

## EDUCATION FOR LIFE AND THE FREE LEARNING COMMUNITIES FOR LIFE

The great challenge of our time is to build and nurture sustainable communities, the environmental, social and existential crisis, among others, increasingly evident the unsustainable of the development model. Address this systemic crisis involves recognizing the need to create new structures and forms of organization. Its necessary a new education to generate a genuine change —consistent to the different contexts and needs, mainly that respond to shift the paradigm from being predators of life to be holders of life in the broadest sense. Today free education and learning for life are key to advance to the knowledge societies and to reach a sustainable present recognizing and regenerating connections and relationships with land, society and our inner being more harmoniously.

Build and nurture communities is a way to transform education. The reflection that then develops, arises from the construction of the Free Learning Communities for Life, as a self-managed initiative about free learning and education for life that seeks to integrate the free learning in family life and in community around the regeneration of life; starting from the premise that until we don't accept our own dynamics and we don't be responsible for our own lives and their impacts in all areas and at all levels, we aren't going to change anything.

Satish Kumar<sup>1</sup>, one of the most important educators of the twentieth century, and a representative of the deep ecology and a new education for life, establish that the biggest challenge we have as humanity is to learn to work together. *"We cannot live apart, we need each other and we need to learn to work together, this is the journey of education"*<sup>2</sup>. This transformation requires to assume education as a common, recognizing that education is in constantly evolving into a learn-by-doing of the society —as a collective and alive entity, that generate continuously new learning, ideas and knowledge, from the exchange of interests, motivations, contexts and needs of change.

Gustavo Esteva<sup>3</sup>, activist promoter of the post-development and founder of the "Universidad de la Tierra" in Oaxaca indicates that this transformation aims to reclaim the possibility to learn and to how live on this planet.<sup>4</sup> Current educational systems, although aim to teach about life and work, it happens outside of a real field; in its structure aren't integrated to a social network, and in its content aren't embedded from the understanding of life and its relationship with work. They start from a curriculum that in most cases is the same for any small town that for any major city in the world, and is virtually the same education for one than for another. The homogeneity of the curriculum and the hole education system is far from the constant flow of life, limiting a real learning that could respond to genuine interest.

The way we learn is deeply connected to the way we live. We live and learn, and decide how to live from our learning, or fail to decide how to live from the lack of a genuine learning. Liberate learning is to recover the possibility to learn, this requires that learning be integrated into every area of life, starting from family life and a community scope. Free learning is a key for a social change, John Holt, one of the main promoters of free learning and education without schooling addressed a main question "instead of education, how could people live and work with a greater purpose?".

It can't understand a real learning dissociated of life, learning is about life. Retrieve the possibility of how to live is intimately linked with a holistic understanding of life, assuming that we are all integrated and are partakers of this frame of life —in the connection, relationship, exchange, collaboration, generation and regeneration with the society and nature, and our inner being. The approach of

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<sup>1</sup> Founder of Schumacher College and Small School, editor of the British magazine Resurgence. Author of "No Destination", among other books.

<sup>2</sup> Satish Kumar, *"You Are, Therefore I Am: A Declaration of Dependence"*. Green Boks Ltd. 2002.

<sup>3</sup> A key figure in the founding of several NGOs and Mexican, Latin American and international networks that promote the empowerment of local communities. He has published a dozen books and is a columnist for the Mexican newspaper La Jornada.

<sup>4</sup> Gustavo Esteva, *"Unitierra, the Freedom to Learn"*

Education for Life is central to the transformation of education, establishes the need for understanding how life is sustained and how we cooperate with this sustainability from multiple and diverse ways in which we live; interacting and cooperating between with each others and with nature. It centered a holistic view of life, as an understanding the whole and its parts, the world as a system, the multiplicity of connections and relationships from one with everything and everything with one, and the diversity of our dynamics as part of this whole.

Although this education is emerging, the debate about its pertinence in the present context is highly relevant, as it highlight the need to sustain life; takes core elements of holistic science, complex systems theory, deep ecology, post-development, education for sustainability and education for peace. Its discussion is led by global thinkers and activists like Fritjof Capra, Satish Kumar and Vandana Shiva. Also, the regional organization in Mallorca, Poc a Poc has hosted this debate for three years since 2011, performing the meetings "*Earth, Soul, Society: Education for Life*".

Education for Life goes beyond the concept of sustainability; recognizing our selves interconnectedness implies building sustainable communities —its about how do we sustain these communities and how de we sustain the life in community, from collaboration in our own contexts and between peers. We urgently need to learn to be community and being community, learn to sustain life as entities that participate from it. To advance in an Education for Life as a common, is essential to generate new structures and forms of organization for the integration of learning around the regeneration of life.

Assuming education as a common involves the understanding that education is an active part of the society through the exchange and generation of new knowledge and a continuous cyclical expansion of consciousness, which requires collaboration, integration and participation of all. This new education is the possibility to recognize us as a community capable of generate the required change, from its own contexts and needs facing the great challenges of today. The "Universidad de la Tierra" is an example of this, taken as a community dedicated to learning, study, reflection and action, that takes actions aimed at rooting social transformation, strengthening and expanding a convivial form of life and a radical democracy<sup>5</sup>.

