

Building community clusters based on coffee

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Be prepared

- "I already sold my coffee, or better said, badly sold it," said Chepe throwing down the baskets and sacks
- "What? Again? You pay them to screw you," reacted Sara, as if throwing more logs on the fire.
- "You are to blame, you did not remind me to buy the scales when we had money, today I did not even have a notebook to write down the weight, they cheated me!" He gasped and sat down, wishing the earth would swallow him.
- "Calm down man! We got `vultured`" ...
- "What?"
- "In the rainy season a vulture cannot even fly because of the cold rain and treeless areas, wet and hurting, he promises to build his house in the dry season; the dry season comes, and he is fresh, flies off and forgets about his promise, until the cold rains return, then he regrets not having built his home."
- "Ah, mind of a vulture is what I have"—growled Chepe
- "Shut up and get ready for tomorrow!"—ordered Sara and turned around to rake the coffee in the drying racks, while Chepe quit complaining, picked up the basket and sacks, and with notebook in hand left for his coffee field....

The vulture mentality is a vicious cycle of not being prepared for— or forgetting about — what is coming: suffering the effects of hard times, promising to not suffer it again, forgetting about your promise absorbed by the good moment that then passes, suffering again, blaming others, getting depressed, making promises again...It is when the person accepts that the past might become the future. That mentality we see reproduced in any area where we people live; for example, in a good part of our realities, we bet only on money and for the short term and knowingly — or forgetting — that we are eroding the soil and harming our diet. The same thing happens in the churches, they fall over themselves in adoration and neglect to invest in the wholeness of life.

How can we connect those moments of suffering and happiness to not accept or rather change that future? What can we do to make short term and long-term perspectives not be either/or in our minds? These general questions help us to reflect on how to free ourselves from the structure of intermediation and build community clusters based on coffee. Sara and Chepe in the parable suggest a path for us: be prepared, imagine the future and make it a reality.

1. Introduction

A concept which we are working on is the community cluster.

There are two definitions of clusters, the version of the American School with Porter (1990), and the European one with Schmitz (1995). Porter defines it as a "geographical set of interconnected businesses and associated institutions in a specific field and which compete and cooperate with one another." Schmitz, for his part, defines it as "a set of enterprises and institutions that focus their production and services on a set of similar final goods and which are located in a delimited

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geographic environment.” Although they differ in their geographic scope, both focus on a final homogeneous product and the generation of financial surpluses. Parrilli (2011) observes that both concepts have been successful, and that in the last 20 years there has been an enormous variation of clusters: they have become multisectoral “around the client and the principal sources of demand,” surpassing those mono-sectoral clusters which come together in a final homogeneous product.

In this notion of clusters which is becoming more diverse and result in several final products, economic logic and the fact that their products have destinations outside of those geographical spaces continues being important. We take on part of that perspective, that of being interconnected in a multisectoral sphere, and we add the community aspect, which is specific to a territory (like the European version of cluster) and it is also broad (like the American notion of cluster), but its purpose is to produce life in the communities themselves. They are clusters which move as constellations of people, initiatives, information, and services, moved by perspectives of social and environmental equity, freedom and values of justice and loyalty, and with a long-term view, over several generations³.

A second concept is strategies. This concept emerged within a military context with Sun Tzu (V century BC), in his book *The Art of War* as the continuation of politics by other means; then Niccoló Machiavelli (1469-1527) worked on it in politics in his book *The Prince*; in recent decades businesses have used it in the sphere of the economy: the challenge is not beating the competition but responding to the needs of the market, and above all to the needs of the future; “the most successful strategy is vision” (Mintzberg); it is “obsession” (strategic intent) (Hamel and Prahalad); and it is “the capacity to learn more quickly than competitors” (Arie de Geus). We reread this: strategies in function of community spirit, not in function of the market; vision in – and healthy obsession for – the community cluster, and a perspective as holistic as possible among the economic, social, political, cultural and environmental aspects, as well as connecting the needs of humans, animals and nature.

This article emerges at the height of the coffee harvest where we are immersed in collecting a container of coffee (412 qq export quality) to export, and 50qq of coffee to roast for rural communities. Amid this urgency to collect the harvest, we are building an organization which would deal with export quality coffee, add value to it, sell it and do everything with a sense of community. The abrasive dialogue which happens between Sara and Chepe in the parable grabs our attention: “get ready for the next pass⁴”. And how is Chepe going to prepare? Reflecting on what happens to the vulture to overcome his “vulture mindset,” he begins to listen to his advisor Sara, gather the things that he himself had thrown down, and draw out his future. This is what we are doing in this article.

For this reason, we have talked with people who move around coffee and with other living beings who also move around coffee. We talked with people who are connected to the soil and different products to transform energy into new products. It is not the person who is the producer or farmer of coffee or soil, but rather it is a constellation of living beings who contribute to the transformation

³ In an article (See Mendoza, 2022), we have identified the long-term perspective of an indigenous group in the United States, a perspective of 7 generations: making decisions and actions thinking about how those decisions and actions will impact the seventh generation.

⁴ Coffee does not ripen homogeneously, on one branch with let’s say 50 beans, some 3 beans ripen first, their harvesting is called the graniteo [spot harvesting], then 15 beans ripen whose harvesting is called “the first pass”, then some 20 beans whose harvesting is called “the second pass”, the “third pass” and finally the last pass. The spot harvest and the final harvest have lesser quality coffee.

of energy through birds, cattle, crops...which later are called products, which on being consumed continue the transformation of energy into other expressions of life⁵. See Figure 1. This way of conversing goes beyond generalities like greeting one another and asking one another about what has happened to them and to other people, we reflect asking ourselves about why what happens has occurred, and what would happen if we changed this or that; for example, about coffee quality, the harvest collection, imagining new commercialization structures where markets begin in the communities themselves. They are conversations where we are tacitly reflecting on this transformation of energy in its different expressions.

