



Manifesto

for
decent and
sustainable work



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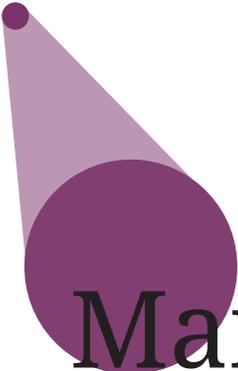
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Manifesto for decent and sustainable work

For more than two years, an international group of thirty partners, ranging from NGOs, social centres, charities, trade unions, church movements and other activists, have collaborated in a research program that aimed to elaborate of a new vision of labour, one that responds to contemporary social and ecological concerns. It has responded to the two needs of successfully transitioning to an eco-friendly economy and alleviating social suffering in the workplace. The research partners have given their recommendations in the form of a “Manifesto for decent and sustainable work” as a way of presenting their vision for the “future of work” as an integral part of the ecological transition. This manifesto points out that labour has a transformative power that will help our societies to transition to a more socially-driven and eco-friendly economy.

Inspiration for this manifesto has been drawn from:

- The body of “Catholic Social Teaching” (CST), which is the sum of teachings and texts that the Catholic Church has issued on social issues confronting our world. CST emphasises the value of relationships between people. This raises at least two important considerations with regards to the future of work. Firstly, it questions what constitutes “good use” of the “twenty-four hours” that every individual has at their disposal each day. Secondly, it raises the issue of the interconnectedness between human beings and the world they live in. In other words, it considers our need to live sustainable lives in both social and environmental terms. The encyclical letter *Laudato Si'* (2015) written by Pope Francis gives a conceptual framework that provides the principal source of inspiration for this manifesto. *Laudato Si'* explains how both the current social and environmental crises stem from common causes, such as the throw-away culture, anthropocentrism and a technocratic paradigm. *Laudato Si'* argues that the transformation of labour is necessary if we are to address these destructive phenomena. According to CST, labour is an essential aspect of human life and a means of contributing to the common good of all mankind.
- The reports of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), published from 1919 to 2019, on “decent work for all”¹ and “*decent and sustainable jobs*”². These sources of inspiration explain that “*work is not a commodity*”³ and should be protected in the name of human dignity.
- The experiences of the partners on the ground. The different realities observed have been combined to give an accurate account of what is at stake regarding the issue of the future of work. Furthermore, the partners have identified similar trends in different contexts, so as to recognise the seeds of tomorrow’s world.

1. ILO, Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, 2008

2. ILO, Decent work, the key to the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, 2017

3. ILO, Declaration of Philadelphia, 1944

The definition of labour given by ILO is intentionally restrictive and it only relates to situations of employment that represent around 50% of workers. The broader CST definition contends that labour comprehends “any activity involving a modification of existing realities”⁴. This manifesto’s perspective tries to combine both approaches while focusing on what will be desirable for the future of work. Within this framework, a shift in paradigm is required in order for labour to help achieve the social and ecological transition. This shift must occur at all levels - local and global, empirical and theoretical - for significant change to take place.

The group has asked, “How can we create a framework in which labour is decent, meaningful, fair and ecologically sustainable for all men and women?” This question has oriented the group’s reflection on a new vision of work that will lead to a socially-driven and eco-friendly future. This manifesto is their response to this question and provides a vision of work that can address the challenges that gave rise to it.

This group advocates for sustainable and decent work globally, now and for future generations. This aim requires the values of human dignity, social and environmental justice, the common good, quality of work and social-ecological solidarity to be respected in the workplace.

This is our manifesto.

4. *Laudato Si'*, n° 125

1. THE PROMOTION OF HUMAN DIGNITY

Human dignity is inalienable, shared by all, and at the foundation of all social life. Its roots originate in the sacredness of the person.

Promoting decent work

Promoting human dignity in the workplace goes beyond financial remuneration and beyond the idea of “decent work”. It implies the defence of universal labour rights and the promotion of “dignifying work”⁵ – i.e. labour that honours and respects human dignity and increases what we can call “relative dignity”, which is dependent on living conditions.

