A higher education for integral ecology: radical and not marginal? The emerging experience of the Campus de la Transition

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In autumn 2018 a “student manifesto for an ecological awakening” circulated in France. It was written by students of the Grandes Ecoles, frustrated by the completely insufficient nature of the measures taken in ecological matters and eager to make some sacrifices: “we, future workers, are ready to question our comfort zone so that society changes profoundly”. By the end of December more than 28,000 students had signed the text.

Inspired by institutions such as Schumacher College (Sterling et al. 2018), the Campus for Transition (Campus de la Transition) was created in 2017 by a group of scholars, students and professionals who were keen to promote high-level academic training in the service of ecological and social transition, by providing all the participants in this project with an experience of “transitioning” in a place itself in transition (in terms of ecological renovation of the building and challenges of mobility, food, social inclusion, etc.). In Forges, a village of 500 inhabitants in Seine-et-Marne, a chateau and twelve hectares have been made available for the project by the religious congregation to which I belong, convinced as we are of the urgency of action in this field and open to the non-denominational dimension of the approach. Can the Campus for Transition help engender a new way of relating to the world, particularly among those who feed unsustainable and deadly business models and lifestyles?

My discussion will be structured around two premises. First, current changes create an urgent need to clarify collectively the purposes of living together. In this respect, even if climate-skeptical discourses exist, if geopolitical priorities mask or delay collective decisions and if neglectful and anti-ecological attitudes are legion, an agreement on the diagnosis and the ethical aim is being sought. This is reflected in the principles, with all their limitations, that underlie the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2015 Paris Agreement: intra- and intergenerational solidarity, equity, attention to ecosystems, co-responsibility. From an educational point of view, it is a matter of reinforcing an intellectual and existential awareness that favors a certain consensus on what world it is desirable to build, its practical forms being diverse: how to draw concrete universals?

The second premise involves debating the paths that make it possible to reach the objectives related to this shared vision, not being content with mere words. The abovementioned international agreements provide a topical example. Indeed, the SDGs may be mutually contradictory: the pursuit of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) growth for all countries is incompatible with access to clean energy for all (Wackernagel et al. 2016, Giraud 2017). The aim is to promote pedagogies that nurture such questions and paths – intellectual and practical – marked by progressive stages, breaks from “business as usual”, decisive progress ... What is at stake is a culture of dialogue able to inform ethical and political questions. It is also necessary to test and experiment concretely the means of making changes, in an uncertain context, toward the effective implementation of the hoped-for future. Questioning the current trends related to the digital economy is key, in order to study the conditions for its consistency with global ecological challenges.

The Campus for Transition project functions at both these levels. From a transformative education perspective, it aims to participate in the incarnation of this shared aim and in the collective research into the means adopted, in connection with various actors, institutions of higher education and research as elected officials and actors of the territory, members of associations and entrepreneurs.

This paper deals with three timeframes, which correspond to the “three horizons” approach (Sharpe 2013) intended to launch various collectives. Here we adopt, in a very free way, the proposed articulation between the three horizons, three ways of looking at the real: from everyday life and the usual ways of doing things (horizon 1, H1), starting from the expected and targeted future (horizon 3, H3) and in the assessment of the path to be taken (horizon 2, H2). A central element of the proposed pathway is to discern whether the innovations and steps envisaged in H2 contribute essentially to acting in such a way that nothing changes (H2-) or lead to actions in the service of the advent of H3 (H2+).
H1 is the horizon of the diagnosis: the inadequacies of the curricula currently proposed in higher education, with regard to the challenges of sustainability. The need for epistemological deepening will be highlighted, along with a reflexive and critical approach. H3, which will be discussed second, is the horizon of the world to be made. We will study the role of the transformative utopia in drawing a desirable future that meets the requirements of an “eco-justice of the commons” (Renouard 2016a). From then on, a creative and interpretative approach is engaged. H2, which will be the subject of the third part, is the horizon of the paths of transformation. It aims to combine the construction of knowledge with experiments, in a context of debates and fruitful disagreements (Viveret 2002), and it requires an approach that is experimental, transdisciplinary and holistic.