The second type of conversation is with the soil, water and animals. We converse observing their behavior, detecting their interaction with plants⁶ and learning how nature is generating life: where there are forests producing its fertility; living beings consume and at the same time feed the soil itself...

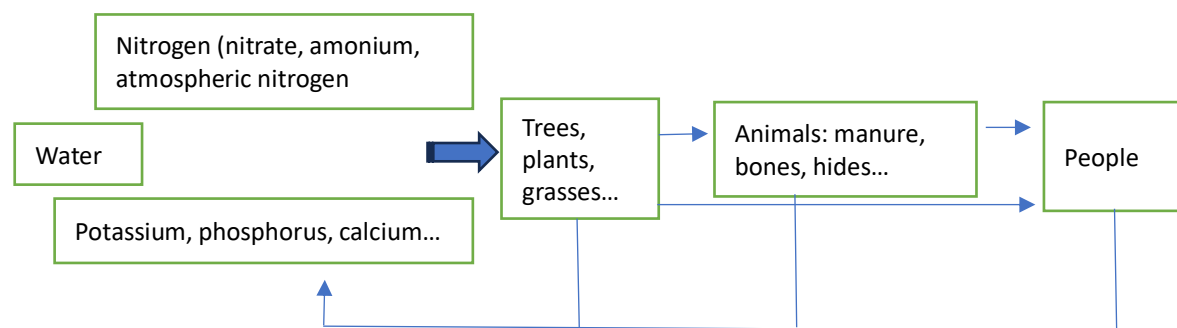


Figure 1. Transformation of energy into different expressions of life

The perspective of colonial and patriarchal capitalism makes it seem that only producers, businesses, and consumers feed the world or move the economy, that it is the farmer who produces the coffee, beans or meat, that he does it disconnected from that transformation of infinite energy which is manifested in different expressions of life, and that “everything is done with money.” This transpires a vision in which only the individual person is the producer, business person, or consumer. The influence of this perspective has made cooperatives and other associative expressions fail or end up being absorbed by colonial and patriarchal capitalism, because they organize only around product commodities, ignoring the infinity of elements which happen in the transformation of energy through trees, soil, cattle, crops, people, and water, elements where organizing really is necessary.

We want to build a decolonizing perspective, which is the diversity of elements in different phases which are transforming energy and that can be infinitely taken advantage of, particularly if people

⁵ Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquin, an experimenter on raising poultry within the framework of regenerative agriculture, says, “We are made from the same energy as fish, water, soil and trees. As farmers we see a process of the transformation of energy in an extreme which is not edible, and through what we do it becomes converted into different expressions of energy. You add nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, etc. It becomes thousands of expressions of life. For CO₂ to be converted in the atmosphere, the methane and nitrogen which fall from storms is converted into sugar, from there into grazing land and then cattle eat it and turns it into meat, fur, or hooves, all this is a process of energy transformation.” For a perspective of regenerative agriculture, see Haslett-Marroquin (2016).

⁶ Delegate of the Word, Dámaso Aguilar, remembers that Fr. Evaristo used to greet animals, “good day, brother dog”, he would say. This anecdote shows that that priest had that perspective of conversing with people and also with other living beings.

organize. The vision of community clusters is the promotion of that transformation of energy into thousands of expressions of life: seed, soil and water – leaves of plants which animals consume, adding value to products that pass from one hand to another – products which humans consume – manure which feeds the soil and bones which are used for arrows or musical instruments...This perspective makes these multiple concatenations of different expressions of life visible, and makes us reflect on how to energize that movement of the transformation of energy.

Within this framework, Figure 2 illustrates the strategies. Our vision is building community clusters through a weaving which is as local as it is global, but with the humility of learning from that infinite transformation of energy. For that purpose, we are designing an inclusive and living community organization. We are concerned about building an organization from and with the people. To structure teams. We connect it in alliances among diverse actors around a diversity of initiatives which gradually are including one and another element of these expressions of life through which energy is being transformed. The figure has the form of an onion, it is composed of



Figure 2. Strategies of CSE-Coffee

several layers which express autonomy (freedom) and at the same time make up the onion as a whole, like a cycle or like our common home, the earth. In the figure there are strategies (or layers) which are interconnected, stuck to one another, constituting a type of “natural antibiotic” which protects and makes living beings protect themselves, while at the same time they grow in unity.

In what follows we are going to describe those “layers” (strategies), in order to, in the end, provide a view of the whole of the “onion.”

2. Strategy of synergy of initiatives, efforts and actions

- One initiative on its own can be highly profitable, but at the cost of the human and natural community. In contrast, an initiative can be profitable, sustainable, and beneficial for its membership and for communities, if it is connected with other initiatives which express well-thought-out efforts and actions. What is profitable and sustainable, then, is that connection and that energy which catalyze good multiplier effects. By that synergy more resources are left in the community itself, and the flow of those resources helps to energize the community; by that synergy they catalyze entrepreneurial undertakings with values of justice and loyalty; and by that synergy they illuminate different routes or make people see new opportunities where their capacities can take advantage.

Figure 3 shows that synergy and interdependence between initiatives. From humanity we learn that the greatest innovation was fire, and that that fire emerged from striking stones. So it is also for the synergy between initiatives, which on striking (connecting, tensing up and coordinating with one another) produce new ideas, generate profits with social and individual equity. It is a synergy behind which people coordinate; synergy of things in reality is an encounter of people with their respective worlds. In the figure, those with the broken line are initiatives which we are currently designing.

