that, in principle, technological development reduces the optimal dimensions, because the better the technology, the fewer resources—work hours, capital and raw material—are needed to produce the same quantity of products.

### **From the era of economies of scale...**

During the height of capitalism, in the 19th century, between British imperialism's bet on free trade, American expansion, European unifications and the revolutions in transportation—the clipper, the railroad, and steamboats—markets grew much faster than productivity. The optimum size always remained out of reach, and capital to reach it was always scarce. It was the Golden Age, and it saw the most authentic of joint-stock companies: gigantic collective efforts that brought together the savings of tens of thousands of small savers and capitalists to put whole countries into production, to charter faster and faster boats, lay telegraph cables across oceans, or cross continents from end to end with railways.

For a long time, the continuous growth of scale seemed to confirm the Marxists, Kropotkinists, and social democrats. In

all of their economic models, underneath the permanent expansive dynamic of capitalism, there was the need to reduce prices by increasing production per hour to survive competition and even—if the owner was the first to incorporate new machines or technologies—get extraordinary benefits while other factories adapted. Every time productive capacity increases, the benefit that each unit of product contributes is reduced, so to maintain or increase the total benefit, the owner has to produce even more quantity, which requires the incorporation of new machines and processes to reach a still-greater scale. Finally, according to these authors, when production approaches or even exceeds the potential size of the market, crises of overproduction erupt.

This model, described for the first time by Marx, is known as “law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall.” For decades, Marxist economists repeated the mantra that “the decreasing tendency of the rate of profit is compensated for with the increase in the mass of product” and took for granted that each cycle of growth and crisis would begin with a greater scale and would increase it further still. Accordingly, capitalism was on the path to create big businesses, true global monopolies in each and every industrial and consumption market, which fit like a glove both with the quasi-religious Marxist vision of a great, revolutionary, global Armageddon between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, and with the social-democratic vision that socialism would be the result of the nationalization of the great industries by the democratic state as they reached critical sizes.

However, underneath both models, revolutionary and reformist-nationalizing, was a presumption that would soon be shown to be erroneous: that in each cycle, greater effective demand would appear. It’s obvious that the average scale of the businesses in the capitalist world would not increase unless owners could foresee a growing volume of demand, because with demand that was not growing globally, if they could pro-

## **Artificially creating scarcity has become a way of life for over-scaled industry**

The traditional information and knowledge industries are engaged in artificially producing scarcity. Contemporary economic theory has described intellectual property as “unnecessary” for years, and there are more and more renowned economists that think that its negative effects far exceed the positives. Large distributed networks, in which millions of people share digital files, are as infinitely more efficient medium to distribute a digitized product than Facebook, Twitter, Google Books or Amazon, but the content industries have held a legal and political grip for years, which costs them millions every year in lawyers and lobbyists, to be able to fence off such networks by law and jail their supporters.

In the production of physical goods and services, the contrast no is less drastic. In contrast to a capitalist business, in an egalitarian community, the increase in productivity translates to a reduction of the work time that one must dedicate to be able maintain a comfortable way of life on the basis of selling products in the market.

We need to say that reducing work means we can spend more time, not staring at the ceiling, but dedicated to other kinds of activities, like learning new disciplines, playing, painting, or developing contributions to the commons in the form of free software, designs, books, or audiovisual content in the public domain. Activities that show us what the kind of work that will substitute wage labor will consist of as we approach an authentic society of abundance: an expression of skills motivated by the pleasure of enjoying interaction with others, the pleasure of learning, experimenting, and contributing. This is the opposite of the sophisticated form of slavery imposed by scarcity.

ways could include reducing the quality of raw materials and, thus, their cost, without consumers realizing it; or ceasing to take responsibility for externalities created in production, like dumping unprocessed waste in a river to save on filters and purifiers. No wonder the word “productivity” can sound scary.

From the perspective of communities, however, developing productivity means something completely different. The main way to obtain it is as new as it is inaccessible to the typical business, which is over-scaled and anxious for rents.

Let’s again take up the example of publishing an online book. To calculate the productivity of the factors, we would have to find the ratio between the number of downloads and the number of factors employed in their production. But if, as we saw before, instead of posting it on a single server, we share it on a distributed network, the cost of one more download will be zero. At that point, we’re in a world of abundance. Even if it had tremendous success, and hundreds of thousands of people downloaded a copy, we wouldn’t need to increase the use of the factors. The productivity of the work necessary to write, edit, and format the book would increase with each extra download.

