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# Call to forge visions of the future in Argentina

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***I could never, throughout my life, resign myself to fragmented knowledge, I could never isolate an object of study from its context, its antecedents, its future. I have always aspired to multidimensional thinking.***

Edgar Morin

With regret, we are contemplating, for many decades now, the Argentine paradox: a country with excellent attributes, to be among the best in the world, but stopped in time. In this difficult scenario, we are increasingly vulnerable to dramatic internal and external processes.

Under this premise, we call on citizens, interested in progress and the future, to be part of an unprecedented Country Project. It is not possible to move forward, in any direction, if we do not have a shared dream. This is what those who know say, outlining lines about education, science and technology or the value added to exports.

We still persevere, however, in sectoral, contingent views, by themes and from the symptoms. Not in vain did the philosopher José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) assert, early on, "Argentines to things, to things." This initiative includes holistic and complexity approaches, with spatio-temporal visions, harmonizing the urgent with the important. For this reason, we do not underestimate the turn of the poet Leopoldo Marechal (1900-1970) when he said "from a labyrinth one comes out from above."

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**"Developing an environmental ethic is more than developing  
new policies, it is about re-imagining humanity in the world  
itself"**

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We visualize that the economy is a result of the structural configuration of the country. We recognize the decisive role of this social science if, in addition to the conjuncture, it accompanies and supports the medium and long-term measures: basically, it cannot be autonomous from politics and - even less - overcome it. We also value a sense of solidarity and cooperation, of economic management, in coherence with the social component of sustainability.

The analysis we sponsor is systemic, thinking globally and acting locally. The contents pass a humanitarian and academic profile, free from positions of power: political, economic or ideological. In due course the proposal will derive in political matters, but it will not be merely electoral or partisan, but rather the (national) constitution and the facts.

We privilege the idea over all other difficulties, because first things first. The original feature of this presentation is to emphasize structural limitations: territorial, productive and cultural. The main objective is to make a new agenda visible, to reinstall an imaginary of a possible future, of the country and its insertion in the world. After a short schematic summary, the link will lead us to a 'working draft' outline, which is only intended to function as an idea trigger.

**Summary.** We call on citizens, interested in progress and the future, to discuss and be part of an unprecedented project for our country. We want an economy, with a solidarity and cooperative profile, that is not exhausted in the contingent and takes care of the medium and long term. The proposal puts the accent on an organic reconfiguration of Argentina, sustainable, in synergy with economic management. After the introduction, we present a working draft with these sections: 1.- Proactive diagnosis; 2.- Policies for Territorial Planning, Agricultural Sustainability and Environmental Education; 3.- Methods: a suggestive formula; 4.- Final considerations and 5.- References.

### **Keywords**

*Project, territory, scale, sustainability, economy, culture*



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## Argentina Preliminary bases of a Country Project

***"Sustainability is the most necessary unifying central idea at this time in human history" (Bybee, 1991)***



## 1.- Proactive diagnosis

It is not a path of change but rather a change of path. It can be approached from sectoral struggles and various pressures or by consensus, with unity in diversity, without ignoring real conflicts: we decidedly propose the second strategy.

It is difficult to transform the country from a vertical or hierarchical policy, but we can initiate an evolution from ourselves: acting at the local level, horizontally and participatory, without discarding the principle of subsidiarity.

There are no longer shortcuts for not designing a virtuous harmony between the State, the Market and civil society, in the face of the nature of which we are part. The point at which we are currently, can be synthesized like this.

Argentina lacks the conceptual frameworks, public and private, to enter a consistent development path. In general, there is no space-time vision, both of everyday problems and of those that concern the future. After overcoming 30 years of continuous democracy, the political (in) culture naturalizes electoral or short-term modalities. Likewise, a critical evaluation of the regional and global scope, moderately shared, is not detected as a basic input for the necessary elaboration of a Country Project

Our Nation exhibits a high, chronic fiscal deficit, but it also has enormous structural deficits: among others, a.- geodemographic distortion, b.- unsustainability in the agri-food complex, c.- deterioration of the environment and d.- social inequity. These factors interrelate with each other when we take a holistic, systemic, not sectoral approach.

Incorporating these agendas requires initiating some cultural transformations, at the different educational and social levels. These changes cannot ignore values of community conscience, of an ethic of the common good, of biodiversity and global cooperation.

At the policy level, in due course, activities should be legitimized with verifiable, transparent and sustainable approaches and actions. As a way to start a debate, we mention some State policies (not exclusive) that would be part of an eventual project.

## 2.- Policies

### 2.1.- Territorial organization

The subordination of social and environmental components, in front of the productive ones, is the usual modality of the successive managements. The virtual hegemony of the agro-industrial model, inserted in an economic worldview, determines a constant loss of small and medium-sized agrarian enterprises (SMEs). In the interior, this leads to social desertification which, in fact, accelerates ecological desertification. Industrial or service SMEs are also experiencing increasing difficulties when faced with larger scales.

We have a high production-consumption distance, with a high population, economic, political and cultural concentration. To this must be added great regional asymmetries -by all concepts- and a high precarious employment. The most significant distortion is the geodemographic one: within 93% of urban residence, a third of the population lives in 0.1% of the surface area and around 50% of the inhabitants live in 10% of the national territory. A single province, likewise, has 40% of the population in 8% of the territory (table 1).