Higher education now faces the challenge of contributing to cultural change, which confronts it with its own ambivalence: if education is daring to think for oneself, it is also a vector of cultural reproduction. The notion of human experience is key to linking and guiding all human faculties. It is not to be understood as a laboratory experiment or a natural experiment in the econometric sense, but as what deserves to be lived, tested, interpreted, discerned and constantly reoriented. The goal is a transformative experience, individually and collectively. Instead of experience as Erfahrung, atomized and without any real repercussions in a person’s life, we must prefer experience as Erfahrung, “which leaves a trace, which is connected, or is in relevant relation, with our identity and our history” (Rosa 2012, 131). If we are plagued by various forms of alienation from our lives, in the light of our aspirations to live lives that are responsive, fostering a quality of relationship with others, with nature, with things, with ourselves, how can we arouse such founding experiences of new paradigms, new ways of thinking and living? And how can we connect them to make the matrix of a new social fabric?

I. Horizon 1, Diagnosis: Higher education as victim of the tragedy of the horizons

In 2016 Mark Carney, Governor of the Bank of England, spoke of the tragedy of the horizons to describe the current inability of the world of finance, focused on the short-term, to integrate structurally the objectives related to climate change: horizon 1 prevails and horizon 3 does not orient a transforming strategy for horizon 2. This tragedy may be that of the Anthropocene epoch, if human action were to lead inexorably to the depletion of resources and species, despite the shared vision of another possible lifestyle. A look at sustainability curricula is enough to show that they are confined to a logic that is essentially H1 or H2; this realization opens up a critical perspective and other ways of relating to the world.

1. The first point to note is that higher education has not yet integrated ecological issues as a transversal dimension. This has been demonstrated by a recent study on sustainability training in various undergraduate and master’s degree programs (O’Byrne et al. 2015). The authors carry out a detailed analysis of 54 programs in different countries of the world, looking at the share of compulsory core courses in ten areas that are either sectoral (natural sciences, social sciences, engineering sciences, commercial sciences, arts and humanities) or transversal (general sustainability, applied sustainability, methods, research and applied projects). The courses contain very few requirements in terms of compulsory training in the natural sciences. The arts and humanities represent on average 1% of master’s programs in sustainability. There is also a deficit of critical social sciences that challenge certain aspects of modernity. The authors point out the great heterogeneity of the courses and readings requested, and the lack of any common basis for real sustainability programs.

This global analysis is consistent with the diagnosis made in a study recently published by the think tank The Shift Project (Vorreux et al. 2018) on the place of energy transition training courses in France. The authors mapped energy and climate lessons in 36 higher education institutions – universities, business schools and engineering schools. The study shows that these issues are still considered secondary. They are taught mainly in specialized courses and in a technical way, even if they are starting to appear gradually in general courses. The content varies greatly from one institution to another.

On this basis, we can see that the results are mixed. On the one hand, more and more training programs are trying to create links between disciplines. Efforts are being made to encourage active student engagement in the curriculum and links with various actors (Swaim et al. 2014). On the other hand, these efforts are limited: they are not enough to initiate adequate transformations of economic models and individual and collective practices. They all too frequently reflect, without challenging, a dominant view of the development of societies. A historical overview makes this clear. Schoenfeld pointed out that although the number of courses in the United States whose title included the term “environment” quadrupled between 1966 and 1976, “on the whole, however, the 1960 American campus picture presented the very antithesis of the integrated intellectual efforts demanded by the complex relationships within the biophysical and cultural environments” (1979, 293). A more recent study (Christensen 2007) takes stock of the courses offered in 50 schools classified by the Financial Times, a little less than twenty years after another study on the teaching of business ethics. It found that the number of schools with a compulsory course in the ecological field has increased from 5% to 25%, linking
ethics to corporate social responsibility and sustainability. However, the study does not look at how the content is presented and taught.

To conclude, the abovementioned studies indicate that sustainability training does not contribute to a profound revision of the assumptions on which our societies are built. It is at best a reforming but not a transformative vision (Blake et al. 2013).

2. It follows from this that an approach that puts critical analysis at the forefront appears to be a sine qua non for the evolution of training models. As early as 1972, Everett denounced the lobbies that did not really take environmental threats seriously. He called for an education that "would bring increased knowledge about the ability of economies and institutions to provide support and status to the poorest groups in society without the means of growth (GDP)" (1972, 94). Springett gives the example of a course on "business and sustainability" aimed at reinterpreting the concept of sustainable development in the light of the evolution of capitalism and international institutions in the twentieth century, to show the ambiguities and the power relations that underlie the dominant rhetoric. The course calls for "a pedagogy based on methods of action to develop skills such as ‘criticism’, ‘social commitment’ and ‘reflexivity’" (2005, 153).