But embracing this path means accepting that the price of an abundant good—which is any digitized content in a distributed network—is zero. And with zero prices, it’s not so easy assure capital the dividends it desires. So, publishers, software giants, pharmaceutical companies, and movie studios try to maintain an extra-market rent, in the form of a legal monopoly called “intellectual property.” And that’s why music companies depend on centralized structures, which come with considerable marginal costs, like iTunes or Spotify, to control the restricted distribution of their products, so they can force the maintenance of positive prices.

duce the same thing with fewer resources, they weren’t going to increase scale, but reduce it.

At time when Marx was writing his economic theory—in fact, for almost the entire 19th century—that extraordinary demand came largely from the incorporation of Asia and Africa into the world market. Colonialism, by subjugating backward economies and tearing down trade barriers for British and French products, continuously increased the demand for manufactured products, overcoming the tendency to reduce the size of the productive units that drove technological development.

### **...to the era of the inefficiencies of scale**

We could put the date of the change at 1914. Twenty years after the colonial division of Africa among the great industrial powers at the Berlin Conference, the expectation that new, extra-capitalist markets would join those of the great powers had already dissipated. Territorial tensions in Europe reflected the rigidity of the delimitation of colonial borders. The war that was about to break out was a “world war” precisely because it meant the end of the first stage of the configuration of a unified global market. Marxist prophecies were coming true. The crisis of ’29 would seem to corroborate them. However, from there—through another World War, the processes of decolonization in Africa and Asia, and a very long Cold War—the evidence set about dismantling the idea that capitalism was constantly evolving towards increases in the scale of businesses.

In fact, big national businesses—which flourished at the beginning of the twentieth century, after the war—were only central in the socialist countries and for some nationalist regimes in backward nations. Both in them and in the developed world, where they briefly flourished as a tool of post-war reconstruction, they were not the “spontaneous” result of the evolution of markets. In every case, they were a shortcut to get produc-

tion underway and reinvigorate industry after the enormous destruction left by the crisis and war. But they soon reached a ceiling, especially in the framework of the planned economies for which they had become a banner. In each new phase of technological development, Big State Businesses increased inefficiencies and their costs, which, in an authoritarian and centralized system, would spread with extraordinary speed across the economic system. The USSR, which promised to “overtake the USA” in the middle of the ’60s, entered into a crisis by the ’70s, and into open decomposition in the ’80s.

In the Western bloc, not even the largest multinationals had dimensions comparable to the great State dinosaurs of the USSR, and yet the weight of the inefficiencies of scale started to be obvious by the mid ’50s. That was when economist Kenneth Boulding called attention to problems of communication, management, and control in large, pyramidal organizations. Boulding also warned that, given the size and weight of certain companies in the economic system and their effect on employment, inefficiencies threatened to spread to the whole economy through the state, since over-scaled businesses competed to “capture it” and to make up for the costs of inefficiencies due to over-scaling with rents resulting from tailor-made regulations.

Following Boulding’s warnings, technological research then became centered on information science and data management, on communications, and on forms of work. The “information revolution” that started at that time was the first line of defense against the effects of over-scaling. It wasn’t enough, however. In the middle of the ’70s, it became obvious in Europe—and not only there—that the State of the postwar period, captured by big businesses and sectoral interests, was effectively unviable.

This was when the set of policies called “neoliberalism” was designed. It was basically an attempt to confront the results of over-scaling in the other possible way: by expanding markets.

## The two faces of productivity

“Productivity” is a word that evokes rejection among large sectors of the population. For years, salaries have been reduced, workdays extended, and thousands of workers fired in the name of increasing productivity. It’s normal for the word to cause a shiver, because in stagnant situations, and in the capitalist framework, that’s exactly what it means.

In reality, however, increasing productivity means being able to do more with fewer resources and is the measure of all systemic alternative. The famous “liberation of productive forces,” that the old revolutionaries expected to succeed capitalism, is nothing more than a general development of productivity. The engine of the increase in productivity is technological change, understood broadly to include forms of organizing and structures. From the community point of view, the center of the development of productivity today is in free software, in distributed networks, and in multipurpose, low-cost tools of production and chains: everything that brings us closer to abundance.

Increasing productivity means “squeezing more” out of the factors: with the same quantity of inputs, producing more value in the same period of time. Increasing productivity means, for example, getting more energy out of a solar panel, needing less water to produce the same amount or more of vegetables, or having new programs that reduce the hours that we have to spend on repetitive management tasks.

But for over-scaled capital, in stagnant situations where there’s no new investment or technological improvement, “productivity” means, above all, employing the labor factor more intensively. That is to say: getting work hours for free—for example, by extending the workday without remunerating overtime; or through personnel reduction, while unreasonably overwhelming those who remain—which is equivalent to a salary reduction. Alternative and sometimes complementary

innovation—the “P2P mode of production.” This, in turn, feeds a sector, the direct economy, that demonstrates enough productivity in the market to compete and beat the industry “from the outside,” without the help of over-scaled finance. That is, this new productive ecosystem is capable of competing and gaining ground against a giant that enjoys the advantage of extra-market rents, like customized regulations, grants, or patents. We’re talking about the same extra-market rents that multiplied with neoliberalism and which have produced the simultaneous erosion of state and market, which is to say, social decomposition. So, just to demonstrate that a productive alternative exists is already big news.

