



## Editorial

### Climate change and the challenges of transitions towards sustainability

#### *Cambio climático y los desafíos de las transiciones hacia la sostenibilidad*

#### *Mudanças climáticas e os desafios das transições para a sustentabilidade*

We close the first quarter of the 21st century, more than fifty years after the emblematic report by MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) scientists called the Club of Rome's "The Limits to Growth" and almost forty years after the resonant UN's "Our Common Future" Brundtland Report. These reports mark a significant milestone on the evidence of human impacts on the global ecosystem or biosphere. The first one warns of the impossibility of infinite growth (economic and demographic) in a finite planetary context. The second one focuses on ensuring that production, consumption, and economic growth are sustainable based on a balance between the economy and ecology. Adding to these signals are the annual reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which show increases in global

average temperature levels and the overflowing of thresholds that condition the continuity of biodiversity and human life itself.

Climate change, biodiversity loss, and other current phenomena are the expression of the progressive misconfiguration and alteration of nature's cycles. Optimism in new technologies as an alternative to extend the planet's life expectancy are, for now, conjectures without evidence. On the other hand, any technology, such as those being generated for the energy transition in the North, implies medium-term relief at the cost of devastation through extractivism in countries of the Global South. These are expressions of a deep civilizational crisis that requires an integral and transformative approach, beyond mere technological or market solutions.

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The current hegemonic political system and global institutions do not seem to be shaken by the environmental crisis that unfolds day by day before their eyes. Even worse, they are not activated by the poverty, unemployment, inequities, and violence that the economic system and its development models have not been able to resolve. This inaction underscores the imperative need to redefine the power structures and institutional frameworks that perpetuate unsustainability, which would help in the construction of a truly ecosocial and democratic governance.

In this scenario, we present this dossier on the problem of climate change and the challenges involved in transitions toward sustainability, challenges that involve interrelated aspects ranging from summits, debates, and agreements at the United Nations, to the responses and treatments that different regions and countries are processing, and even local experiences that could provide clues for global responses.

Our focus is mainly on Latin America, but from a global, planetary, and at the same time, comparative perspective with what is happening in Spain and Europe. Latin America as a reference for the Global South, and Europe as a reference for the over-developed North.

The purpose of this monograph is therefore to amplify the reflection from a critical perspective on the transitions toward systemic sustainability, addressing three concatenated areas: First, the need for a less fragmented and limited notion of sustainability. Second, the debate on how to approach transitions to sustainability and reflect on recorded transition experiences in different spaces. Third, it analyzes the question of conscious-

ness, sensitivities, discourses, and behaviors. This monograph, therefore, aligns with the interdisciplinary, innovative, and critical approach of the *Revista DeMA*, seeking not only to enrich the academic debate on the interface between society and nature, but also to offer relevant and high-quality knowledge for a diverse public, including governmental organizations, civil society organizations, social movements, and the business sector, who are key actors in the construction of authentic ecosocial transitions.

Regarding the treatment of the notion of sustainability, several entries are recognized depending on the place and interests of those who argue it. Here, analyses and discussions are presented from academia, critical thinking, and participatory research with the aim of overcoming the disciplinary fragmentation of the sciences in its treatment and contributing with proposals from complexity and transdisciplinarity, including the perspective of the ancestral peoples of Latin America.

Sustainability in this context refers to the continuity of the conditions that make possible the unique act of “sustaining life”, an approach that necessarily interrelates biophysical and social aspects, a perspective that we call an ecosocial approach. This entails a fundamental critique of development theories and particularly that of sustainable development, due to the insistence on promoting the limitless expansion of the economic system without considering that the global ecosystem that sustains it is already saturated and that, therefore, the responses to the systemic crisis we are facing must be sought in different ways of producing, distributing, and consuming, for which a

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culturally ecosocial political order is fundamental, with vision and consistency to guide transitions toward the sustainability of life.

There are many signals in this direction, but they are scattered and without articulations. For this reason, those who maintain the most philosophical and cultural vitality in the human-nature relationship are the ancestral peoples who inhabit the American continent. Although they do not raise an explicit proposal on sustainability, they do so from Sumak kawsay in the Andes, from the Utz K'aslemal of the Mayan people or from the Kumen Mongen of the Mapuche, all appealing to the relationship of harmony and balance with nature, to community life and cultural identity as bases for sustaining territories, nature, and life itself.

Secondly, we have opened ourselves to the debate on the transitions toward sustainability, as this perspective is generally treated in an incomplete, insufficient, and manipulated way from the dominant paradigm of an economic development model that has caused this planetary crisis. Contributing to the reflection on transitions from academia is fundamental to provide more comprehensive clues in the construction of sustainable societies.