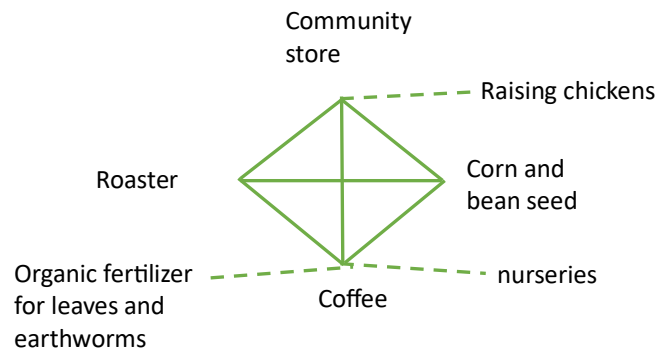


Figure 3: Synergy of effort

Working on coffee is working on that synergy. And starting with synergy is building the entirety of the organization.

The next step is, supported by the idea of energy transformation through different elements, to make visible a number of elements which that synergy of initiatives, reflected in the Figure, hides, and consequently to make the organization able to create the conditions for its membership to work on them. Like which ones?

- Roasting, raising chickens and pigs, and the harvest of beans and corn, leave important elements for making organic fertilizer which feeds the soil: the roaster leaves coffee husks, chickens their manure and beans and corn leave chaff and dirt which are full of nutrients, and damaged grains which serve as feed for the chickens, turkeys and pigs.
- A community store which, in addition to demanding products produced in the community itself, adds more and more value to the products it buys: for example, making nacatamales which require peasant products like plantain leaves, plantains, corn, pork or turkey meat.
- Manure from pig raising is fertilizer and also an input for making kitchen biodigesters, which saves people from money spent on firewood, lessens the pressure on energy trees, and saves time for people who cook.
- The roaster also could be used to process other products: roasted corn...

Organizing initiatives like the roaster or the nurseries which are in Figure 3 are important, while the real challenge is detecting other elements that those initiatives generate tacitly and make visible, like raising poultry, the production of fertilizer or food processing, and so organizing ourselves around them to take advantage of them. There is where organizing makes sense and where we can make a difference.

3. Strategy of alliances

In coffee there is an alliance of actors who make up an important part of the value chain: from production to the sale of roasted coffee in the US and in the communities of Nicaragua; it is an alliance for producing ideas.

Figure 4 shows the Community Social Enterprises (CSE) - Solidaridad Cooperative and Winds of Peace Foundation (WPF) alliance, behind which is the connection between the human community

which even in an incipient way is finding its way of organizing, and the natural community. The basis of this alliance are local and global communities (from Nicaragua to the United States and from the United States to Nicaragua).

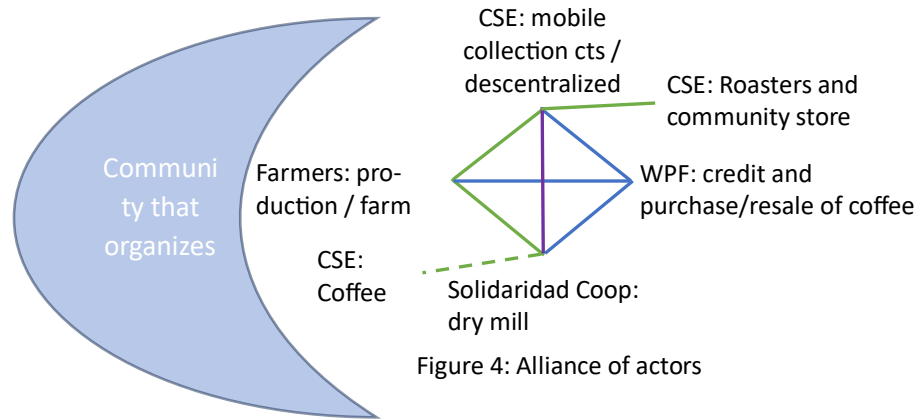


Figure 4: Alliance of actors

The figure of the rhombus replaces the linear drawings of production-processing-commercialization which tend to be done in value chain studies. The rhombus is due to the fact that WPF has connections with the Solidaridad Cooperative and with the CSEs, the CSEs with WPF and the Solidaridad Cooperative; it is a relationship between different actors located on different links of the coffee chain and impacting the entirety of those links. It is a privileged alliance in financing, commercialization, production, processing, design and thought. It is an alliance under construction with a community focus.

This alliance we are watering like a recently sprouted plant is watered, the way to “water it” is: carefully recording the data which result from the transactions, and that they be reported by the supervisor every week; feeding transparent information to the alliance; increasing the frequency of communication between different actors, coordinating actions to get and transport coffee; and producing ideas, like this article, to organize different actions and make them viable.

Behind the alliance is the community which organizes, a community that is watching over equity and sustainability – the half-moon in Figure 4. It is responsible for seeing the alliance from the perspective of the soil, water, all human and natural populations. It is the domain that watches over the spiritual dimension.

In this chain a key point is the harvest collection. Traditionally, harvest collection is “accumulation, storage and stockpiling.” In this alliance of organizations, we are reconceptualizing the idea of harvest collection.

- Harvest collection commonly understood is a place where the product goes, the person who collects it waits for it, receives it, weighs it, and pays for it. In the CSE harvest collection is mobile, it receives, weighs, and pays for the coffee, at the same time the person who collects the harvest goes out to visit selected producers. What are we looking for? If we build good and lasting relations with producers, they will bring in the coffee or we will collect it.