This echoes my own twelve years of experience teaching at ESSEC Business School, at the Ecole de Mines de Paris, and four years at Sciences Po Paris on topics related to global capitalism and social and ecological justice. The courses combine a deepening of ethical sources with student presentations, meetings with actors and case studies, related in particular to field research carried out by my research program CODEV on the effects of the activity of multinationals. One of the objectives is to encourage students to reflect on their criteria for their choice of profession. Their reviews show how this type of course promotes a change of outlook. In the words of a student at the end of a course in June 2018, "I am always quite aghast to hear from high school friends saying to me ‘I would like to do that [often: going into entrepreneurship, going into an NGO, working in a social start-up], but I cannot, so I will go into finance and consulting’ [...] I am convinced that on the one hand, our studies allow us a real choice of profession, and on the other hand, we must accept the responsibility of making things move at the level of social and ethical issues. Indeed, we are perhaps best placed to do it: if we don’t do it, who will?"

In the words of another student, "It was only when I arrived at a business school that I became aware of the path of perdition to which I had committed myself: all the values strongly conveyed by all the courses are strongly directed toward a capitalism asserted and disconnected from my reality. Indeed, having lived all my life in a country of the South, I have been, from a young age, sensitized to realities and values which are not perhaps always compatible with the situation in which I find myself. It was by taking this course that I found a kind of comfort by approaching the company from a radically different point of view than I had seen before. I was able to take a class where questions that are close to my heart were finally asked. The benchmark on which I can essentially rely is that of Rawls’ sense of justice. Indeed, the concept of equality is attractive but it is not enough, in my opinion. To think of the company is to think of fairer societies, with a sharing of resources that is fair, supportive and respectful, ensuring a future for future generations". Such experiences are recounted by students from diverse backgrounds. However, participation in an isolated course or even in a specific sector is not enough. How can we take a deeper approach to the problems posed by our economic models, if not by questioning their foundations?

3. It is impossible to draw a complete overview of the ways in which researchers from different disciplines, from physics to anthropology, have been brought to reconcile their ways of thinking about their relation to nature and the world. One could object that many internal debates in Western thought have taken place, and there have been numerous recent challenges to the rationalism that approaches the real from the angle of linear causality, mastery and appropriation of things to know and to transform (e.g. Rose 2013). Such rationalism is no match for the subtlety of many schools of thought – starting with Descartes – and their capacity to promote a respectful, frugal and unifying relationship between humankind and nature. In a sense, we do not need the Gaia theory (Lovelock 1990) or a detour via animist thought (Descola 2005) to challenge our own ways of living and thinking; it is the great contribution of modernity and democracy – related to the politics of ancient Greece – to have fostered a self-critical relationship to our own tradition (Castoriadis 1996).

However, a certain type of criticism is probably only possible thanks to knowledge from the hard sciences and a detour through other ways of representing the world. Thus, economic research in dialogue with physics and biology, especially the laws of thermodynamics (Georgescu-Roegen 1971), shows the need to integrate the finitude of energy and resources within economic models. Neoclassical models in no way take account of the fact that economic activity increases entropy (the disorder of a system), dissipates energy and generates waste. These studies converge in a relational conception of the universe, compatible with the mobilization of many ancient and contemporary wisdoms from different traditions, in a renewed relationship to life, to our
perceptions and to our spiritual resources (in the broad sense). These relational approaches to life allow us to re-enchant our personal and collective lives, to give them meaning beyond the absurdity that inevitably passes through them.