This social and productive space around the “new digital commons” or simply, the “commons,” is today’s equivalent of the first cities and markets of the medieval bourgeoisie, a space where new non-commercial social relationships appeared, and the new logic, together with signs of autonomy, begin to show a limited but direct impact on productivity. Throughout the lower Middle Ages, the bourgeoisie was able to drive those cities to turn them, first, into a big “urban workshop,” and later, into “municipal democracies.” A similar historical task, now with a society of abundance as the goal, is what lies ahead for communitarianism.

This is because this whole reduction of scales brings the optimum size of productive units ever closer to the community dimension, and therefore, points to community as the protagonist of a society of abundance. And it is in community that we can understand why the struggle to overcome a socioeconomic system cannot be proposed as an electoral platform, revolutionary as it may be, but rather, happens in the setting of more profound competition: productivity.

What’s original about neoliberalism is that not only does it extend markets in space—through reduction of tariff barriers and creation of free-trade zones—but also over time, with the use of new tools such as “financialization.”

## **Today, capital is too big for the real productive scale...**

It’s well known how financial innovations and deregulation came together to lay the foundations for the global crisis of 2008. What’s less discussed is that in the same “exuberance of capital” that preceded the crash, a problem of excessive scale was manifested. Investment exuberance is a mass mirage produced by the hopelessness of investors who can’t find a place for their capital.

Also, this problem, already endemic, was multiplied by the capture of the State and of the market itself by banks. The State had deregulated financial activity for the benefit of the big banks beyond a reasonable point. State agencies were powerless, and often conditioned or seduced by pressure from institutions that were considered “systemic,” and had turned “too big to fail” into a pirate flag. And not even the market could act as a counterweight. With ratings agencies captured by their own customers—and distributing hyper-optimistic descriptions—the mass of small investors could only follow the great tendencies of capital as an independent indicator. The trouble is that that movement wasn’t independent at all, since the same financial groups were channeling it. The result is a system that, even in midst of the crash, they contained their damage by abusing asymmetries of information and their power to set prices at the expense of their own customers. Today, eight years after the fall of Lehman Brothers, that system remains basically intact.

The root of the problem was that the financial system was also suffering from the inefficiencies of over-scaling: the amounts of capital were too large in relation to real, productive businesses for anyone to pay attention to the reality of the investments; and even to find interest in investing in a scale that was known to be really productive. The problem to solve was—and is— “placing” big piles of capital that couldn’t, and can’t, find enough projects of their size.

Over the last two decades, it’s become common to hear complaints in the economic press that fewer new large industries that justify grandiose investments are appearing than in prior periods.

The attempt to solve this that arrived with neoliberalism was to “financialize” whole markets: to “package” risks—to “dis-solve” some from over here with some from over there—and create abstractions of value to bet, more than invest, those huge amounts of capital. Enron, the business that made financialization its flagship product, made it possible to invest in things like “Megabit of bandwidth installed” or “Megawatt consumed,” showing that not even telcoms and energy companies were capable of meeting the need to place large masses of capital on their own. And the famous mortgage derivatives, which were at the center of the crisis in 2008, showed that the construction sector had also become too small for the scale of capital that wanted to cast its lot with it.

The crisis of 2008 made clear the origin of the “decomposition” with which we begin this manifesto: the simultaneous destruction of the two main social institutions, the State and the market, by the hunger for rents of over-scaled companies—and financial companies are just the tip of the iceberg—which see in them the only way to make up for their own inefficiencies of scale. What everyone saw in the financial sector in the years that followed the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers, was later seen with equal clarity in the dominant businesses in sectors as apparently different as energy or agroindustry.

place for others to download more. The more people download it, the less possibility there will be that, no matter how fast or large increases in demand may be, that any member of the network would have to increase their costs so that someone could download a new copy.

This is doubtlessly the most important thing the Internet has taught us: the same product that is abundant in a distributed network certainly would not be in a centralized or decentralized network. And, conversely, what is scarce in a centralized or decentralized network, can be abundant in a distributed network.

This finding may seem limited, since with current technologies, it would only affect intangible goods. But some of those intangibles—like industrial design, hardware, or processes—are the motors of the increase in productivity in physical goods and, since the world wars, the percentage they represent of total value produced has only increased. Their conversion into free goods can’t help but have a profound effect on the whole productive system.