Transitions imply a political stance as well as a clear socio-ecological orientation, as setting as a strategic objective options for reversibility to the unsustainability of the way of life that has configured human society for centuries, but that today collides with biophysical and social limits, affects economic and political interests of those who hold political power both globally and locally.

Identifying what type of transitions are

on the agenda of the United Nations, national governments, companies, or civil society and indigenous peoples is a precise task for academia and ecosocial research, both to understand the dynamics of socio-environmental tensions and to guide and promote transitions consistent with the perspective of the sustainability of life and not the reproduction of the model and the infinite accumulation of capital.

And, thirdly, we focus on the sociocultural and political reality, addressing the topic of consciousness, environmental sensitivities, behaviors, and discourses in relation to sustainability.

Education is undoubtedly a pillar of sustainability perspectives, as it is in this dimension of social reproduction where there are opportunities to regain the understanding that human beings and nature are an indissoluble unit, to regain the value of nature as a living being with rights, and to build on these bases a new culture and economy of life centered on sustainability.

Academia, in this dilemma of reproducing the system or generating alternative clues, has the historical responsibility in the face of the systemic crisis that threatens us to guide the paths to follow through research, linkage, and the dialogue of knowledge. A horizontal and decolonizing exchange between diverse forms of knowledge (from science to ancestral knowledge and community practices) is crucial to challenge epistemic hierarchies and generate genuine alternatives.

## *Content Overview*

As an invitation to read, we present an overview of the contents of each article, which

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highlight the concerns about the web of intertwined crises that we live as humanity. Each article, with its own entries and foundations, gives the dossier a richness in analysis and proposals.

The monograph begins with an article that raises current reflections on the notion of sustainability, while presenting considerations to take into account when we think about and implement transitions toward said sustainability.

Indeed, Carpio, Abad, and Guamán suggest a multidimensional, systemic, and complex analysis from the perspective of understanding the interrelation between human beings, nature, and culture to build a robust notion of sustainability in the context of the global environmental crisis. The article recovers and systematizes a theoretical-practical notion of sustainability from ancestral peoples of Latin America who have developed holistic conceptions of life from a different relationship with nature, in contrast to dominant Western perspectives. The article collected, through interviews with key interlocutors from American indigenous peoples (from Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Brazil, Mexico, Guatemala, and Chile), the cosmovision, perceptions, and practices on sustainability of these peoples. Ancestral experiences and knowledge offer crucial lessons for addressing the contemporary environmental crisis. Integrating these perspectives into approaches to sustainability provides new strategies and innovative solutions. This integration also fosters a necessary intercultural dialogue and a more inclusive collaboration between different forms of knowledge.

Next, Astudillo, Sigüenza, and González present experiences on the path toward territorial sustainability, marked by new practices that

question the dominant system in transition to post-development. In this context, local initiatives related to popular ecosocial transitions are developed. They offer two perspectives: one, Latin American, which seeks transformative experiences with a focus on alternatives to the dominant system. And another, European, Spanish, in which they reflect on the possibilities and limitations of the 2030 Agenda, when local entities try to advance toward sustainability from the tools available through institutional channels.

The study focused on Latin America proposes a transformative vision of reality toward economic, ecological, and cultural sustainability, seeking a radical change in ways of thinking and acting, based on revitalizing ancestral knowledge and practices. The authors describe experiences of collective action and social metabolism that have managed to promote territorially sustainable local practices, identifying the common key elements for their achievement, such as the revitalization of ancestral practices and collective action based on participatory processes and epistemic plurality and social metabolism focused on the sustainable management of resources. These are not just isolated initiatives, but laboratories of systemic change and embryos of the future, which offer scalable and replicable models for a broader societal transformation.

In this analysis, the article by Araújo da Silva and Shiraishi Neto “Aldear a política, processos de promoção da legitimidade política de Sonia Guajajara” fits as another example of a transition toward sustainability from the indigenous political struggle. In this case, it is about centering the political and environmental demands of indige-

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nous communities in the local communities (the villages), a way of influencing politics by “reforming” it, placing environmental priorities and the traditional indigenous way of life at the center of a political strategy that is then taken to a federal and state level.

On the other hand, Arnaz Monreal and García Montes address some aspects of the experience of local implementation in Europe of the 2030 Agenda, at the municipal level, as a fundamental strategy to develop the transition toward sustainability, although it falls short by not considering citizen participation in the planning of sustainable public policies. According to the authors, citizen participation is a critical and non-negotiable aspect of the process, because it favors the efficiency and effectiveness of public policies, and because its absence negatively impacts the awareness of the climate crisis and the development of pro-environmental behaviors. This connects with the efforts that indigenous people and collective action are carrying out, both in Europe and in Latin America, reinforcing the importance of community participation in the transition to a more sustainable world.