- Harvest collection is not just a place where coffee is stored, it is also a place where it is dried, beans are selected and several types of coffee result: washed coffee, honey coffee, natural coffee. In this cycle we are going to mobilize ourselves around washed and natural coffee, for drying this latter coffee see Notebook No. 1.⁷ Harvest collection is where the weight is recorded with each action: when paying the producer and spreading it out on drying beds, when gathered from the drying beds to store in the warehouse, when moved to the dry mill, and when in the mill it is moved from the patio to the warehouse, from the warehouse to the huller, and from the huller to the ship or to be roasted in the communities.
- It is a mobile harvest collection, where each step which is taken is reflected upon; it is also a collector of ideas and patience, of love based on empathy for the people who come in from experiencing different “storms”.⁸
- Businesses tend to have their central and sole harvest collection center in the town (municipal capital), the CSEs have several small harvest centers in different communities, centers which are in the homes of producers. In the medium term we want each producer family to also be a place for harvest collection, with all the previously mentioned elements, having a common place only for hulling the coffee, the roaster and the principal warehouse.



Another key point in this alliance is commerce. Buying and selling happens when there is trust between buyer and seller, it is not something technical, just weighing, paying and providing the receipt. Trust is the basis for economic transactions under lasting relationships, otherwise we would be left trapped in the vulture mindset.

- Traditionally, selling is understood as buying, transporting, selling + trickery - playing with prices (“I pay 4000 the load...but this coffee is dirty, has coffee bore holes, I will pay you 3600”) and playing with weights where the scale is calibrated to take off between 2-5 lbs for every 100lbs. There the objective is making money with deceitful methods (trickery). In the CSE making money is a means using fair and honest ways, the goal is to build trust in a network of people, it is not convincing them, it is informing them so that each producer might compare, reflect and make their own decision to sell their coffee to whoever they want.
- In traditional commerce, the producer feels humiliated when his coffee is bought, feels like they were not respected: “they cheated me!” they shout like a child who is looking for solace from their mother. In the CSE the producer feels respected, feels that they were taken into account, and recovers their self-esteem. Why? Because a fair weighing is done, the street price is published in a transparent way, the rules include the fact that a readjustment will be made: if coffee is bought at a time of low prices, after the season the price is readjusted to the highest price that it was bought during the harvest season, in other words they are paid the difference. The **treatment** is more important than the price: while the buyer mistreats the producer, in the CSE the treatment is fair, honest and caring;

⁷ This is a step-by-step guide for drying natural coffee.

⁸ Each person experiences joy and conflict in the heart of their family, conflicts and hopes, which in most cases are true storms.

in each harvest collection center of the CSE there is free hot coffee so that each farmer who comes in might start their conversation drinking coffee.

- Buyers act on informal rules (“to get profits you have to steal from the poor”), while in the CSE the rules are written down and the farmers can read and reread them. The farmer can sell their coffee to the CSE guided by the rules, through which they avoid being the object of discrimination or the victim of discretionary decisions.
- The buyer is subservient to capital and deceives producers to get more profits. In the CSE we build loyalty: the CSEs are loyal to the producers, and the producers are loyal to the CSE collective. All their coffee is transacted by the CSE and the CSEs follow everything that is indicated in the rules. For that reason, all the people of the alliance comply with the agreements and the rules, bringing in the best coffee possible, making their maximum effort, making the readjustment, sharing international profits...That is loyalty to the community and not subordination to capital.
- In the CSE we also seek to be loyal to our common home: investing in the soil and water quality (free from agrochemical pollution). This is a process which we are working on.

An important notion, coherent with what was done in the synergy strategy, is **crop lien lending**. Traditionally it is understood as “purchase of future harvest”: paying for coffee in advance during non-harvest months. We understand it in the sense that a farmer family turns in (sells) their coffee to the CSE knowing that the CSE is going to roast and sell it in the communities, and will share in those profits, or knowing that the CSE is going to turn it into the dry mill of the Solidaridad Cooperative where they will dry it well in order to improve its quality, and from there export it to the US where WPF is going to roast and sell that coffee, whose profits the CSE and each farmer family will benefit from. This idea differentiates the fact of being an alliance: the farmer family knowing what we just wrote will make an effort to improve their coffee, the CSE, Solidaridad Cooperative and WPF, knowing what we just wrote, will also strive to make their best effort. In other words, the coffee comes from the hands of a farmer family, passes into the hands of the CSE, then passes into the hands of Solidaridad and then into the hands of WPF, and everyone knows they need to make an effort, act with justice and distribute the profits. A farmer family empowers the CSE to add value to their coffee, it is not like in traditional commerce, where the farmer family on selling their parchment sun-dried coffee says good bye to that product, not ever knowing anything more about that product.

4. Strategy of forming a team

Selecting and organizing a team and an alliance of teams is vital, it is as a team that we become subjects of the local-global community improvement. In this the fundamental tool is the methodology of reflection.

4.1 Construction of a team

A talented person can win games, and a team can win championships, the basketball player Michael Jordan used to say. We would add: a team can win championships if there is a good organization which builds that team – building a club parallel to the team is the key to success over time.

The merchant buys coffee from whoever; he is not interested in forming a team with farmers; on making the purchase-sale transaction it all ends there: the farmer will not know anything more about their coffee, nor will the buyer want to know about the producer. In the CSEs we are interested in forming a team with the different sized producers, that is why we win them over in

their homes, we do not wait for them, we go out and look for them; we do it based on a list that we build based on conversations and analysis along with honorable people from the communities; to form a good team we must know what type of people we are looking for and above all study the capacities of people so that they complement one another. In a parallel fashion, we are building the organization in its entirety. Figure 5 shows the actors that make up the team: farmers (medium and small ones in size of property and coffee area), hired staff, advisors, directors of drying and hulling, and reseller of coffee in the United States. Regardless of the geographical distance which separates us, these actors move about and communicate in an ongoing way and consult with one another so that, together, they might push the cart forward.

