

The Politics of Water

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Today I want to dive into the political truth around water, our situation around water in this world. Last week we heard here thoughts from Dieter Duhm about the issue of truth and love. I want to try to bring some thoughts about the truth of water, mainly also because I am moved by the political situation, that next week in Marrakesh there will be the [COP22 conference](#), a UN conference where politicians talk about climate change. In these conferences, politicians usually talk about adaptation to climate change.

Together with the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN), we have been able to come to a consensus to present the idea of a global climate and ecosystem restoration plan under the title of the "[New Water Paradigm](#)." It will be presented at that conference, and I want to use this moment to wish blessings on this conference, that this thought of a new water management in cooperation will touch the hearts of the people, in their souls, and can anchor as reality in our lives.

“Solo le pido a Dios: Que la guerra no me sea indiferente.” Many people say that coming wars will be fought over water. I definitely don't want that. There's still time to bring in different thoughts and information, to look into a different future than a future of war over water. All this I would gather under the title, “The New Water Paradigm.”

Our aim there is to bring the issue of natural water management into the whole climate debate. At the moment, as I said before, people are talking about adaptation to climate change. There is a group of people who agree that through ecological restoration, through natural water management, we can start to talk about climate restoration, and not only about adaptation to climate change. This is a huge difference. There we are talking about sustainability and regenerating our living situation here on this planet.

I don't want to go into the ecological details of this, but just to mention, for those to whom this is new, some of the thought lines of this. When we talk about climate change, and we and the planet are in a process of climate change, we are talking, for example, about rising temperatures. Here, for example, on a beautiful morning like today, you can see what natural water management and especially abundant vegetation does to temperature, its cooling effect on the Earth's crust. When the temperature rises one degree, it's already a disaster for the global situation. Here we can show that cooling down our Earth's crust through vegetation when we have natural water management is much more effective, and cools down the crust much more than a temperature rise of one degree.

We can address the issue of carbon in the atmosphere by fixing carbon in this same vegetation. We can address the issue of sea level rise when we retain water in the Earth body again and don't let it flow into the oceans. We can even prove that unstable weather conditions, rainfall patterns, etc., can be corrected through natural rainwater management.

These are all major aspects of climate change, and I really wish that this time in Morocco, it comes through, that water will be accepted in the debate of climate change. It's a huge political issue, and will make a huge change all over the world.

I'm really excited about this, and I'm glad that GEN took this challenge on and will present this New Water Paradigm at this conference.

And still, all these global issues are very much related to our local situation. I would like to share a story I witnessed on our walk last month, through our watershed, the Walking Water Pilgrimage here in Portugal. We started with about thirty people here in Tamera and walked down our watershed to the ocean. It's not a nice story. What I want to share now is a story of the old paradigm, definitely very “old paradigm.” But

I still want to speak it out to generate the power to invest in and envision the new story.

When we walked down here, already after five kilometers we reached the first small town. We were received by the Mayor, who we asked, "What is your water situation?"

And he told us, "We have an abundance of water."

We asked him, "But the neighboring village doesn't have enough drinking water. They have to bring it with lorries from far away, from a dam that was built there, low quality. Why don't you offer them some of your drinking water?"

He said, "We would love to do that. We are not allowed to because the municipality of Odemira sold our water to a private company, which dictates to us what we have to do with our water. We have an abundance of water but we aren't allowed to use it."

I want to put awareness to the political reality in front of our doors. Because we hear of and know of this from many situations, and it is also here, very actively.

Going further down the watershed, very soon we came to another drastic reality, which I have to share just once. I'm sorry, I know it's Sunday. Afterwards I will try to also bring in the positive picture of it.

Mining. Mining in the Sado river basin, and all over the world. Mining companies dig deep into the Earth body for profit, extract minerals from there. Here in the Sado river basin it is up to five hundred meters deep, extracting minerals like sulphur, that are then shipped to the bigger cities where the big industry is. These minerals are converted into fertilizer for agro-industry. The mining itself is already a huge ecological problem, because mining at a depth of five hundred meters brings a big problem to the groundwater balance. It unbalances the whole groundwater system, and then when the mining stops and these mines are flooded with water again, it poisons the whole groundwater table. This is what we see here in Portugal again and again.

But it doesn't stop there. Because when industry works on these minerals and converts them into fertilizer for agro-industry, it causes another kind of serious pollution, again to the water, either of the ocean or of the river, nearby, and to the atmosphere. Huge amounts of energy are needed for this, with all the

consequences that are involved in that. This fertilizer then goes back to the watershed and is used by agro-industry to produce what they call “food” for people.

I didn't know that Portugal is the fourth biggest producer of tomatoes worldwide. In the Sado watershed, with this fertilizer, they grow a hundred tons of tomatoes per hectare of farmland. One hundred tons of tomatoes are produced per hectare of farmland, with the support of these fertilizers that go through mining and industry and then back to the agricultural fields, and polluting watersheds, groundwater and rivers again, not to mention all the animals involved there.

With this example of the tomatoes produced here in this region, we asked the people who provide the water to the farmers, “Why don't you sell these products in Portugal?”

They said, “With one percent of our production we would flood the whole Portuguese market. We mainly sell these products to China.”

The political reality here, in this watershed, was new to me, because we are talking about an area that is officially still in ongoing desertification. A so-called dry country is exporting water, in the form of tomatoes, in huge quantities, to China. In this process, they pollute and destroy their own – our own – ecosystem. This is a real, very weird reality, which I could go even further on with. I mentioned the effect it has on wildlife in this whole river basin, on the social conditions of people who live here. I don't want to go into all these details. For me it was very drastic to look into that reality here.

