



“The new horizons of the Economy of Communion”
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PANEL 6
“NOT ONLY ECONOMY. FOR A HUMANISM OF COMMUNION”
ECOLOGY AND COMMUNION

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I seemed to gather from this rather unusual topic entrusted to me, a subtle prophetic and therefore stimulating factor – if not provocative – with regard to the relationship between economy and ecology. These two sciences, while having the same root: *oikos* (house, in Greek), in the course of time increasingly distanced themselves from one another to the point of opposing each other.

I will begin my argument with an ethical reference. In doing so, I do not intend to moralize or to be academic; rather, in the present-day global situation of environmental policies – after the shelving of the Kyoto protocol, after the *nothing accomplished* of the Johannesburg Summit (2002) and the consequent paralysis of significant initiatives on the global level – the reference to ethical principles, is, I believe, a necessary basis for re-launching a sensitivity to environmental problems and for formulating new proposals.

On the horizon of an ethics of responsibility towards humanity today and tomorrow and towards the ecological system Earth – in which we live – one principle is usually placed among all the others: the *principle of cooperation*.

It affirms that the conservation of the Earth is the duty of all men and women: each individual person and each community has the duty to work and to use the natural habitat responsibly. The States and international institutions intervene with activities aimed at global and local coordination through specific environmental laws, incentives and supports.

It is in reference to this ethical principle, which presses towards a quantitative and qualitative intensification of relationships between economy and ecology, and in view of an evermore sustainable development, that the following proposal is made: the creation of an institutional location from where the developing countries can draw clean technologies, set up



by the industrialized countries, with accessible economic conditions so as to reduce the global environmental impact of their growing industrial production.

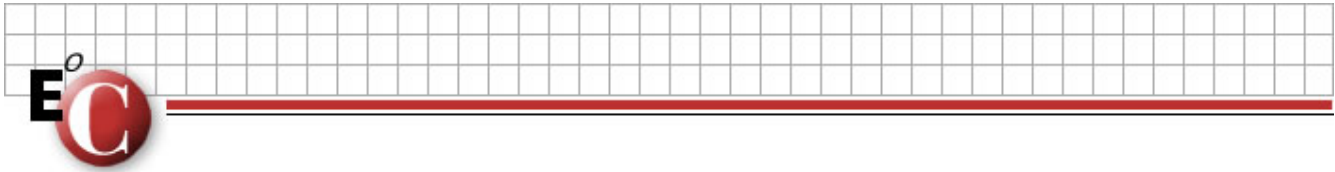
Today, in fact, we cannot underestimate the fact that the growing specialization of industrialized countries in the production of services is accompanied by the shifting of many industrial productive activities to the developing countries, with the related burden of pollution, where the cost of labor and the policy of environmental rules are less onerous and compelling.

Moreover, while in the industrialized countries there is both the technology with the related know-how and the institutions for taking the first steps towards policies of sustainability, the developing countries have serious problems with both of these factors (technology and institutions) needed for achieving such policies. As a result, the developing countries invariably withdraw from the international agreements on global environmental problems – climate changes, the greenhouse effect, etc., – understandably concerned about the consequent burdens for their economies.

On the other hand, while the problem of sustainable development emerges as a global problem, it would be pointless to attempt to set up a policy on global environmental questions that does not create the conditions that would enable developing countries to adhere as well.

The commitment of industrialized countries for sustainable development should guarantee that a policy of sustainability is achieved not only by them, but also by the developing countries. This is a central **communal element** between ecology and economy. All this requires, for the countries of the north of the world, a serious commitment on the financial level, a serious reduction of its per capita consumption, the use of clean technologies, which they already possess but do not, as a whole, use, and the transfer of these clean technologies so that the “necessary” adhesion of developing countries to the international agreements does not damage their efforts towards development.

In fact, the environmental policy of the industrialized countries towards the developing countries is filled with contradictions: on the one hand the industrialized countries seek to pursue an environmental policy by modernizing their technological machinery, selling their



obsolete technologies; on the other hand, they ask the developing countries – forgetting every obligation to cooperate – to adhere to the international agreements which would require much higher technologies than the ones the industrialized countries sold to them (ecological dumping).