From this point of view, the proposal made by Andreas Weber (2013) to supplement the Enlightenment approach with the notion of enlivenment is suggestive. The modern aspiration to autonomy and democratic values is preserved, emphasizing “subjective experience” and “objective poetics”. It is a matter of looking at the world from the subject, through the eyes of others. A “first-person” science is inseparable from the experience of interdependence and the conception of individual freedom as growing with that of an entire community; from this comes the interest of the notion of commons, popularized by the work of Elinor Ostrom (1990), but it also relates to the notions of global commons and common good. If the global commons are defined by economists as rival and non-exclusive goods, resources to which everyone should be able to have access today and tomorrow, the so-called commons approach insists on the collective dynamics that define and ensure these conditions of access. I define the commons as “an approach of interpretation and collective action for the distribution and use of goods in the service of social and ecological ties; these goods can be designated as relational goods, participating in the search for the common good, as an individual and collective horizon” (Renouard 2017). The perspective of the commons involves emerging from visions of the world in which a form of man-nature dualism goes hand in hand with an atomized understanding of the relationships between persons. The commons make it possible to consider the economy as being at the service of the organic development of people and communities. Recent scientific, biological and physical discoveries have emphasized epigenesis, the adaptation of organisms, and the fact that organisms are interdependent networks (Strohmann 1997, Browaeys 2018). From this perspective, biologists such as Francisco Varela describe the capacity of each organism to generate its own organization, the fruit of its relations with others. Every living being develops with the desire to live in interdependence with and adjustment to other living beings. Therefore, an economy of the commons is careful to generate wealth for all and not to create externalities that endanger the balance of the whole. “Commoners realize that their household needs and livelihoods are entangled with the specific place and habitat where they live, and with the earth as a living being. They realize that their physical needs (hunger, thirst, health) are entangled with their search for existential meaning (a good life, joy, meaning). Finally, they realize that commoning, as an alternative system for meeting needs, is about a constant enactment and re-definition of a multitude of relationships, both material (metabolic) and psychological (symbolic)” (Weber 2013, 44). Weber mentions the buen vivir or Max-Neef approaches to essential human needs, to which we can add the capability approach (Sen 1999, Nussbaum 2000), and particularly the work around collective and relational capabilities (Giraud et al. 2013), including relationships with ecosystems.

In the end, most sustainability training does not challenge the dominant economic paradigm and is not articulated in a structured way. The primary condition for a more coherent approach is the implementation of a critical perspective. From this point of view, an approach centered on the participation of the human being in the living environment, and on the cooperation between living beings, favors a reflexivity as to what destroys or promotes the lasting quality of relations. Is it possible to agree on the principles for a desired future in common?

II. Horizon 3, Transformative utopia: The eco-justice of the commons
When raising the possibility of a common vision, we should be aware of the difficulties that need to be addressed before we can propose a transformative utopia.

1. Four main criticisms can be leveled at a holistic perspective. The first relates to its Western character. Thus, the SDG discourse first reflects a conception inherited from the notion of sustainable development, articulated with an economicistic view of the world and obscuring other ways of understanding development (Rist 1996, Rahnema 2003, Escobar 2018). If sustainability training in universities is based on such notions, then backing that training means continuing in the same vein. A response to this criticism is that if the self-critical and reflexive thought mentioned above is at work, then an analysis of the objectives and the articulation of the curricula must be carried out that takes into account the dissonant, marginal voices, and perhaps starts from them.

The second criticism cites the risk that the discourse will be incorporated by the capitalist doxa, which is able to ingest all such criticism (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999). How can we avoid becoming stuck in the logic of marketing? How can we move beyond a social marketing perspective and ‘nudges’ that cannot lead to a deep reform of behavior (Corner and Randall 2011)? How can we promote a genuine individual and collective emancipation?

This points to the third criticism of the formal nature of the approach, the risk being all the greater when it comes to education: how can we get out of the schism between reality (Dahan and Aykut 2015) and cognitive and practical dissonances, out of the abyss between the intention and the reality of our trajectories? This would require the articulation of objectives at different scales to prevent the dimension of individual commitment being
concretely anticipating the organizations of tomorrow’s world.

Finally, a major objection is that there is little point taking such a step, from the strategic preferences of states to the “survival mode” of certain populations, in the face of geopolitical issues that do not allow us to look at the longer-term horizon. How can we integrate ecological concerns into the core strategy of countries and large companies, in a desire to collaborate, facing the tragedy of horizons and divergent interests?

2. With regard to these objections, different educational responses are possible. The recognition that we have only one planet, precious and fragile, is salient. Admittedly, the attitudes of psychological rejection of climate change are diverse; they include reinterpretation of the threat to the downside, strategies of consumerist diversion, deferral of responsibility and putting the blame on others, indifference, unrealistic optimism ... (Franks et al. 2018, 129). But there is also growing awareness of belonging to the same wounded world and, even for those who are motivated by short-term financial strategies, an awareness of the cost of inaction: the financial cost, the economic cost, in terms of the deterioration of the quality of life for all, not just for the poorest (Wilkinson and Pickett 2010). Curriculum transformation requires the use of these arguments for everyone.

