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EDITORIAL

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Climate change, global warming, and associated risks have moved to the centre of public debate, often referred to as the greatest challenge of the 21st and 22nd centuries, currently mentioned daily in the national and international media.

The World Economic Forum's 2020 Global Risks Report considered climate change along with infectious diseases and pandemics, like COVID-19, as among the top 10 risks in terms of impact over the next 10 years, and in 5 categories – economic, environmental, geopolitical, societal, and technological. The loss of biodiversity and climate disasters, top the list of risks, which warns us that the failure of climate action is the most severe risk of the decade. Clearly, environmental risk is most likely to manifest itself in several areas, namely the areas of production and distribution of goods and, above all, in the consumption patterns. The deterioration of the planet's habitability conditions is at the top of the global concerns.

The use of fossil fuels, related with the Great Acceleration historic period, was, in fact, the determining factor that made possible the rupture of the scales that previously bound the space of human presence on the planet, during the Holocene. It caused radical changes in the socioeconomic, technological, cultural, and environmental spheres.

Most of the human activities that contribute to global warming and the consequent climate change are local processes. They arise from the growth of emissions of greenhouse gases in activities ranging from the production and burning of fossil fuels, in electricity generation and transport, through deforestation, agriculture (eg livestock and fertilizer use), fisheries (eg trawling that decimates animal species...) and solid waste disposal (eg sanitary landfills and incineration), likewise to the destruction of the ozone layer through the emission of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs).

The relationship between ecological system-social system, which was stable during the Holocene, is now, at the Anthropocene, being disrupted. Problems of Nature are problems in our relationship with Nature, so they are social problems.

At the age of reflexive modernity, people may have access to a great amount of information but has little knowledge about the subjects they can access to, leading to the cognitive vulnerabilities of today's societies. Paradoxically, one of the risks of the so-called reflexive societies is related to the lack of trustful information, lack of understanding in make decisions, thus, implying, the need to reduce the knowledge gap between those who disseminate the information and the public receptors.

Moreover, while debating the climate crisis, just experts address the ensued erosion of social cohesion and related issues like the deterioration of mental health arising from the impact of traumatic events such as natural phenomena, infectious diseases, pandemics, wars, terrorism, unemployment, climate migrations, etc. That takes place, as most of the concern is centred on economic crisis, or, more specifically, on economic growth. Indeed, the economic stagnation, unemployment, increase in social inequalities, and the crises, unleashed by the SARS CoV-2 pandemic, has uncovered the direct connection of social disruption associated with economic growth in the context of the neoliberal market economy. Furthermore, digital inequality and the collapse of social security systems are deepened by the neoliberal policies that do not address the social inequalities.

Risks in the Anthropocene raises new problems and demands for action. Ignoring the effects of climate change will block development. In fact, most of these risks we face are related to socio-economic choices, which show the

inability of governance to reduce vulnerabilities and to warrant adequate basic infrastructures to face human made risks. Therefore, a robust effort must be made to adaptation, so that the economy and society are not globally disrupted.

Indeed, the continuous changes in the physical environment introduce imbalances in the Earth System and in the relationship between species, as the pandemic that we were going through, have so well demonstrated. The scientific community has been expressing its concern about global climate change for several decades, through academic papers, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports, and media opinion articles.

Despite the difficulty to grasp all effects of the human actions, climate change is unequivocally a problem of global “common good”, dealt with in the context of international negotiations between countries. For sure, this goes within and beyond global Environmental Agreements.

However, it has not been easy for governments, at their different levels, to address the matter, given the complexity and uncertainty on the amplitude of its effects, and the nature of general and specific changes required to keep the planet habitable. It is even harder when effective sustainability transition measures require changes in patterns of production, consumption, and citizen’s behaviour.

The economic dimension is crucial for a sustainable transition. Solutions lie in the category of what we can call “science time”, as it involves a set of scientific oriented solutions, in interaction with economics and politics, not dissociated from public opinion in the design of solutions for local sustainable development strategies. In this context, the dissemination of scientific information, is seen as a right of citizens that contributes to well-informed actions, decisions, and oriented solutions based on a reflexive thinking about the ensued economic and political implications. This should involve a whole network of actors, from scientists, stakeholders, policy makers, and the public. Social safety nets and associated policy measures ask for accountability and public confidence about the answers to climate change and associated risks.

We are clearly at a point of intersection of ethical, political, economic, technological development, and social change dimensions, which demand for a high sense of responsibility. It is the time of solidarity, a dimension both political and ethical that should cross economic growth.