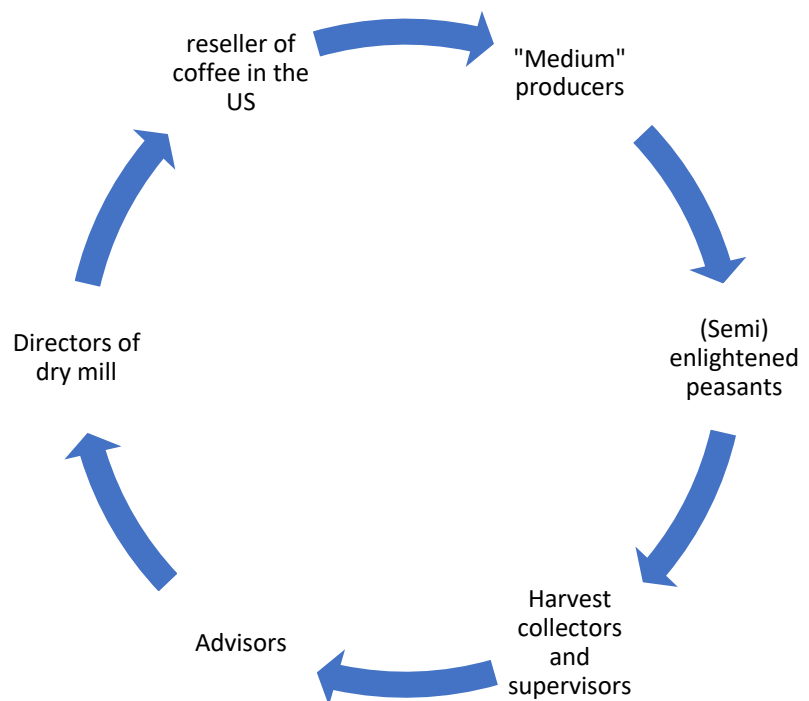


Figure 5: Construction of a team with a sense of justice

In the case of the farmers, we are not looking for any farmer. The objective is not coffee at any cost, it is a person who can be part of the group, which slowly might become an innovative team and that would obtain an increasingly better-quality coffee. Coffee quality because of its variety, good crop management, investment in soil, studying the coffee field and efficiently administering their resources as a family.⁹ Consequently, we are looking for honorable people who follow the written rules as a way of increasingly organizing themselves better and that they might contribute to the

Box 1. References

People who enlighten:

- "Talk to Concha, we will see what she says" (said her sister Estela, she means that if Concha joins, she will as well)
- "Clemente, Rufino are there..." The people responded: "Oh, if he is, then sign me up".
- Key: 1) these people draw more people if they see that they like the initiative, and also drive away people if we do not take them into account; 2) following the network of Concha, Nelson Cornejo, Rufino, Clemente, Gutiérrez. Each one has a network which includes, first of all, their relatives and then their friends.

People to look for:

- in Estrechura: Dámaso, Camilo Aguilar, Pablo, Pérez, Gutiérrez (medium scale producer in the municipality)
- In Cerro Blanco: Nelson Cornejo, María Elsa Cornejo...
- In Samarkanda: Rufino, Claudio,
- In San José: Noelia/ Bismarck... Fabiola
- San Antonio: ...

⁹Cooperatives, like buyers, do not make a distinction over where the coffee comes from, whether it comes from members or not does not concern them; nor does it concern them whether the coffee is improving its quality nor are they interested in the farmer families adding value to their coffee. In the CSE we are concerned about where it comes from because we are committed to coffee quality: if we buy coffee "on the street" from people who are not part of the CSE group, we are not doing follow up; in contrast, we do provide follow up on the people who are

fact that the organization responds to its communities. These people are:

- Medium scale honorable farmers who live on their farms, tend to have economic and social leadership in the micro territories where they live and move about.
- Enlightened peasants tend to be those people with a discipline of saving, not going into debt, not having vices, who visit and cultivate values of honesty, loyalty, solidarity and voluntarism, they have the conditions for making leaps of improvement within the framework of the organization. See Box 1
- Staff who come from the communities themselves, work there, and are more and more paid by the initiatives themselves, are a clear sign of the sustainability of the organization.
- Staff who in the drying and hulling of the coffee rescue coffee affected by mold and ensure good coffee yield.
- Advisors who push for the study of these processes and that each person innovate.
- Resellers of coffee who buy inside the country and resell in the United States, adding value to the coffee.

This team is committed to good yield and good coffee quality.

These four actors tend to have cell phones, know how to read, have skills so that when we gather, we produce an innovative team, embody a motivating spirit, something alive, a team that makes magical plays (thinking) and passes the ball (ideas, information, contacts, products, resources) to others. It is a team committed to making the organization grow for the good of their communities.

4.2 Methodology of reflective conversations

Based on the reality of the people and rethinking the strategies of the CSE in the face of these realities, there are two rules of thumb which guide us.

The team cultivates this methodology of reflectively conversing, holding rationally and emotionally advantageous dialogues. Let us remember, we are not just looking for coffee, we are looking for people who think, we are looking for willpower incarnated in people, and we are looking to make visible other elements where people are organizing in a unique and effective way.