In view of the risk of empty rhetoric marked by a Western and/or extractivist conception of the world, the adequate answer cannot be the postmodern valorization of the diversity of the stories, putting them all on the same level. All cultures and traditions have to work on them, to discern ways of finding the enlivening described above. The search for concrete universals (Walzer 2004) is fundamental to an articulation of the sharing of macro-ecological, economic and social issues in a diversity of contexts; from the “thick” contexts in which people and groups evolve by sharing representations of what counts as a good life in a given political space, it is possible to recognize “fine” elements shared from one culture to another. Therefore, this interpretation must be made in a dialogue between cultures.

In the case of the Campus for Transition project, the relationship to a territory, to a particular region (in this case, the department of Seine-et-Marne) is considered as central: it is a matter of contributing to the training of people who are destined to become social actors in the region within the spaces where they will be mobilized. This response implies an openness to the common cues given by scientists (in particular to the state of our planetary boundaries) and an openness to references from other cultures and other schemes concerning the relation between humanity and nature, and to other living beings. The debates relating to moral subjects and patients in so-called anthro-, patho-, bio- and eco-centered ethics invite a deepening of the ecological attitudes or virtues that make it possible to hear, in the words of Pope Francis (2015), the “cry of the earth” and the “cry of the poor”. Such a horizon is at once ethical, spiritual and political: the desirable transformations come from a diagnosis of the banality of the evil that runs through our institutions and our individual and collective behaviors. The overcoming of many resistances, forces of inertia and mobilization in the face of possible collapse implies spiritual resources – in the sense of openness to otherness and the power to inspire – that can irrigate political orientations (Renouard 2016a).

The notion of sustainable development, popularized by the 1987 Brundlandt Report and repeatedly taken up, especially in the SDGs, has the merit of playing an integrating role. Can it be a vector of a transformative utopia? The term utopia, coined by Thomas More, and whose underlying perspective is present in different cultures (Sargent 2010), refers to a vision of society from “off-site” that allows us to outline a better world. The critical arguments of utopia are to denounce the abstract and fixed, even totalitarian, nature of utopias, and to plead instead for policies of small and gradual change that make it possible to get rid of the concrete evils of our societies (Popper 1948). Such criticism is answered by Mannheim (1936) and Ricoeur (1986), who explain its link with ideology. The function of utopia is subversive, faced with the legitimization of the dominant power by ideology, whose function of social integration must be recognized as positive. Utopia offers an alternative to the present. Under what conditions is sustainable development a utopia rather than an ideology? This vague and catch-all term can indeed be used by economic and political leaders to invoke a necessary change without taking the measures that could contribute to a weakening of their position. In this respect, sustainable development plays the role of a non-critical ideology. Its utopian potential is linked to its radicality and the desired coherence between orientations that question the existing order. Jean-Philippe Pierron speaks of it as a constructive utopia (Pierron 2007), and I myself would talk about it as a transformative utopia (Renouard 2008), which I now relate to the language of commons.

Utopias concern the intellectual field and its practices, and these two aspects meet the challenges of the Campus for Transition project: it is a question of describing the aim of economic models corresponding to models of desirable society, envisaging practical experiences that can give substance to these models, concretely anticipating the organizations of tomorrow’s world.
Ecological utopias have multiplied over the last two centuries, portraying different types of societies marked by a renewed relationship with nature. We can distinguish the ecotopies, or utopias of sufficiency (More, Thoreau, Morris, Howard, Huxley, Callenbach, Bookchin), from technological utopias, or utopias of abundance (Bacon, Owen, Saint Simon, Fourier, Bellamy). The first focus on the finiteness of resources and the inability of science and technology to solve the outstanding problems of humanity; they value a simple lifestyle. The utopia of Thomas More denounces the system of enclosure that deprives the poor of land they previously had access to. The ‘good mother nature’, meanwhile, must be respected and surrounded. Growth is not an objective, nor is the idea of increasing wealth or lifestyle. Human progress is defined not in terms of material growth but of free time and spiritual and intellectual development. A culture of simplicity, frugality and moderation is valued. Production serves to fulfill essential needs, not unlimited desires.

Such utopias can be used as a compass to navigate by (Geus 1999). It is not a case of building a completely new society. The ecotopic ideal is not a fixed and abstract goal, but it can help us make clear distinctions among the many decisions to be made, and to move progressively toward an ecologically stable society. Ideal images can help to stimulate creative ideas, to orient ourselves, to favor behavior that adapts intelligently to the circumstances and living relationships between people and their environments. The Campus for Transition is part of this perspective.