- Divisiveness and competition in the workplace undermine human dignity. This needs to change. Human dignity must be at the core of management methods and Corporate Social Responsibility. Moreover, it should be a compulsory evaluation criterion when considering signing a trade agreement, a business contract or a contract of employment.
- Promoting work decency implies that human beings will never be considered as mere commodities and lowered to being treated as machines or resources. In that regard, establishing decent wages must be a priority for business owners and leaders. This principle should never be bypassed on any circumstances.
- Decent work, in contrast to slavery, implies that workers also enjoy complete freedom and autonomy to choose their job. This implies the right to choose a way of meeting their job requirements that is in conformity with their culture and beliefs.
- The majority of workers do not have an employment contract and an even larger proportion have no access to social pro-

5. *Caritas in Veritate*, Benedictus XVI, n°63: “What is meant by the word “decent” in regard to work? It means work that expresses the essential dignity of every man and woman in the context of their particular society: work that is freely chosen, effectively associating workers, both men and women, with the development of their community; work that enables the worker to be respected and free from any form of discrimination; work that makes it possible for families to meet their needs and provide schooling for their children, without the children themselves being forced into labour; work that permits the workers to organize themselves freely, and to make their voices heard; work that leaves enough room for rediscovering one’s roots at a personal, familial and spiritual level; work that guarantees those who have retired a decent standard of living.”

tection. It is therefore important to formally recognise such “invisible” workers. International and local institutions must work towards extending labour rights to “invisible” workers.

Paving the way to dignified work

- The workplace should also foster opportunities for all workers to be creative and express themselves positively. It must be a place where human dignity can be cultivated by positive encouragement of good work and pride in its achievement.
- Short-term thinking and fast-paced activities can be socially and environmentally detrimental. In order to dignify work, every worker must have the right to work at a sustainable and healthy pace. They should be able to enjoy decent and fulfilling work relationships. This capacity to interact respectfully with others must also be extended to non-human beings. Indeed, workers can relate to all sorts of entities and creatures while being at work; and these opportunities to interact must be fully accessible and deeply respectful of all. This is the only way to welcome vulnerability in the workplace.

Solidarity with humankind and living beings

- Human dignity is achieved within a community of people. It is only recognised as being fully achieved in relation, from one person to another. From this perspective, the regulation of labour – be it in economic, political, legal or social terms, can promote respect for the dignity of all. It is one more opportunity to create a community of people enjoying the same status of respect and supporting one another. That community must incorporate all “invisible” workers, including indigenous people, migrants, and those discriminated against on the basis of ethnicity or occupation. The issue of labour should not be approached from an individualistic standpoint. It must consider the rights of the most vulnerable. It is by nature a collective issue. This calls for an ethic of solidarity in defence of every workers’ rights to cooperate in labour laws and in the way labour is organised in the workplace.

- Human beings are corporeal persons and part of the material world: human dignity requires that acceptable living conditions are maintained. Humans have a responsibility to make the world a habitable place. This responsibility goes beyond human needs, it concerns all beings that inhabit this world. All beings have an intrinsic value, the denial of which runs contrary to a full expression of human dignity.

2. THE PROMOTION OF SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Social and environmental justice are threatened principles in the workplace.

Fair working conditions

- Social justice entails the creation of fair working conditions that include: (1) ensuring a decent wage for all workers; (2) limiting the wage gap to a maximal factor between workers and top-level managers; (3) enacting and enforcing fair and equal employment laws; (4) allowing and strengthening trade unions; (5) taking care of the relationship between consumers and producers; (6) and promoting gender equity in treatment, conditions, wages and opportunities.

A fair sharing of resources

- For the past century, the notion of “social justice” has been focused on wealth distribution. In other words, it looked at the fundamental right to enjoy the fruits one’s labour. Today, however, the negative impacts of climate change, pollution and other environmental disruptions are disproportionately greater on those with least responsibility for their causes. The most environmentally exposed and underprivileged need to be protected, which requires consideration of *environmental inequalities*. Rights such as equal access to a healthy environment and right to migrate to environmentally tolerable places must be recognised.