Before looking at the steps, let us go back to remember the treatment. When we go to a home looking for somebody, there we will not commit the mistake of leaving if the person we are looking for is not there. If we are looking for Juan and he is not there, but his wife Juana is there, let us talk with her. The same thing in reverse, if we are looking for Juana and she is not there, but Juan is, let us talk with him. It is not just respect; it is the fact that she is his spouse and bears another perspective on the same topic that we want to talk about.

Now let us look at the steps for conversing.

committed to the organization, to the quality of their coffee, their geographic origin and social sector, thus we learn about them and we can share with them good crop management, ways of studying their farm and sharing profits, etc.

- Step 1. Starting with the situation which producers are in, ask them certain things depending on what we know about them or what we observe. In the case of the Cornejo family who we visited, we asked about their grandparents, and we did a genealogical tree, because we know their cousin and we knew that their grandparents had a lot of land. When they gave us enough data, we could imagine a dialogue with their grandparents Marciano and Jerónimo: see Box 2, to provoke reflection. This dialogue dramatized the situation in order to clarify that even the medium scale producers are close to disappearing: a “being without a soul” is just a “lying in state”.
- **Step 2. Look for explanations for those facts.** In the case of the Cornejos we saw that the causes had to do with the fact that year after year they turned their farms into monocropping and depended more and more on coffee; their mentality is changing almost without them realizing it, they are transiting from self-sufficiency producing what they eat, to depending on money to buy food; also, almost without realizing it, their subordination to hierarchical structures is intensifying.
- **Step 3. Reread the strategies worked on up to now.** Say out loud how it is that the CSEs can respond to these challenges and the challenges we have found, which is why we have been designing the CSEs; this is the why, the how, and the what for. Here we can use the strategies worked on up to now, adapting them to each conversation and taking advantage of that conversation to improve our strategies. In this way we are reflecting and inviting people to reflect.
- **Step 4. Leave them the rules and booklets so they read them, express to them that they are completely free to make their own decisions.** Let us remember, if they do not join now, they will do so next year, “precisely because we are in a hurry we are moving slowly.” If they do not join for years, they will have their reasons, while they will have a good concept of the CSEs.

Box 2. Imaginary dialogue with ancestors

- Did you imagine that the grandchildren of your grandchildren would be born to be fieldhands, people without land?
- ¡Noooo! Responded together Marciano and Jerónimo
- Are you sure? We insisted.
- We left them land so they might produce it, multiply and live well.
- You started to break up your land before dying, your entire family fell under the curse of the elites: divide up your land until it disappears
- Ahhh, we did not think we were dividing it up, we thought we were helping
- A peasant without land is like a being without a soul, the grandchildren of your grandchildren are born “soulless” –we noted.
- Ohhh –they muttered and went away.

With these steps we are provoking reflection with producers and ourselves. Let us recall that there is a difference between farmers and the harvest collection advising team, where the farmers do not know that they do not know the situation of subordination in which they find themselves, while we know that we do not know. This is the engine that moves us in this process, the road on which we must combine several elements, which we can explain through the following images: thorn, flower, tortilla, hot coffee and a breath.

- **Thorn:** we tell them that the mentality of the elites has penetrated their mind set, and that monocropping agriculture and their de-peasantization has intensified from within them. This is like a thorn in farmers; they feel hurt and react.
- **Flower:** we speak highly of their work and the fact that they are a reference point for many people, despite the dividing up of their land. This is a rose, it makes them smile, they feel valued.

- **Tortilla:** we talk to them about the profits and the readjustment which they can have within the framework of the organization, and that the better the quality of the coffee, the more profits they will have. This is the opportunity that they can have, something which they have never had before.
- **Hot coffee:** we ask them to invite us for coffee, which is like the fact that they must demonstrate interest in the organization by leaving 10% of their coffee on deposit, make an effort to improve the quality of their coffee, visit their neighbors, add more value to our products....
- **Taking a breath:** we remind ourselves that we know that we do not know, which leads us to listen more, observe more and at the same time think more.

With this methodology of reflective conversations, we are studying the people with whom we talk, and based on that, discovering their capacities, looking to integrate them in the process. We are not working with a preconceived approach, we seek change based on the very forces for change which each person and the network has, and which bloom during the conversations. It is like a soccer team, the technical director should not impose an approach to the game but study each player that he has in order to organize the team.

5. Strategy for building the organization.

An organization is the sum of wills in which each member moves as its representative, no longer individually. Here is the issue of the distinction between your interests and that of the group.

All the strategies listed above (synergy, alliances, team) are found and make more sense within the construction of an organization. Let us begin distinguishing what is properly organizational.

What is individual and what is organizational

- "Aren't you the one who was picking coffee? And now you are out buying coffee?" –a well-known producer in the community reacted on recognizing Freddy
 - "Yes, I am" – responded Freddy with half a smile.
 - "We come now on the part of an organization where we are buying coffee" I intervened
 - "Ohhh," he responded.
 - "Aren't you the one who was in Dora's house? And now you are out buying coffee?", said another well-known producer recognizing Freddy.
 - "Yes, I am, now we come in the name of an organization" –responded Freddy.
 - "Ohhh," he responded.
 - "My clothes were covered in dirt at that time and now they were surprised in seeing me," Freddy said to me as we left both places.
 - "Just your presence provokes reflection," I responded.
- Fragments of these conversations happened during visits to farmers 2023.