The transformative ecotopia of the Campus for Transition can be viewed as the search for the eco-justice of the commons. Liberal societies are marked by different tensions. The first of these is related to the aim of the exit from dependence, the defense of individual freedoms and rights (including property rights): it can result in a refusal of vulnerability, fragility, need of the other. The second tension is the rejection of limits, in the name of the progress made possible by science and technology, with a view to the goal of well-being for all. The third tension is the obscuration of the social struggle, in the name of a harmonizing perspective of which the invisible hand (Adam Smith) or sweet trade (Montesquieu) are manifestations. Faced with these three tensions, three principles of eco-justice emerge: recognition and autonomy in interdependence; development in frugality and sharing; and participation/empowerment and representation for the sake of the affected and acknowledgment of conflicts and power relations. This perspective is both ethical and political; it involves taking into account common goals, setting up objectives that make it possible to achieve these goals, and fostering personal and collective attitudes and moral, even spiritual, and political resources that give them flesh and make transformations possible.

Each of these principles is linked to a concrete dimension of the Campus for Transition project in the territory of Seine-et-Marne. This territory is in Greater Paris, an hour by train from the capital; the Forges estate is located in a village of 500 inhabitants, 3 km from the new, upper town and 7 km from the old town of Montereau (20,000 inhabitants). The community is characterized by diversified agricultural and industrial activity but also by a level of unemployment twice the national average and by a large proportion of people (30%) living under the poverty line. The articulation between the social, economic and political dimensions of eco-justice is therefore decisive.

Sociocultural recognition aims to deploy the capacities to speak, to act, to tell and to be made responsible (Ricoeur 2004), and to fight against the social invisibility and oblivion that mark our societies. Recognition is also an expression of gratitude, of a receptive and even contemplative attitude. Such an approach seeks to situate the concern for the social and ecological bond in everyday life, paying concrete attention to beauty and vulnerability. In the Campus project, this is expressed both by care of the land, in all its dimensions, and by promoting social diversity: welcoming a young refugee into our small community; the search for future links with associations of the community of communes, engaged in social matters; the desire to develop educational projects with companies and actors of the social and solidarity economy; attention to the quality of interpersonal relationships, benevolence and mutual trust.

Faced with the refusal of bodily, natural and material limits, the search for production and the equitable and sustainable distribution of the resources of creation is an overarching goal. As discussed earlier, this perspective implies questioning the dogma of GDP growth and, upstream of decisions about economic development, questioning the conditions of a just creation of wealth, before discussing the distribution of this wealth. It is a matter of combating predatory practices and reducing inequalities. In the Campus for Transition project, this objective passes through the experience of a happy and supportive frugality, nourished by work on our consumerist imaginaries. This means in particular the agreement of Campus stakeholders to minimize our overall ecological footprint and to contribute to a sharing of our resources. Some aspects of this are more advanced than others, and we are at the beginning of the process. The search for a carbon-neutral footprint as soon as possible implies a definition of the perimeters within which we focus our efforts, with the intention of considering the entire life cycle of the goods and services we use. It is a question of measuring the different flows, as much for those who reside on the land as for those who spend a few days there: the building and its insulation/heating, travel (regular and exceptional), food resources, internet use, data storage,
the carbon footprint of the ores used by hardware, water consumption, waste generation, etc. Addressing these issues as much through scientific analysis as through the arts and daily creativity seems very important to us, so that we can make these objectives the subject of an attractive lifestyle and not an obstacle course. We have set up several workshops to advance the transition of the domain, particularly from the economic and cultural point of view: a building-energy workshop; a bio-regional economics workshop (links with local stakeholders, in particular agrifood plans); a finance workshop (financing the project, including buildings and educational activity); and a community workshop (the modalities of how a community of people with varied commitments can live together in the service of the project). Our goal is also to make these workshops the site of a documented experimentation of the transition of the place within a logic of research-action and with implications for pedagogy.

