

INTERVIEW WITH ASIER ARCOS, REPRESENTATIVE OF THE HEGOA INSTITUTE

1. Why is the Hegoa Institute involved in an observatory on the fair distribution of wealth?

Since the beginning of Hegoa, more than thirty years ago, the fight for social justice and against inequalities in and between countries has been one of our fundamental concerns, which give meaning to our existence and work.

We believe that the evolution of the international context in recent decades has led us to a time of increasing change and complexity, which can be analysed in terms of systemic crisis: A time in which many of the structural problems of the past remain unresolved (poverty, hunger, gender inequalities...), while others have emerged whose implications affect both the North and the South (climate change, new forms of armed conflict and violence, migration and the crisis of asylum policies...). Thus, we observe with concern how the current economic system leaves more and more people on the margins.

The fight against poverty and inequality has as its flip side the fair distribution of wealth, which is an approach that involves paying attention to the other side of the coin of the egalitarian redistribution of resources, which, moreover, are finite and increasingly scarce.

Hegoa has been a driving force in proposing new approaches, debates and strategies, based on reflection and critical thinking, which has led to an improvement in the quality of cooperation and education for social transformation, with significant contributions in specific areas such as local human development, human security, women's rights, globalisation, etc. The area of the fair distribution of wealth is, therefore, a space for debate in which we believe we can collaborate and contribute together with the organisations that form part of the observatory, with the aim of being able to contribute to the transformation of the current local and global system.

2. Why is wealth accumulation and the resulting inequality it generates a problem?

The accumulation of wealth, as we are persistently seeing, generates inequality. As seen in Intermón Oxfam's 2020 report "Time for Care: Care Work and the Global Inequality

Crisis", there is data that reveals in itself the gravity of the situation of unequal wealth distribution worldwide:

- The richest 1% of the population owns more than twice as much wealth as 6.9 billion people (Oxfam, 2020).

- The 22 richest people in the world own more wealth than all the women in Africa (Oxfam, 2020).

These two figures alone illustrate the magnitude of the challenge facing humanity (or at least some of it) to achieve an equal, fair and just world.

Moreover, from the point of view of the rights approach, an area of research in which Hegoa has been working for a very relevant period of time, all people must have equal and inalienable rights for their freedom, justice, peace and personal and collective development. Growing levels of inequality have immediate consequences on the effective freedom of the most disadvantaged people and on their ability to exercise their rights and develop. Furthermore, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognises the obligation of States to "ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights". However, while a large number of people are not guaranteed their basic needs for the exercise of these rights, we are faced with an accumulation of wealth by a minority, far in excess of their needs. Accumulation is not a right, but must be subordinated to the human development of all people.

It seems clear, therefore, that the drift of the prevailing economic system does not point in the desired direction, quite the contrary. This makes us reflect on our own system of production and consumption and its clear limits to development, which, for example, are clearly reflected in its environmental dimension. The planet is not capable of supporting these levels of unlimited growth for much longer, given that resources are finite. Similarly, in relation to care, we find that the current system makes a large part of the work carried out by women invisible, when, paradoxically, it is a fundamental pillar of its sustainability. As stated in the aforementioned report: The economic value of unpaid care work carried out worldwide by women aged 15 and over amounts to at least \$10.8 trillion annually, a figure three times the size of the global technology industry. (Oxfam, 2020).

For all these reasons (and we could go on for many more), we believe that wealth accumulation poses a major problem today, which needs to be addressed urgently by a range of public and private actors.

3. What are the solutions proposed?

The solutions are multiple and diverse; it is difficult to come up with concrete solutions to a multidimensional problem. Hegoa, as a research centre, tries to influence social change through the construction, proposal and application, based on critical thinking, of theoretical frameworks, processes and alternative strategies for human development and transformative cooperation that make it possible to move towards the sustainability of life. To this end, we want to advance in the construction of an organisation that is recognised for:

- the generation of a critical and proactive way of thinking in resistance;
- Advocacy with others for transformation and social change;
- its relevance in the university and in society, as well as its capacity to establish links between academia and social agents;
- its organisational strength, with an inclusive cohesion that favours plurality;
- its feminist commitment, expressed both in its external and internal practices, including the transition towards a model of shared leadership and where care is part of the organisational culture.

This task is based on shared values such as social justice, solidarity, gender equality and ideological plurality.

Among the thematic lines of research that are underway in HEGOA, we find the Social and Solidarity Economy. Within it, we find two lines of research: Feminist Economics and Ethical Finance. The former focuses its attention on the feminist analysis of economic processes and on the reformulations of socio-economic and organisational dynamics that place the sustainability of life at the centre, while the latter is concerned with theoretical proposals and practical experiences that seek to put the mechanisms and instruments of financial intermediation at the service of Feminist, Social and Solidarity Economy projects.

The Social and Solidarity Economy proposes a change in the approach to the reason for the economic act. The economy must serve the good of the people and this must be its ultimate goal. Working from this paradigm shift, researching and developing actions for its development and focusing on Feminist Economics and Ethical Finance, we believe, will contribute to the questioning of the production and consumption system itself and its limits.

The Social and Solidarity Economy, as a socio-economic alternative, is based on core ethical values such as solidarity, inter-cooperation between agents, reciprocity, redistribution, social justice and equity, among others. The practice of this type of economy, in itself, confronts the accumulation of wealth, given that it is opposed to these values. Therefore, we believe that moving in this direction can provide humble but valuable solutions to the problem of inequality and the deficient redistribution of resources.