

Interview with Marian Díez, president of REAS Euskadi

1. Why is REAS Euskadi participating in an observatory on the fair distribution of wealth?

Reas Euskadi is made up of more than 80 companies and organisations that share a common objective: to build another economy among all of them, an alternative economy to the current capitalist and hetero-patriarchal one, an economy at the service of the sustainability of people's lives and the planet, based on other values: solidarity, equity, care for nature, cooperation, non-profit-making, commitment to our environment, mutual support, in other words, the principles of our Solidarity Economy Charter.

Since 1997, the year in which it was created, Reas Euskadi has wanted to be not only a network but also the driving force behind a movement that contributes to the transformation of the current local and global system through the creation and consolidation of alternative economic initiatives. As a result, during these years, the solidarity economy has been deployed and has become a real alternative. And when I say that it already exists as a real alternative, I want to emphasize that we are not talking about the Solidarity Economy as an idea or a concept, but rather the existence of diverse and transforming economic practices that are present in all economic circuits and that demonstrate that it is possible to produce, distribute, consume and, very especially, live on the basis of other, fairer and more sustainable principles. At this moment, the companies in our network are present in sectors such as the generation and distribution of renewable energies, ethical finance, agro-ecology and food, care, cooperative housing, fair trade, recovery and recycling of waste, culture, communication, etc.

For years we have been defending and building, from our practices, an alternative economy that moves towards a model where people, and not markets, are at the centre of economic and social organisation, where the economy takes on an instrumental role subject to the democratic spheres of citizen participation and decision making. And we do so because we are convinced that this is the only way to achieve decent, fair and equitable living conditions for all.

Our participation in this Observatory has to do precisely with those values and principles that I have already mentioned. We believe that it is essential in the process of building economic and social alternatives to recognise the equal dignity, rights and possibilities of all people, while assuming and respecting their differences. We also believe that it is essential to redistribute all socially necessary jobs, including those that do not pass through the market, but are fundamental to the quality of life of women and men. We also believe that not-for-profit is a guarantee of our commitment to the redistribution of wealth, while also ensuring the reinvestment of the profits from economic activity in our environment, in new collaborative and supportive projects. All these commitments are set out in our Charter of Principles of the Solidarity Economy.

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

The data on inequality and other undesirable consequences of current capitalism are insistent and are maintained year after year. According to the latest reports, inequality is not only extreme, but also out of control. Hundreds of millions of people live in poverty while the richest elites receive huge profits. There have never been so many billionaires in the world, and their wealth has reached an all-time high. Meanwhile, the world's poorest people have become even poorer. The current model is so unsustainable that it is not even capable of meeting one of the most basic needs of all people: their food. World hunger is on the rise since 2014 and affects 690 million people.

At Reas Euskadi we believe that these data are not coincidental; they are the consequence of the capitalist system we suffer from and, with it, of neoliberal thinking, which has managed to devalue life itself. The entire organisation of our world revolves around the submission of the process of production, distribution and consumption to the market, as well as life to the values of individualism and selfishness. The capitalist model benefits the richest people, favours the domination and accumulation of capital as the engine of the system and generates ever greater inequalities and the impoverishment of millions of people and regions throughout the world.

The reason for this inequality lies in the fact that capitalism is guided by the search for maximum profit for companies, the greatest benefit for capital, and therefore is not at all concerned with the distribution of wealth, nor with generating more quality employment, much less guaranteeing a fair and sustainable life for the people, women and men who inhabit the planet. In this system, people are only instruments, economic subjects understood as producers or consumers, leaving aside the fundamental dimensions that contribute to a healthy and dignified life for all. The result is the existence of a fundamental contradiction between capitalism and the sustainability of life.

3. What are the solutions proposed?

The proposal of REAS Euskadi is very clear. We want to transform our local society and our global world from the root and from below. The Solidarity Economy is a fundamentally transformative practice, given that it clashes head-on with the capitalist model, giving people, their needs, their abilities and their work a value above capital and its accumulation, while at the same time demanding a more redistributive and equitable socio-economic model. We believe that working together with other social movements in defence of this alternative is fundamental to promoting a social and ecological transition.

The covid pandemic¹⁹ has therefore brought back to the fore something that critical economies and social movements have been arguing for years: the urgent need to rethink the pillars on which the functioning of our society and our world has been based until now.

If we had to draw shared conclusions from the alternative currents, we would point out, among others, these priorities: to begin to build a new society that cares for all people - especially those with the greatest difficulties; to strengthen public education, health and social protection systems; to pay attention to the services and products that are

essential to our daily lives; and, of course, to promote an ecological transition that addresses the challenges we are facing with increasing urgency.

In closing, I would like to make a more specific reference to the jobs crisis, a crisis further exacerbated by the current pandemic. We believe that two important issues have become apparent in recent years. The first is that the source of citizenship, of rights, is the individual and not employment. The second is that there is much more work beyond paid employment: care work, community work, etc.

The questioning of the role of employment in our societies must lead us to propose important changes that will enable us to move towards a more just, sustainable and democratic social model: new forms of articulation of social rights not directly associated with employment, a new social and economic valuation of all jobs (productive and reproductive) and a new distribution, as well as other instruments for redistributing wealth and financing social benefits and services.

One of these debates undoubtedly revolves around the importance of introducing new tools such as basic income, a debate driven by the progressive decoupling of work and pay and the precarization of employment, but also by the care crisis. In this context, raising the basic objective of establishing indispensable vital minimums that must be guaranteed by the State for the entire population is a tool that contributes to the distribution of wealth and that must be combined with other measures that put an end to speculation, accumulation and unbridled consumption. But, also, basic income is a very valid tool to fight against the capitalist heteropatriarchy, to make visible in a clear way the jobs associated to the care of human life; jobs that are unavoidable and that correspond to all of us.