The third dimension of the eco-justice of the commons is political. Faced with a minimization of the balance of power in liberal societies, the objective is for beings to participate and be represented in the decisions that affect them. The political exclusion of the weakest and the silence of non-human beings requires the defense of the rights of agents and moral patients. For the Campus for Transition, this is a matter of giving voice to processes of collective discernment and social creativity. The mode of governance – which is in the process of being drawn up – is intended to be regularly re-evaluated in order to verify its coherence with the objectives being jointly pursued, and this goes hand in hand with the desire to foster processes of collective intelligence, of discernment oriented by the search for the justice of the commons. I deliberately use the term discernment to characterize our approach to governance. The participants in the collective adventure of the Campus come from diverse political backgrounds and have had varied experiences of governance within the framework of companies, associations, movements and communities. If decision-making by consensus seems to be a favorable means for the implementation of our project, we do not give up certain decision-making directives, taken by those mandated to coordinate the various pillars of the project (the legal structure, the workshops, the academic laboratory, etc.). It appears to us that the permanent priority for vigilance concerns the positions of the different members. This approach to governance through collective discernment is marked by the participation of some of us in institutions influenced by the Christian heritage or, more precisely, in churches or Christian religious congregations. Through the very horizontal decision-making process that has existed in Quaker communities for centuries to more vertical traditions, such as the governance of the Society of Jesus or of my own congregation, there runs a common thread: the importance of decentering in commitment, the concern to assert the interest of all, the search for the common good. This perspective leads to the identification of the attitudes required for the functioning of groups marked by the same research – without minimizing the balance of power, ego, conflict and differences of interpretation.

In short, two major axes of this transformative utopia relating to the justice of the commons emerge in terms of educational methods. On the one hand, the importance of creativity and interpretation presupposes a place for the arts and humanities in the elaboration of collective narratives (in dialogue with the natural sciences and social sciences), as well as a place for gratuitousness, solidarity and play. On the other hand, adapted methods of governance are sought, with participation or representation of those affected and of the most vulnerable; the key is to learn participative and collaborative methods without denying the place of authority. The term “republic of the commons” allows us, at different scales, to speak of processes in which a mandated authority makes a collective commitment possible at the basic level of subsidiarity.

III. Horizon 2: A transdisciplinary and holistic approach

The first two parts of this paper have shown the importance of critical thinking and that of the creative and interpretative dimension in order to deconstruct ineffective models of transition and to write narratives of the world to come. What particularly needs to be explored further is the link between knowledge and pedagogies.

The notion of environmental humanities foregrounds the importance of the connections between actors from the academic world, practitioners and citizens. We will also highlight some issues of multi-disciplinary and transdisciplinary working methods.

1. The environmental humanities developed from the 1970s and 1980s in the awareness of the convergences around certain subjects in departments of philosophy, literature, history-geography, anthropology and the social sciences. They articulate concerns about “medicine, animal rights, neurobiology, race and gender studies, urban planning, climate and digital technologies” (Emmett and Nye 2017, 7). This approach makes it possible to highlight the links between the ecological and social dimensions and the centrality of the ethical questioning relative to the meaning of human actions and their beneficial effects (or otherwise) for humanity and for the planet. This covers how to handle tourism (Urry 1990) and the designation of certain areas as “wild” or not domesticated, for preservation or conservation; the possible extinction of many species (Van Dooren 2014); how to use energy sources and whether or not to limit fossil fuels; the promises and threats of biotechnology and
the risk that it will commodify nature and humans; alternative approaches to consumerism and productivism; the use of geoengineering (Hamilton 2013); the environmental damage of the digital economy; inequalities in the face of pollution; the role of the arts in talking about disasters and their silent victims (for example, after Chernobyl; Alexievitch 2006); and many others.

The environmental humanities therefore formulate a specific way of doing research and teaching, in which the Campus for Transition wishes to participate, with particular emphasis on ethical discernment. They allow the decompartmentalization of knowledge, and a (selective) withdrawal from the usual ways of knowing, arguing and evaluating.

2. An approach built on experiences located and in a back-and-forth with the state of the art and the knowledge of other experiences can lead to different levels of commitment, which is also at the heart of the Campus project. The immersive dimension makes possible a displacement vis-à-vis the classic structures of learning and life. According to Krasny et al. (2009), “participatory approaches to education seek to create situations in which, through ongoing interactions with the social and ecological elements of the expanded system, students acquire the ability to play a meaningful role in formation of their own future and that of their community” (2009, 3).