- Social justice should also encompass *ecological inequalities* – for instance, the unequal distribution of natural resources, dangers and rights to pollute. There is an urgent need to acknowledge the impact of human activities on the environment and hold actors to account, which could include the idea of an ecological debt.
- It is clear that the poorest people are facing a double penalty, in both social and environmental terms. These people suffer from social injustice and environmental disruptions at the same time. An international tribunal looking at social and environmental injustices should therefore be created to protect the most socially and environmentally vulnerable.

Equal job opportunities

- A fair distribution of job opportunities requires social and environmental policies to be transparent in any organisation that employs people for paid or voluntary work that produces a good or a service.
- The international division of labour should promote local economies. This would reduce the phenomena of massive rural to urban migration and “brain drain”.
- Multinational and local companies must make sure that their activities are sustainable and benefit the territory in which their activities are performed. Moreover, their activities must not only benefit consumers, but also the citizens of the country in which production takes place.

A fair definition of job opportunities

- Job opportunities must be fairly defined. This means that jobs must also be created according to what is needed socially and environmentally. “Bullshit jobs”⁶ should not be the only way to reach full employment. Promoting activities that are not considered jobs, but have a social and/or environmental value, can be a way to insure that human needs are met.

6. To use the expression coined by David Graeber, in *Bullshit jobs*, Éditions Les liens qui libèrent, 2018

- Labour can be defined as being a collective asset. Each and every worker should be able to have a say regarding the way labour is organised. Labour can be collectively managed by using participatory management methods and team cohesion dynamics, and by inviting workers to participate to the governing board of the organisation. More specifically when it comes to innovating in the workplace, a greater account should be made of local knowledge, such as indigenous knowledge, as it may provide the means to achieve greater resilience. Elaborating methods based on local knowledge while also including workers in decision-making processes will help refocus work life on trust rather than competition.
- Being able to unionise must be a universal labour right ⁷. More specifically, workers should have paralegal training in order to know how to form a labour union. Additionally, various kinds of “invisible” workers, such as migrant workers, must be represented in these unions. Lastly, there must be dialogue between labour unions, and between unions and governments.

Personal responsibility and structural change

- While social justice requires sharing resources equitably, it also requires individuals to take responsibility for creating a fulfilling yet simple lifestyle. The concept of “enoughness” is useful in achieving this. It is indeed advisable that “fulfilment”, that is the development of everyone capacities ⁸, must be the centre of people’s concerns. Instead of focusing on acquiring wealth individually, human effort must be oriented towards living a simple yet fulfilling life whereby everyone’s personal development matters. This calls for the promotion of the value of simplicity, which sets limits on the accumulation of goods, the control of people and resources, and the influence of a powerful minority on the majority. Indeed,

7. Similarly to what is suggested in the Ethical Trading Initiative, Base code, clause 2 “Freedom of association” (<https://www.ethicaltrade.org/eti-base-code/2-freedom-association-and-right-to-collective-bargaining-are-respected> (<https://www.ethicaltrade.org/eti-base-code/2-freedom-association-and-right-to-collective-bargaining-are-respected>), last consulted on May 9th, 2019)

8. Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*, Belknap Press, 2011

work is a collective action and it should require a fair distribution of the decision-making power along the production chain. This creates fair relationships in the workplace and acknowledges that value is collectively produced.

Promoting cooperation

- Labour is by nature collective. Its strength rests on the fact that it requires the cooperation of multiple stakeholders so to achieve its production goals. That is why, instead of encouraging competition amongst workers, which is oftentimes counter-productive, managers must consider the dynamics of cooperation among labourers when evaluating the success of their business.
- Workers' rights must be better protected and, as already mentioned, participatory methods of management should be promoted in the workplace so to foster creativity and innovation. Encouraging associations of workers and labour unions will help in this regard.
- The interactions between humans and the environment in work activities must be made clearer, especially when a company is engaged in mutual relationships within a (human and non-human) ecosystem.

Social justice and “invisible” labour

- Social justice must be central to work management and organisation. This is urgently required in the informal economy so as to protect “invisible” workers. Any type of “invisible work” (informal, domestic, volunteer, etc.) should be accounted for in national or international legal systems. Such new regulations or institutions can give a better account of the world of work at the national or international level.