**Table 1.**

**Geodemographic distribution, over the national total, in three districts.**

<i>Districts</i>	<i>Population %</i>	<i>Area %</i>
Province of Buenos Aires (PBA)	<b>39</b>	<b>8,2</b>
Greater Buenos Aires (GBA)	<b>25</b>	<b>0,1</b>
Federal Capital (CABA)	<b>7,2</b>	<b>0,005</b>
PBA + CABA	<b>46,2</b>	<b>8,2</b>
GBA + CABA (AMBA)	<b>32</b>	<b>0,1</b>

Adapted from INDEC, National Census 2010 (Loewy, 2015)

These numbers exhibit eloquence of their own and, at some point, are very surprising. However, they participate in a dramatic neo negativism (by default), which refers to cultural and economic factors. A policy of national decentralization and deconcentration, based on a gradual reconversion of the agri-food complex, would be the natural corollary of this synthetic diagnosis.

Sustainability, thinking about human development, enables to prioritize the equity foreseen in its social component. This can be achieved, to a large extent, by favoring production units with a "small" or "medium" scale. This strategy, within systemic visions, presents a high modeling potential of the territorial profile and efficiency.



Indeed, at least six factors -that contribute to development- appear positively affected by this premise: environment, society, food, energy, economy and landscape. Together, they make a substantive contribution to a population, political and economic decentralization, being functional to a territorial order.

## **2.2- Agricultural sustainability**

The agri-food complex in the world is called to undergo a second "great transformation", paraphrasing the capital work of the Hungarian economist Karl Polanyi (1886-1964). This area, based on its high participation in social metabolism, has the potential to define a good part of our relationship with nature.



The traceability of the different foods, within the production systems, must satisfy standards of food safety and demanding consumers. Transforming family farming, from unfeasible to sustainable, requires an active policy of the State. In the southwest of Buenos Aires, to exemplify, the modal surface of the agrarian properties has a deficit of 500 hectares with respect to the Agrarian Economic Unit (UEA).

A consistent way to tackle this problem is to provide, at SME scales, with good agricultural practices (GAP), processes and low inputs, agroecological or organic. With this integration, the units achieve the qualification of multifunctional. By incorporating some favorable features of the rural property, such as tenure and residence, the expression of all the sustainability components is completed in the system.

The expenditure of the society, to generate viability in units lower than the UEA, is the recognition of the social and environmental benefits of these farms, agro-social or agro-ecological. Another economic, structural and structuring provision is a land tax free of improvements. This Law would simplify the tax system, promoting production and equity simultaneously.

Different measures, economic and political, will also be decisive to complete a general picture of national deconcentration and decentralization: they simply escape the space for this primary analysis of the current situation.

### **2.3 - Environmental education**

There is no possibility of structural changes without cultural changes. This task is perhaps the most arduous and requires considerable time and will. An initial measure, in that sense, is to incorporate environmental education at all educational levels. The approach of this endeavor must not be merely disciplinary: it must abandon the traditional ideal of omniscience and the dual criteria of a humanity that dominates nature.



It must also move from an instrumental rationality to an environmental one, without ruling out a "dialogue of knowledge" that includes a diversity of cultural heritages. It is already known that the resilience of a system is directly proportional to the diversity it contains.

Since the choice between extinction and evolution (of life on the planet) is ours, the future of humanity cannot be contingent or left to chance. A responsible strategy is to guide "a collective evolution along paths in which biospheric survival and human well-being will become more than simply possible"

According to Unesco (2000)

The concept of sustainability, as one of the necessary references for Environmental Education in the coming years, must be permanently and critically reviewed with a

double purpose: to avoid its use to mask developmental and unsupportive approaches and to prevent its indiscriminate application in any initiative that associates education and environment

Finally, the systemic-holistic and complexity approach should preside over the approaches that we are considering in this working draft. In this line, environmental education is also system dynamics and their thermodynamic balances, exosomatic / endosomatic human balance and evolution, social metabolism and species consciousness, among other topics. At the tertiary level, it is possible to incorporate sustainability sciences, in basic and specialized terms.

We believe that politics must be legitimized - within the framework of a solid participatory democracy - adopting a non-rhetorical sustainability. A recent enhancement of the concept appeals to its integral stamp, calling it systemic sustainability: it validates its operation from a system threshold, where all its components can be expressed simultaneously.

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### **3.- Methods: a suggestive formula**

This call is just an attempt to recreate a country-agenda. We are not getting into legal, procedural or political strategy issues. We are just trying to build a "critical mass" to start working on something different.

Even so, it is useful to point out some rules -of a methodological order- for a higher instance. To do this, we take ideas from a clearly inspiring book called: La Encrucijada. Argentina and its reunion with the future. From the sixth chapter, «Wills and tools», we extract the following paragraphs:

If we achieve a firm will to excel, the tools to implement socio-economic and demographic changes - which will give it sustenance and viability - must observe two fundamental rules. The first of these rules is that of an active time: it is dynamic time, which is rhythmically integrated into the rhythms of the environment involved, giving a wide margin to all its necessary accommodations.

The second fundamental rule is that of persistent convergence, of all suitable means, towards the focused objective. This convergence is the engine of active time in its approach to the desired transformations. The persistent convergence, sustained through active time, constitutes a formula of great instrumental potentiality, superior to any revolutionary voluntarism.

### **4.- Final consideration**

Deconstructing the Argentine paradox may well go through recovering a country agenda that refers us to a national identity. This would be the step for a qualitative leap that transports us towards systemic and project goals. In this exciting cultural battle, which is proposed, it will be necessary to review words, convictions and values. Addressing what is important is not ignoring the present but an attempt not to collapse into the urgent. We invite you to think about a path of future horizons and utopias.



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