

Social inclusion through steam locomotives and tourist trains

In his paper the author explains why tourist trains can be an alternative solution to help to solve the rising unemployment of the excluded.

Three years ago, I had the honor of being invited to Tokyo to freely express my opinion on the sustainability of tourist trains. At that time my clarification about the difference between sustainable and sustainability had such an impact that now I am tempted to repeat it.

The word “Sustainable” refers to something that can sustain by itself. On the other hand, we could talk about “Sustainability” meaning something that can sustain on time, thanks to the economic, social or environmental conditions that allow it. What is the difference then between sustainable and sustainability? Sustainable is only concerned with the preservation of natural resources to ensure that future generations can also have this kind of resources to satisfy their needs. But it is not a permanent status, a fire, an earthquake or man can destroy it. However, sustainable development is a process for achieving sustainability. It considers the social, political and economic conditions of the community.

The World Summit for Social Development in 2005 identified as goals of sustainability the three pillars: economic development, social development and environmental protection.

Some relevant issues of economic sustainability linked to the improvement of the bottom line of the company, with positive environmental impact, were presented at the 1st Congress of the tourist trains that took place in Brienz, Switzerland, in October 2003. Along with the modifications in the locomotives made by Roger Waller, I presented a report on the benefits of modern steam technology, a concept that you all know. I refer to Lemport nozzles to improve the flow of exhaust gases designed by the famous engineer Livio Dante Porta, in addition to his well-known Water Treatment for boilers.

In Tokyo we deal with the issue of environmental sustainability. Today I am going to tell you my vision about social sustainability, and the concerns in a community where we develop our projects.

The opening to world trade, result of the first GATT agreements, generated a new Globalization era, whose paradigm today is to promote a single space for commerce. If we narrowly define globalization as the degree of integration of markets for goods, services, and capital across country borders, we can see the ebb and flow of globalization depicts how integrated the world economy has been over time.

Its impact has been enormously positive for humanity, having succeeded in removing half of the people from poverty, something that seemed impossible in 1960. We must highlight both, its positive aspects: The increase in productivity, the rise of the Internet, technology growth; as the negative aspects: closing of companies, increase of unemployment in the so-called rust belt areas, decrease in education. To better understand the impact of globalization on Western societies, we should apply the economic conclusions of the Stolper-Samuelson theorem, which summarizes:

"Globalization affects scarce factors and benefits abundant factors." This is how abandoned industrial areas appeared in many regions and cities, with people without work and unable to adapt to the new era of Digital Revolution.

Because of globalization, we have two serious crises to face in the twenty-first century:

Unemployment of skilled labor and the digital revolution, which have displaced many people in the developed world. As everyone warns us, in the future a job will require other skills.

What happens then with the cities and its societies? For a community to grow sustainably, it must be sustainable with the environment, have a sustainable economy, and must also accept being a plural community, in which consensus and social equity are achieved. Pluralism helps every community to grow better because it enriches it by removing it from stagnation. And to be able to grow and to live better, a community must reach consensus, everyone must yield and accept an intermediate solution in the antinomies that are usually presented daily. Finally, equality is important so as not to exclude others that are outside the system without the possibility of developing.

Poor or indigent people are mostly associated with unemployed people, but since the eighties a new social group emerges that are the "poor working people". These are poorly trained people for whom there are fewer and fewer jobs. Although quality jobs are created, there are a lot of people who are not "employable" in the terms that the labor market requires. This problem is found in many developed countries and in Argentina it has had an even greater expansion in the last 30 years. Having reached 57% in 2002, today the poverty level is 28.7%.

In Argentina, the richest districts look like parts of Europe. Majority of university students, aging population, many people living alone and negative vegetative growth. Families today have fewer children than their parents had or, directly, do not.

On the contrary, in the poorest districts of the rest of the country, the population growth is of underdeveloped levels. Adolescent motherhood, i.e. women with more than three children at an early age, are a huge problem.

For those girls and boys, who are hardly educated and trained, there will be no decent work. They will be poor or, worse, destitute, even if they have an occupation. And that's true, at best. The other alternatives are the permanent dependence on state subsidies, crime or a combination of all misfortunes.

It is no longer enough to reduce inflation and improve employment, to significantly improve the social situation. Even with good policies well implemented, for many it will be late. They will live on the state subsidy until the end of their days because, perhaps, they can never be transformed into employable people. Although it is extremely difficult to improve the situation, it is incredibly simple to make it worse.

The new society in which we are entering rapidly in this century is the information society. This change, based on the digital revolution, is raising new class barriers between "Included and Excluded" in the community.

Our country, with 44 million people, some 26 million people are Economically Active Population, but only 12 million are registered workers. 2.2 are unemployed people. The rest: 5.2 self-employed people; 4.9 social assisted people; 0.5 domestic workers and 1 are odd jobs. The complexity of employment is increased if we consider the immigrants who increase the labor supply. But a harsher vision is to divide them into: "combatants" who are the ones who work, the "wounded" who live by populist social subsidies and the "prisoners" who are expelled from the system.

Many technical schools developed by the state railroads and by the union were the source that provided machinists, mechanics and technicians who worked for the railroads. With the shift to the private sector, all this process was abandoned leaving a huge void that today is occupied by the railfans. Although it sounds a paradox, today the lovers of the steam locomotives can be dedicated to trains, when before nobody would have let them intrude if it did not have the pertinent suitability.

For this reason, I believe that our interest and effort to preserve the old locomotives and trains has a greater social value if we understand that with our action we can generate alternative sources of jobs that require little computer knowledge, helping to mitigate the negative effects of this digital revolution, so that we can make society more sustainable. We must promote the knowledge of steam and the classical locomotives.

Tourism is one of the few forms of job creation that still needs people as a medium and less from computers. The tourist trains are one more opportunity to generate jobs for all those people who are being left out of the system. So is the naval industry, where a ship requires 40% of skilled labor that is hardly replaced by robots.

We shall promote the tourist trains, as well as we shall promote tutoring about how they work, to generate opportunities that help us to include the excluded.

"We must say no to the economy of exclusion, the excluded are not even exploited, they are discarded." Pope Francis Evangelii Gaudium (2013)