Farmers know us. They know Axel, Freddy, Yesenia, Yeiling and Noelia. Without the organization they continue seeing him as "covered in dirt" and "coffee pickers"; if Axel, Yeiling...would turn into buyers, they would be seen as buyers; if they would become leaders, they would also be seen as leaders, always as individual people. On seeing them in that way they place themselves socially "higher" and make it understood that they were already higher when people like Freddy walked around "dirty" and as "coffee pickers". Now when they see them, they see them as individuals and want to continue seeing as they did in the past. "Aren't you the one...?" Here the challenge is distinguishing between the interests of the individual and the interests of the organization: it is the same Freddy or Yeiling, but now they represent an organization and a group of actors who have

their rules, values, goals, alliances, resources... Through the organization Freddy, Axel, Yeiling, Noelia as well as Yesenia, are on a plane of relative equality with farmers of different economic sizes and social statuses. The individual and the organizational are present, they are roles that we must distinguish, explain and in this way make it be felt that in this organizational space all of us can be a part of it and grow together.

This makes us even more committed, Each one of our actions and words is also as an organization. If Axel weighs the coffee fairly, it is the organization which is weighing it fairly. If Freddy pays the published price, it is the organization which is complying with the published price. If Noelia takes care of the coffee quality at the moment of receiving coffee from a producer, it is the organization which is taking care of the coffee quality. If every day they share a report on coffee purchases, they strengthen trust. If Yeiling processes the data to publish a report, it is the organization which is organizing the information.

This is the organization which we are building:

- As something decentered (several mini collection centers) and decentralized (decisions made in each collection center) and at the same time coordinated, connected and synchronized.
- The coffee leaves the farm, arrives at the center, we take it to the dry mill, it goes by ship and then in the United States to the city which is awaiting it.
- It is a path of self-determination, not of autonomy. Autonomy would be: "I set the price and you do not interfere with me." Self-determination is coordinating, being guided by rules, it is cultivating multiple connections
- It is organizing information and sharing it with transparency.

This organization has rules, values and direction which we review constantly.

- Values: justice, honesty, loyalty, effort and commitment. We reflect on these values, and we see them as our boundary markers.
- Loyalty is being loyal to the neighbor and not the buyer, being loyal to the family and not to a commercial mediation structure.
- Honesty and justice are values where we can fall into traps; someone can throw a banana peel in our path without us realizing it, and we can slip on that banana peel; for example, a passenger says to the bus collector that he has no money and that he will pay him later that night. The bus collector accepts, but the passenger goes to the owner of the bus in the afternoon and tells him that his bus collector is careless and did not collect his fare, and pays the owner; a similar thing can happen in our work, maybe in the weighing we let pass 1 or 2 pounds for our friend, but that person can tell his neighbor that the harvest collector saved him two pounds and surely he is doing the same thing for other people and that maligns the organization.
- Commitment. There are times that we say, "I am only going to work a few hours, just to comply with my job;" there we are not showing commitment and a vocation for service.

Proveedor	Peso (kg)	Valor (COP)
1. Egidio Gaitano a la Lata	388.74	17,688.26
2. Clemente Moreno	419	16,784.26
3. Juan de la Cruz Diaz	152	15,612.26
4. Jose Damazo Aguilar	438	13,373.26
5. Jose Damazo Aguilar	70.08	14,425.18
6. Clemente Moreno	898	13,532.18
7. Santos Venyua Hernandez	1526	12,006.18
8. Maria Demetria Manadiga	286	11,720.18
9. Concepcion Hernandez	90	11,630.18
10. Jose Calixto Hernandez	612	11,018.18
11. Salomon Funes Lader Gutierrez	72	10,946.18
12. Salomon Funes	4845	10,461.68
13. Dora Olivas	2376	8,085.68
14. Dora Maribel Olivas	4630	6,455.68
15. Fredrick Mapfields	0	0
16. Rafael Ramirez	552	5,903.68
17. Wilmer Antonio Muello	1005	4,898.68
18. Bryan Guerrero	9326	4,166.08
19. Santos Uno Pico	580	3,636.08
20. Dima Pico	3281	2,355.08
21. Cesar Durand Perez	464.02	1,666.06
22. Rapach Ramirez Lopez	2126.81	-240.757-
23. Alonso Olivas	22,000	19,739.243
24. Jairo Gaitano a la Lata 20 mil	1,149.53	18,589.713
25. Alonso Olivas	1,066.8	17,522.413
26. Juan Ramon Garcia	766.5	16,756.413
27. Santos Ruben Hernandez	861	15,845.413
28. Juana Castillo	142.8	15,732.613
29. Luis Diego Olivas		

This is a sign that the structure of mediation is alive within us and governs us. In the CSEs there is mutual commitment, the organization is a means for the people to contribute, show commitment, think and revolutionize their actions.

We are forming an organization with identity, values and financial sustainability, betting on young people, the identity of a social, democratic and communitarian innovator with equity. It is an organization which we are building so that it might be decentered with a synergy of initiatives which would transcend even the organization itself. In this organization people become enamored with fair things and people, and not money.

Finally, for greater clarity. In sports, let's say soccer, there are dozens of teams like Barcelona, Dortmund, Saprissa, Inter Miami, Boca Juniors, Flamengo, etc; in soccer a distinction is made between the team and the club, the team are the 22 players, 11 of whom play in a particular game; while the club is the organization, which includes different sports divisions, several sports including soccer and basketball, as organizations they generate income with different actions, they have a sports office, board members, group of legal advisers, shareholders. Do you see? The CSE is like a club, it is the organization, within whose framework we have a synergy of initiatives, alliances, team, a methodology of reflective conversations. It is with this organization that we promote community clusters. See Box 3.