But I also found an anchor of hope in this. Because what I can see behind this is all one strategy, which is capitalism and centralization. All these activities follow capitalism and centralization. It wouldn't make any sense to produce tomatoes for China here, thus destroying this ecosystem, were it not for money.

I'll stay with these tomato fields. They introduced a technology that was brought in from California, where, from seeding, growing the plants, and harvesting them, to putting them into tins, no human being touches the seed, plant or fruit. It's all fully automated vegetable production on open fields. Only a few people earn a lot of money with this. For me, the anchor of hope is that if we take this factor of money out of this game, it will not be able to go on.

If we bring in another logic, of cooperation and regional autonomy, a completely different reality will take anchor and promote itself with its own logic in such a

region, relatively fast. Nobody would think about producing food for the other side of the world here, when people here don't know what to eat.

All these industrial agricultural practices have a huge impact on the ecosystem. I want to mention two other examples, from California and Israel, where I see that people, or whole nations, are at a decisive point now.

In Israel, there was a lack of drinking water. Through introducing new technology, mainly huge desalination plants, suddenly this country had enough drinking water, access to drinking water from these desalination plants. The whole situation there changed. But all these water cycles, from the desalination plants to the households, and back to the sea, are artificial cycles, that we human beings have learned how to control quite well, if we don't consider the quality of the water. We can control these cycles. We can guarantee access to water when we have these technologies. And we suffer from climate change.

Nobody on this planet has a solution to the issue of climate change if we don't talk about water. From my point of view, natural water management is the only answer to climate change. This also provides decentralized access to good water all over the world. So all these technical investments and technical water cycles are obsolete if we bring the issue of climate change into account, if we don't sell off our mother nature without thinking of the generation coming after us.

In California, there's been a huge collapse in water management in recent years. From my perspective, this country is now in front of the question, "Shall we now invest in more sophisticated technical water management, or shall we start to invest in natural water management, with a large perspective and a solution to the problem that does not prolong the threat to survival on this planet?"

Back to this region. For me, I really saw the craziness of what was going on in most parts, but the potential of this land, the people, the animals, is still here. I started to believe that change could become visible here very fast if we reach people, and first, people will gather in one region and support each other with this background. Local ecological restoration makes a lot of sense if we know about the global context, its importance, and if we can embed it into the importance of climate change. There is no centralized solution for climate change. But there is a decentralized solution, there where the rain falls. And that is where the earth is, where the plants are, and where farmers and other people should be, being active in ecosystem restoration.

We can imagine this in larger regions, for example in our watershed, from here northwards, towards Setubal. If we dare to think that this is our shared responsibility as a watershed community – this is an existing community, whether we want it or not – that our water management changes the lives of the people

further down in the watershed. Every mining company changes the lives of the people further down. That's very obvious. And if I imagine that we can establish, as a regional model, an ethical guideline of water management in a watershed, and go for that with a regional restoration plan, that could make a very fast change.

Here in Tamera we are blessed to have been able to witness this change, from a system of scarcity to a system of abundance in the area of water and vegetation. I want to invite us to see this in the larger region.

Something new for me was, looking at the larger region, the question, "What role does each part have in the ecosystem?" also got wider. When we had walked downstream fifty kilometers, we looked back and said, "Where is Tamera?... it is more or less in the hills and mountain ranges over there." And looking from there, it was very clear: these are the forests of this watershed.

Coming back with these cellular impressions, I have to rethink our strategy of regional autonomy. What does it mean if it's our responsibility to build forests? To get rid of all these fences? To build forests on a regional scale, not only on one farm, and the next farm, and the next farm? That is not a forest, that's impossible. But by "forest" I mean an ecosystem with woodland species where you can walk for hours without being disturbed by fences. Wildlife will come back. Wildlife will find its habitat there, and so will human beings. I don't want to remove them from there.

But there is a difference between living in an area which is perfect for growing rice, and an area like here. It doesn't really make sense to grow a forest on a rice field, or to try to grow rice here, when we dare to conceptualize a regional network of people who agree upon a minimal ethical guideline, and from then on mutually support each other, and step out of this system of capitalism and centralization, back into a system of mutual support in decentralized autonomous structures.

These are very precious pictures, socially and economically. Still, I have to admit that what motivates me the most is that I want to see rivers again. I want to see rivers flowing through this country. Clear rivers of drinking water quality, not traversed by rainwater floods, that meander through the ecosystem, around which the wetland ecosystem has its place, and where you can enjoy nature in the purest and most vital form I know.

This picture is coming so close to manifestation and realization here in this watershed, if we can find a way to think of stopping agro-industry. If I imagine that people start to think of the possibilities for economically sustainable living here, where farmers wouldn't start to think of the idea of agro-industrial business, the whole thing will start to change quite fast.

I hope that we find the motivation, here in Tamera and in the regional network that is being established, to bring these thoughts through and to get active in this region on this topic. Because it's our friends out there! It's not enemies I'm talking about. They're people who are concerned about nature, who often only lack a vision and the daring to step out of conventions.

I come back to last week's matinee, where Dieter Duhm said, at the end, "Loving human beings are not governable." We always say that human beings who live in decentralized autonomous systems are not governable. I think that's also true. If I put these two together now, loving human beings living in regionally autonomous models, then I can see a power that is stronger than war. Then I see a future for this planet, a future without war, and a future worth living for the generations that come after us, for all living beings that want to live here, and all over the world. With this vision and hope of success, I send us into the week. Thank you for your attention.