This form of learning seeks to go as far as possible on a transformation route for all members of the educational community. Moore (2005) draws on her experience at university in Vancouver (a master’s degree in zoology and then a thesis on education) to suggest an articulation between models of cooperative, collaborative and transformative learning (Cranton 1996). Cooperative learning allows learners to take ownership of an objective together and to achieve it; the teacher remains in a supervisory capacity. In the collaborative model, a collective production of knowledge is sought from each person’s contribution; the educator is a co-learner. From the transformative perspective, participants move toward decisions based on their life experiences, their mental habits and their points of view. The reflective perspective of each person can lead the group to collective action. Such an approach can create discomfort for both the learner and the educator: we are used to our unsustainable lifestyles and do not want to change them. We do not want, as teachers, to change our posture. However, this concern for transformation can also increase self-confidence and inner strength, bringing new skills.

The modalities of the access of students – and teachers – to this conception of the world informed by ethical issues at different scales are varied. With regard to the philosophy underlying the Campus for Transition, we have already stressed the quest for a concrete universalism that links the diversity of cultural representation systems with the concern for a coherent treatment of issues at different scales (from global to local). We challenge a perspective that denies the specific contribution of those who “know” or experts in certain technical, scientific, intellectual and other fields in the construction of collective knowledge. On this basis, the idea that learning essentially follows a trajectory from the bottom up seems to us to be wrong. The objective is the contribution of each to a collective dynamic that cannot be confined to the reception of a downward formal contribution. There is a need to combine the use of specific knowledge, the mobilization of individual skills in different fields, with the co-construction of paths of knowledge and life.

3. Finally, the power of language, which shapes how we interpret what we are experiencing, must be emphasized. Multidisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity are distinct and complementary approaches: while multidisciplinarity consists in the study of an object (of a discipline) by several disciplines at the same time, transdisciplinarity aims at a unity of knowledge, at the beyond disciplinary research. This arouses the suspicion of researchers, who see it as a lack of methodological rigor. The implementation of these perspectives that fundamentally invite decompartmentalization of knowledge, the grasping of “what is woven together” (Morin 2000), involves defining the objects to which contributions from different disciplines are needed to deepen questioning and seek paths of action consistent with the ethical issues of our time. This presupposes a reflection on the ability to articulate languages, to translate what is said from one discipline to another. Many possibilities exist, and I mention three that are particularly topical on environmental issues: a systemic approach, a management approach and an interpretative approach.

The systemic approach seeks to close in on nature, ecosystems and climate, from the natural sciences and by calling on the human sciences. As the latter “present an objectified and quantified social world”, this can often be very reductive (Federeau 2017).

The management approach takes into account the human dimension, from the point of view of incentives and the possible transformation of behaviors to make them more socially useful, particularly with regard to the ecological transition (Federeau 2017). It can be conceived as a tool for presenting a socially acceptable version of capitalism in an instrumental way, which limits its transformative scope (Kesteman 2004).

The interpretive approach aims to honor the question of meaning: the global understanding of what is at stake for humanity and for the societies of the planet. Kesteman refers to it as a “transdisciplinary utopian” approach.
It is this version of transdisciplinarity that seems to us the most adapted to the Campus project, which also aims to open a space to various modalities of dialogue between disciplines (of multidisciplinarity) as to the plural aspects of the transition of territories and people.

The Campus for Transition aims to develop a reflexive, creative and holistic pedagogy that feeds on personal and collective experience and for its part provides its members and participants, students and various actors with the resources for discernment and action. Time will tell whether and how this laboratory of an eco-justice of the commons will play its part.

**Horizon 1 – Diagnosis**

**Horizon 3 – Aim**

**Horizon 2 – Paths**

**Content**

Deconstructing
Identifies the ambiguities of discourses and training
Open to other ontologies
Proposes a transformative utopia: eco-justice of commons
Experiment, learn, debate and decide: controversy, discernment, choice of routes
Disciplines convened in priority
Philosophy, epistemology and economic and social sciences, in dialogue with hard sciences/nature
Arts and Humanities, Ethics and Hermeneutics
Applied Sustainability, Engineering Sciences, Management Science, Law, Ethics and Political Science

**Method**

Critical and reflective approach
Creative and interpretative approach
Experimental, multi-disciplinary and transdisciplinary approach
Pedagogical tools
Contact, living with nature
Newspapers
Personal readings, small group seminars, lecture-debates
Play and artistic creation
Social engagement
Governance at the service of the commons
Meetings with actors
Living and transdisciplinary survey of objects
Acquisition of concrete and technical skills Process of personal and collective discernment

**Bibliography**