3. CARE FOR THE COMMON GOOD

The concept of the common good goes beyond general interest: it pertains to “the good of ‘all of us’”⁹. This fact is anchored in our specific common history of global interdependence. Nowadays, it raises the urgent question of finding a way to respect the world’s social and environmental boundaries, which define what is morally and physically achievable given our planet’s resources. Looking for such compromise obviously concerns labour activities: labour is an integral aspect of achieving the common good. The new paradigm this manifesto advocates for rests on this assumption and thus questions the current financial and business models which our societies are built on. Yet, one element remains crucial in that analysis: economic value. It must not replace or take precedence over the common good. Both can be produced by labour and our current economic model tends to encourage the production of economic value at the expense of the common good. This manifesto advocates in favour of a concept of labour that places the value of the common good at the core of its activities.

The common good and common goods

- The concept of the common good is linked to that of environmental sustainability. It is almost disconnected, however, from our current economic model. The aim of the common good cannot be separated from that of sustainability, of creating something that lasts and can be maintained. Similarly, the common good by nature contains an environmental component: the realisation of the common good depends on judicious management of the planet’s resources. The current ecological crisis evidences the fact that our current economic model, based on the belief that everything can be destroyed and re-created, is not sustainable. This creative destruction does not seem to lead to greater human well-being. That unescapable observation induces the necessity to rethink how labour impacts society and the environment. We must rethink the social and/or environmental value that is created by labour.

9. *Caritas in veritate*, 7

- The care of the common good requires the care of common goods (water, climate, biodiversity, internet, labour, etc.). If we are easily conscious of the care needed by regional common goods, we need to keep in mind that we are never disconnected from global common goods.

A vigilance at all levels

- Social and environmental justice must be the guiding value of economic life. This will require a regulatory principle that places restrictions on free competition.
- It is the responsibility of public authorities to implement, protect and defend a legal and social order that regulates all economic life to the benefit of people's lives. Yet, it is the responsibility of companies, auditing organisations, labour unions, the International Labour Organisation, and all persons to make sure that a global system of labour regulation exists.
- At the institutional level, innovative strategies must be undertaken to help a company or an organisation to formulate and implement its social and environmental policies. A vision of having responsible companies is attainable. Indeed, instead of being predatory, enterprises can seek to carry the mission of achieving the common good as a long-term goal. Short-term profit would no longer be the primary objective. For instance, one long-term objective could be to fulfil the duty of care that an enterprise has all along the production chain. The French law of "Devoir de vigilance" (Duty of care), which has been discussed at the United Nations¹⁰, is one example of what can be done in that regard. Another possible objective could be to promote the development of the region in which a company bases its production. That is why every person participating in the production cycle or impacted by it must be included in decision-making processes, including non-workers, civil society, families and communities. Thus, decision-making will take greater account of its subsequent impacts.

10. UN, Human Rights Council, June 26th, 2014, resolution 26/9.

- Transparency must be a priority for companies all along the value chain. They must make information accessible to everyone.
- Lastly, companies should be rewarded when their environmental and social policies comply with international and national norms, and when they are successfully implemented on the ground. This will incentivise other companies to do adopt similar policies.

Participatory labour management

- At the level of the individual, participating in labour activities can be an opportunity to reflect on one's social responsibility and contribution to the common good. Indeed, labour places the individual at the heart of a collective process that directly or indirectly contributes to the common good. Therefore, labour management must seek to benefit from individual reflection by becoming more participatory.
- Additionally, the most vulnerable should not be left behind but should be empowered: benefiting them benefits society as a whole and helps achieve the common good.

4. PROMOTING QUALITY WORK

Workers must be proud of the work they achieve. They must be empowered to be able to do their job well. They can only gain dignity through their work if their job is meaningful to them. Work conditions, in particular health and environmental safety, must be advocated for in order that they are acceptable to workers that have a right to a decent quality of work.

Doing one's work well

- It is not advisable to try and quantitatively measure the quality of somebody's work. Quality of work is a subjective notion that stresses the importance of "time" as a resource. Time is a resource that everyone needs in order to do their job well and

to balance both their professional and personal lives. Every worker must use time efficiently. Trust among colleagues and within a hierarchy is a key element for this process.