That’s how, for example, the creation of free software works, as does the whole growing economy in general, the immense majority of it decommodified, that we include under the label “the P2P mode of production.” At the same time, the direct economy uses the results of innovation outside the productive apparatus controlled by over-scaled industries and the very over-scaled financial system, increasing productivity in the manufacture of tangible goods and pushing scale even farther downward.

## **The “P2P mode of production” is the model for the production of abundance**

Although we are still far from general abundance, we have a model of the production of abundance for intangible goods and



centered on satisfying human needs: anyone could enjoy as much as they need without giving up anything.

This does not mean that capitalism tends to be “decommodified” by the mere effect of competition. But this extreme solution of a basic model of economic analysis is, in any case, very illuminating.

In practice, abundance exists when the cost of producing one more unit is negligible and, given a sensible calculation of potential demand, we can do it indefinitely. For example: the cost of serving a web page or an electronic book to one more user from our own server is, for all practical purposes, zero.

### **A scarce product in a decentralized network is abundant in a distributed network**

We should say that this example would only be true within a definable range of requests, but that if the number of people who want read our book were to pass a certain critical point, we would have to increase our bandwidth and the number of servers as well. So, if we look at it over the long term, these cost increases should be attributed to the units served. The marginal cost, the cost associated with the last copy distributed, wouldn't be zero. Abundance, in that case, would have been just an illusion, a mirage, sort of like the cost of taking more person to work in our car: it's practically zero... until the seats run out. Once the places are full, we need other car, or at least a bus ticket, for each additional person we'd like to transport. The marginal cost, the increase in costs for one more person, would be positive and easily perceptible.

But in our example, an information good, this criticism would only be true if the copies were distributed from a single server. If we share it on a distributed network with other users who, by downloading it, make it available to others in turn, each new download, each new user, will mean a possible

### **... and the optimal scale is approaching community dimensions**

But if the result of neoliberal financial policies was object of a profound public scrutiny, what does not usually receive so much attention is how the information revolution joined the globalization of commerce in goods with the reduction of optimal scales to create a whole series of new productive forms. Surely the reason is that the first to take advantage of it were thousands of Asian small businesspeople, the true engines of the drastic reduction in global poverty. Only more than a decade later, in the middle of a crisis, have the new models started to reach Europe and America, driving a wave of sustained, small-scale, entrepreneurial projects on a new technological base and often oriented towards niche demands in the global market.

We can group these new forms around two broad trends: the “P2P mode of production” and the “direct economy.” The P2P mode of production replicates the free software model in all kinds of industries where knowledge condensed into design, software, creativity, blueprints, etc., is central to the creation of value; and can accumulate in a “immaterial universal commons” that can be improved, reformed, and used in alternative ways for many kinds of different projects.

This multifunctionality of tools and value chains—which is what economists call “scope”— is the key to the direct economy, a way of creating products created by small groups and launching them on global markets by using, on the one hand, low-cost, adaptable, external industrial chains and free software and, on the other, advance sales systems or collaborative financing.

That is, before our eyes, before and after the large financial crisis, a new kind of small-scale industry has developed, which is characterized by being global and by getting capital and credit outside the financial system, some in collaborative fi-

nancing platforms, others announcing their own pre-sales and getting donations in exchange for merchandising. In fact, it's an industry of "free" capital, which doesn't have to give up ownership of the business to the owners of capital because, on the one hand, it reduces its needs by using publicly available technological tools, like free software, and on the other, obtaining the little capital it needs in the form of advance sales and donations.

Taken together, P2P production and the direct economy, two ways of substituting scale with scope, are the leading edge of a productive economy moving more and more quickly towards the reduction of scale. That makes them essential to understanding why communitarianism has a unique opportunity in the new century.

## **Building abundance here and now**

### **Abundance has to do with production, not with consumption**

Abundance is an economic concept in the setting of production, not consumption. Abundance exists when an extra unit can be produced without that meaning a perceptible increase in costs. For economists, it can be reduced to a formula: "zero marginal cost." In an ideal competitive market, when the marginal cost is zero, that means that the prices that would maximize the benefit to producers would also be zero.

Common sense would say then that the business would have no incentive to continue producing. But really, just the opposite would happen. Although the price of the product is zero, the interest of the producer is to produce the maximum possible to dilute fixed costs as much as it can among all units produced. It is at that theoretical moment, with zero price, when a business stops thinking about the market and starts to seek the maximization of meeting the human needs its products match.

That is, if the marginal cost approached zero, the products would be "decommodified," would stop being commodities that have to be sold, because if they aren't, that would create a new loss. As a consequence, as of a certain level, anyone could enjoy as much as they need without giving up anything, and the same rationality that orients the behavior of the businesses towards the maximization of benefit would lead to an economy