A more general reflection perspective, centered on the Global South, is provided by the article: “Repensando as transições desde o Sul: um diálogo com Raúl Prebisch sobre periferia, desigualdade e capitalismo” by Gudynas and García-Quero. Here, the limitation and incomplete diagnoses of the dominant approaches to transitions and the obsession with adapting the criteria of the North to the South without considering the particular social, political, ecological, and historical contexts are emphasized. From this

position, a re-reading of Raúl Prebisch’s work is made, updating and correcting concepts such as center-periphery, unequal trade, accumulation, or development ethics, to explore their validity and usefulness in the formulation of transitions, with a critical and contextualized view of transitions beyond conventional development and that embody potential to face the crises of the present.

The article “Perspectivas de la sostenibilidad: réquiem para un sueño” by Dimas Floriani addresses the socio-environmental crisis, for which he analyzes the proposals of the SDGs and evaluations of their progress from ECLAC. He introduces a critique of the theory and practice of sustainable development. He argues that there are diverse forms of use and appropriation of nature that depend on cultural perspectives and conceptions, from which conflicts or consensuses on future scenarios emerge. He concludes with alternatives from the perspective of subaltern actors, fundamentally ancestral peoples.

Another block of articles focuses on the behaviors, attitudes, education, and values of citizens related to the transitions toward sustainability. In relation to attitudes and behaviors, environmental issues have been of relative concern to the public, which has not allowed the internalization of relevant sustainable behaviors.

The article by Arroyo Menéndez and Álava Atiencie explores to what extent the recent change in the intensity and frequency of phenomena related to climate change improves sustainable behaviors, taking Spanish society as a reference. The results reveal that climate change is already palpable and it is recognized that it affects daily life, which results in greater ecological concern

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and greater interest and thematic follow-up, but with an impact that is not yet relevant on individual behaviors. The reasons for this poor evolution are: the politicization of the environmental issue, which alienates conservative citizens from sustainability. The decrease in purchasing power explains the drastic drop in economic support for the environment, but other behaviors and attitudes also decrease among those with less purchasing power, widening a gap between affluent citizens who are increasingly involved in sustainability and impoverished citizens who become disengaged and unconcerned. It also contributes that young people are less involved in ecology and that media messages focus on problems and not on the effects of actions.

The role of education in generating positive attitudes and behaviors in citizens is fundamental and should gain more strength at all levels of the educational system, as a factor to undo this paradoxical gap between concerns and behaviors. The article by Ther Ríos, Guzmán Espinosa, and Peralta Vallejo examines some strategies for transitions toward sustainability in Latin America, focusing on six important Latin American universities. The objective is to analyze the notions of sustainability, in order to show their importance and recognize their contributions to stimulating alternatives to development. Four topics were considered: conception of the environment, conception of sustainability, inclinations toward critical thinking, and environmental criteria included in Latin American universities for decision-making. Effective strategies for the implementation of sustainability in universities are identified, as well as barriers and opportunities in this process. The results

clarify how sustainability can be a powerful tool to reimagine higher education, promoting a greater integration of principles and equity in educational programs.

Finally, we present an article that deals with a profound change in the system of values that has been in force until now, from an anthropocentric vision rooted in modernity, to a decentralized vision that requires the transformation of the energy paradigm of the authors Acosta Espinosa and Quizhpe Parra.

The Rights of Nature represent a break with the anthropocentric paradigm so characteristic of modernity, recognizing Nature as a subject and promoting an ethics of coexistence that fosters harmony between humans and with Nature. These rights emerge as a fundamental ethical and political proposal to promote deep and necessary sociopolitical, ecosocial, and intercultural transitions. This article focuses especially on one point: how the Rights of Nature can contribute to transforming the energy bases of our societies, recognizing energy as a fundamental factor for social, political, and, of course, economic life. Forceful elements are proposed for energy transitions away from dependence on fossil fuels, without this decarbonization process configuring new forms of colonialism. A transition is advocated that is guided by respect for Nature and communities, the democratization of energy, and the revaluation of local and ancestral knowledge, understanding energy as a right and not as a simple commodity.

In the end, this collective effort that arises from the Doctoral Program in Territorial Sustainability, with a mention in post-development studies, of the University of Cuenca, Ecuador, with

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the sponsorship of the Complutense University of Madrid, the University of Los Lagos, Chile, and DeMA of the Federal University of Paraná, Brazil, is a contribution for those who are in the orbit of research on environmental crisis, climate change, sustainability, transitions, and alternatives, hoping that these approaches support the development of their work and generate more questions and searches.

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