- All along the value chain, work conditions must be audited so to ensure the protection of every worker, and especially the most vulnerable. This is also a way to promote quality work and human dignity across borders.
- The use of technology in the workplace can help reduce arduous work and improve labour conditions. Nevertheless, if technological progress happens in the workplace, it should not be solely aimed at benefitting financiers and stakeholders. The belief in infinite progress remains questionable and labour must remain humanly achievable.

Care for relationships

- Labour holds the potential for people to have meaningful relationships with others and the environment. The workplace offers opportunities for dialogue that can positively transform people, workers and the world as a whole. Thus, the development strategy of an organisation must focus on the power of meaningful relationships in the workplace among employees, customers and resources.
- Encouraging and sustaining meaningful relationships all along the value chain can cure the current social and environmental crisis that our society is going through. The subject of a meaningful relationship can be a transcendent entity, nature, another person or oneself. If a worker or an organisation is aware of how fulfilling and meaningful a relationship can be, this might lessen their desire for more goods and power.
- In many organisations, caring for people and customers is presented as a primary objective. Yet this often amounts to only lip-service when works fall victim to work-related diseases and social isolation. That is why labour management strategies must value the power of listening in order to improve relationships in the workplace. This could prevent psychosocial risks. In the same vein, labour management should take care to be inclusive of everyone, even the most remote and socially vulnerable communities of workers.

5. THE PROMOTION OF SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL SOLIDARITY

The principle of solidarity applies to all living beings on the planet. That is why this manifesto argues in favour of social and ecological solidarity. The word “solidarity” evokes the need for all member of a society to care for and be responsible for one another’s survival and well-being. Accordingly, we should mitigate against the disproportionate impacts of pollution and ecological disturbances upon the more vulnerable, which exacerbates existing inequality. We wish to extend the value of solidarity even further: it should be applied to all living beings. The human species must care for other species, not least because other species help sustain human needs. We must recognise that we share a common earthly fate with other species.

Labour and the sustainable development goals

- According to ecological solidarity, economic activities must be both socially and environmentally sustainable. Therefore, companies and organisations must have the legal duty to conduct social and environmental impact assessment studies to measure the impact of their activities and to modify their behaviour accordingly.
- The development and respect of human rights and needs will have to fit into the planet’s limits. In other words, humanity has to face the fact that the planet’s resources are limited. Humanity has to find the adequate balance between what is morally and socially achievable within the planet’s carry capacity. The following image illustrates this well: let’s imagine that this equilibrium would be located between a social floor and an environmental ceiling. The social floor – based on the principle that all human beings would be treated equally, regardless of gender and social status – represents human well-being and includes all human needs (food, health, education, housing, energy, etc). According to Kate Raworth¹¹, the environmental ceiling «reflects the pressure that humanity

11. Kate Raworth, *Doughnut Economics : Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist*, Cornerstone, 2018

can exert on the earth's vital systems without putting them at risk, for example by causing climate change, loss of biodiversity and destruction of the ozone layer at dangerous levels ».

- At the local level, workers should be informed and aware of the impact they have on social and environmental issues. This requires companies and organisations to be transparent about their activities.
- At the global level, massive land conversion should not result from unregulated development. Moreover, the international division of labour should not deny local producers the possibility of consuming their produce. Additionally, production and consumption waste should be avoided as much as possible. To that effect, products must be designed to be sustainable and recyclable.
- In the longer run, governments must support global institutions in their effort to create jobs that restore and regenerate the quality of the social fabric and the environment.
- Managing the commons must influence job creation globally. The link between labour and ownership must be carefully considered.
- Those who are more socially and environmentally vulnerable must be legally protected. For instance, national and international institutions must agree on a legal status for climate refugees. Consequently, protection would be granted to people suffering from climate change. The ecological emergency also compels us to protect people that are not yet displaced, such as small farmers located in remote areas. States and labour unions could help them transition to more sustainable and resilient farming methods, which may include traditional method. In this sense, the ecological emergency is also a social justice issue.
- Technology has the potential to enhance human dignity. Its benefits must be equally distributed among the world population. Yet technology is not a magic bullet that can solve the environmental and social ills of the world. It can also produce pollution and requires the consumption of raw materials and energy resources.

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*The Future of Work,
Labour After Laudato Si*





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