It is the possibility to recognize us as a participant community of the knowledge societies. In its first world report on Knowledge Societies, UNESCO notes that the emerging societies will be societies in which knowledge be shared in order to remain conducive to human development and life. "A knowledge society must ensure the sharing of knowledge as a common, and must be able to integrate each of its members and promote new forms of solidarity with the present and future generations".<sup>6</sup>

But what we mean by sustainability of life and what are the new structures and forms of organization that are required, in which way a new organization can establish more harmonious relations with life. How we face educational and non-educational systems decoupled of the "frame of life" that promote competitiveness and individualism away from collaboration and cooperation in networks. To Fritjof Capra<sup>7</sup> the basic pattern of life is the network through which all relationships and connections are supported through a continuous collaboration. "Ecosystems are living networks of organisms; organisms are networks of cells, organs and systems; cells are networks of molecules. Wherever we see life, we see networks. Living networks in human societies are networks of communications. Like biological networks, they are self-generating. Each communication creates thoughts and meaning, which give rise to further communications, and thus the entire network generates itself".

Friendship is a starting point for the sustainability of life and to generate new forms of organization, it

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<sup>5</sup> <http://unitierra.blogspot.mx>

<sup>6</sup> *Towards Knowledge Societies. First World Report.* United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Featured thinker who integrates science, spirituality and concrete actions for social change. Author of "*The Tao of Physics*", "*The Web of Life*" and "*The Turning Point*", among others. Is director and founder of the Center for Ecoliteracy in Berkeley, California and academic Schumacher College.

is an engine of interconnection and networking, is an entrepreneurship and starting of any project. Friendship, like a network, is the pattern by which we overcome individualism, indifference and the state of anomie. In the introductory lecture of the meeting *“Earth, Soul and Society: Education for Life”* in 2011, the representative of the Poc a Poc organization seats that “for the new education all is one, we are one big family, and everything is sacred, the new education links spirituality with science, ecology with economy, being with done, head with heart and hands”. The triad of land, soul, society, coined by Satish Kumar to Education for Life, is key to the sustainability of life, which Kumar points out that we can’t continue responding from a purely analytical process, is required the intuitive knowledge, the spirituality, the understanding of how we transform our reality from our everyday and our hands.

The initiative of the Free Learning Communities for Life seeks to build and nurture sustainable communities from the integration of free learning in family life and community around the regeneration of life. Questioned how collectively build a sustainable present for the recognition and regeneration connections and relationships with the land, society and our inner being more harmoniously. It approach seeks the participation of its members, based on a learning by doing freely and in response to the contexts, interests and needs of change. The autonomy, reflection and study, and doings of free people, is given the generation of new ideas, inspiration and knowledge —local, multiple and diverse, around to sustain life.

The emergence of these Communities, is given from the meeting and exchange of ideas and knowledge of some moms, some dads and people interested in deep ecology and social change; about how to cultivate the joy of life, how to propose and propose to our children learn in freedom and dignity, how to propitiate a real parenting attachment and new a ways of conviviality, and how to relate differently with life. It seeks to learn together from each other, build community and learn from it as also from families, from motivations, traditions, ways of life, dialogue, conviviality, sharing, and above all, take care of the interest and desire of learn, understood as an aspect of everyday life. The approach of the Free Learning Community for Life just begins to bear fruit with the process of forming one community in Mexico City and other in Tepoztlán.

Regarding the formation of these communities is not merely a participatory process of self learning, but its conception is given by the understanding that the whole group has a wealth of knowledge and the aim is to develop new knowledge<sup>8</sup>. Their process is based on the methodology of knowledge management<sup>9</sup>, as the creation of spaces and suitable conditions for the collective creation of new knowledge; permanently, with the voluntary contribution and equitable conditions for all views of the participants. At the same time, it recognize the principles that knowledge is not transmitted, but is shared and exchanged, the more knowledge is shared the more we grows, and that we all have something to contribute to the construction of knowledge.

The Free Learning Community for Life initiative questions whether is the construction of the own community a first learning for regeneration of life and sustainability exercise; if retrieve this possibility, —as we grow and learn in relation to others, is the returning to the etymological origin of education — from the latin *educare* “pull out”; and if the creation of small learning communities based on a holistic vision that face the challenge of how to sustain life, is the possibility of a new structure that contributes to the formation of Education for Life.

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<sup>8</sup> The central aspects Initiative retake the Cooperative Sula Batsú analyzed on knowledge management, from the third generation of the development of the concept, recognizing that arises from the need for development organizations to achieve much more collective action. In this context, the role of the GC is to develop a logical articulation of knowledge appropriate to the conditions of each social group.

<sup>9</sup> There are 3 important concepts to consider: 1) information management, which is the area that is focused on explicit knowledge, understood as information in the broad sense of the word and focuses on the production, capture, organization and dissemination of resources information, 2) exchange of knowledge, which is focused on the exchange of tacit knowledge or experiential knowledge are the tools, spaces and processes that focus on interconnect the knowledge of the participants, and 3) knowledge management, which is the area of management that focuses on designing and operating spaces and processes to build collective knowledge. Kemly Camacho, Sula Batsú.

We have to start from any level that meets our context, first from our own example and or course from the friendship, from our families and our own children, from our partners and with civil society. With all who spread to reclaim the most wonderful exercise that touches the hearts and fills us with enthusiasm for life: learning.