Box 3. Distinction between team, organization and community	
Bodies	Content
Team	-harvest collectors -farmers -directors of drying and hulling -resale of coffee in the US
Organization	-CSE: Coffee-CSE, Beans-CSE and Stores-CSE -Alliances with WPF, Cooperative Solidaridad, Coasmaot... -Physical investments -Rules, philosophy, policies
Community clusters	-Enviromental: soil, water, biodiversity, agroforestry systems -human: responsible for democracy, equity and transparency of organizations -is a geographic space in a place and it is also on a global level -transformation of energy into several expressions of life: grazing land, coffee, soil, water...

6. Strategy of Community Clusters

Radius of action: San José, San Antonio, Estrechura, Cerro Blanco and Samarkanda, communities which will become community clusters.

It is a defined geography which we want to turn into a cluster where diversity, diversification and value-adding make innovations flow. Point 3 deals with the construction of a living team, point 4 is the construction of an organization, and this point is making an innovative, just and democratic community,



community cluster: see blue circle on the light blue map which is the municipality of San Juan del Rio Coco.

Enormously valuable people will come from the communities mentioned: better teachers, doctors, producers, bakers, mechanics, advisors, accountants, police, and better leaders. In Box 4 we list the different actors with whom we need to communicate, talk with these people, the contribution of each actor can be redirected to add to the purpose of forming community clusters. In the case of cooperatives, it is important to talk with their boards, historic leaders, and current members, doing it just with their boards can be a mistake, because let us recall that they tend to reproduce the despotic structure of commercial mediation. In the case of buyers, far from seeing them as competitors and even enemies, we should talk with them so they might improve their services, many of them might join on learning that there are other more just ways which are more beneficial for the community for selling products that even might generate more profits for them – for example, buying quality coffee, natural and honey coffee.

Box 4. Communicating with some visible actors

- Teachers, so that they might provide more creativity and pride for their own roots
- Delegates of the Word, let us reflect theologically with them. Let us include some pastors
- Transport workers like Gámez, the bus of the poor, and the bus owner Walter Castellón of Samarkanda.
- Leaders of cooperatives absorbed by the structure of mediation, needing to rethink their role and energize their cooperatives (the coops Maradiaga, Isidro Cornejo, Benjamín Cornejo, and Reynerio). We could see ways in which WPF might provide them credit in those cases where they need it.
- Buyers, harvest collectors of the buyers...

From this perspective, when we talk about collecting the coffee harvest, for example, it really is that the entire community might become coffee harvest collectors, add value to it, collect ideas... In talking about commercialization, it is that the community might sell, exchange products. As a community cluster, that people might diversify products and social relations. Being in just one crop or doing less of the processing of products, we depend more on the buyer, and on the worst buyers who limit themselves to only buying the product and selling it without adding value. On the other hand, people have now gotten accustomed to the machete and do not want to do anything else, changing that mind set is not a matter of convincing them, it is that they themselves will join as innovations increase in the community. Catalyzing entrepreneurial initiatives in the community without caring whether that initiative is or is not linked to the CSE, the important thing is that they be generated. The more innovations there are, the more will information and good practices flow, the more collaboration there will be, the more trust and self-esteem will be produced in the community itself, the more they will take care of one another.

When we talk about a synergy of initiatives, it is that they really might be generated in the community, be corrected there and catalyze innovation. The organization at first will contribute improving the conditions for these innovations, later in the long term it will be the community as a cluster which will contribute with better conditions. An innovation is like expanding initiatives in Figure 1 and the fact that technological and organizational innovations result; technological ones are for example improving coffee quality and yield, picking coffee in less time given that there is a scarcity of labor; in other words, innovations can emerge following a crop like coffee, they can emerge combining different initiatives like Figure 1 or being concentrated in areas like the soil,

water; the CSEs can, in this sense, contribute to the fact that people systematically and continuously innovate, each on the basis of the previous innovation.¹⁰

The organization produces these community clusters, at the same time these clusters produce the organizations. The community sphere is the biggest counterweight and pressure for the organization to be democratic, transparent and equitable. The community is for the peasantry what corporations are for the wealthy classes; it is the community which can prevent, for example, the fact that they might sell their land to the elites, thus protecting their human and natural populations.¹¹

7. Conclusions

“What the herd most hates is the one who thinks differently. It is not so much the opinion as such, but the audacity of wanting to think for themselves, something that they do not know how to do”, said Arthur Schopenhauer, (1788 – 1860), a German philosopher who took on the philosophy of India like asceticism, negating the self, and the notion of the world as it appears. From the CSEs we say that we are cultivating that audacity in a group that seeks to become a team, it is a collective audacity creating the conditions that lead people to think differently and, in this way, overcome the vulture mentality.

Under that spirit in this article we have reconceptualized the community cluster and its strategies, along with being inspired in a perspective in which energy is transformed into different expressions of life. Let us recall that we are children of the stars, 97% of our body is formed of stellar dust. Consequently, we organize overcoming the perspective of colonial and patriarchal capitalism which only sees the commodities of producers and businesses for consumers, it is a new path of innovation.

The strategies described in this article respond to that vision of community cluster in communion with animals and nature, seeking to capture new elements around which we might organize ourselves, mediated by that perspective of infinite transformation.

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¹⁰ Altraide (2019) describes dozens of innovations which have emerged since the time of Einstein with the industrial revolution. He notes there that an innovation emerges based on a previous innovation. The same can happen in agriculture, not in the direction of mechanizing it nor making it dependent on agrochemicals, but that responds to its productivity, quality and which would benefit the community itself first of all.

¹¹ This is a topic which we are beginning to work on, a topic to reflect on profoundly. From the focus of this article, for example, community is broader, includes WPF as well, therefore we should reconceptualize the notion of community.

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