This contradiction fully betrays the prospects of a sustainable development because it fixes the moral attention solely on maintaining the choice opportunities of the future generations of the industrialized countries, while compromising at the same time the possibility of satisfying the present needs of the developing countries and the opportunities of their future generations.

Quantitatively, considerable global environmental benefits could be obtained today from the initiative we proposed above in view of the trend of development in countries with high populations, such as China, India and Brazil.

The proposal inevitably touches problems like the policy of patents, the cost of purchasing and managing such technologies, as well as the formation of technicians.

Besides the ethical demand which orients us towards the promotion of such an institution, some elements of the environmental economy also point in this direction.

In 1992, in one of its documents the World Bank made reference to the relation that exists between some factors of environmental degradation and the levels of per capita gross national product.

This relationship shows that environmental degradation grows with the average income increase when this latter surpasses the critical threshold level of around \$8,000 per capita income a year (dollars 1985).

The curve in question is known in economic literature as the “Environmental Kuznets Curve”

What does the “EKC” tell us?

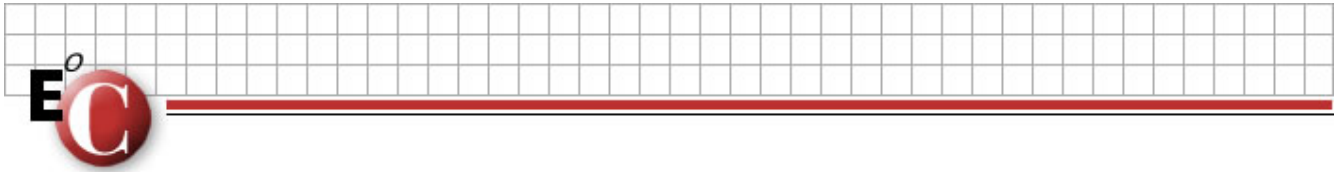
- it shows that some signs of environmental degradation (emission of CO₂; urban solid waste) increase, that is, worsen, with the increase of per capita income;
- other signs (lack of potable water; hygiene indicators) diminish, that is, improve, with the increase of per-capita income;



- still others (emission of sulphuric and nitrate anhydride) first increase and then decrease with the increase of per capita income.

What indications can we draw from the “EKC”

- 1) Because the countries of the north (20% of the world population) are placed to the right of the critical threshold level indicated above, whereas almost all of the countries of the south (80% of the world population) are still far from such a goal, and because the environmental problems that cause the greatest concern are the global ones, we conclude that it is necessary to intervene urgently on the rules of economy and international trade before the majority of the world population draws near to the critical threshold and causes a vast environmental impact. In this context we see the need to transfer clean technologies to countries that are approaching the critical threshold so as to lower the EKC and reduce an environmental impact that would have devastating dimensions.
- 2) The second and most important message is the relationship between the problem of sustainable **development** and the problem of **poverty**. It would be illusory and irresponsible to think of resolving the first by not taking into consideration or, worse still, by aggravating the second problem. Efforts aimed at improving or at preserving the environmental quality of the north of the world would be of little use if, at the same time, an extraordinary program is not mobilized against poverty so as to allow the countries of the south to move with clean technologies beyond the critical threshold identified by the EKC. It will necessarily have to deal with a program of redistribution on the global scale since the policies on the national scale no longer secure such a goal.
- 3) The need to overcome the current difficulties in transferring clean technologies to the developing countries, such as a lack of incentive and obstacles of an economic-juridical nature, require a World Environment Organization, eagerly



awaited today in many parts of the world. In view of today's globalized market, it would need to be capable:

- of addressing an adequate *governance* of the market itself in respect of environmental obligations;
- of interacting with the World Trade Organization in order to harmonize the rules of free trade with those of protecting the environment and, at the same time, making such rules respected;
- of favoring and managing the transfer of clean technologies towards the developing countries.