

OMINA

FOUNDATION

Good afternoon.

What a joy to start this three day-long seminar on Circular Economy with a full house. I want to thank all of you who are here today, and those who are following us online, for your interest and support.

The First Lady of Costa Rica, Mrs. Claudia Dobles, ministers, deputies, government representatives and members of international institutions: we are honored by your presence. Thank you very much for your interest in developing an alternative economic model, despite the inherent difficulties such an ambition may raise.

And, of course, to our special guests Femke and Peter from Ex'Tax Project: we cannot be more grateful and privileged to have you here today. All the seminars we organize at OMINA require a lot of time and effort -we truly put everything we've got into materializing these events- but the preparations for this summit have been especially difficult. I've been rehearsing for over a month now, all in an effort to correctly pronounce our Dutch speaker's last name: Gro-o-thi-us. Femke, I know my pronunciation is dreadful, but I'll keep trying!

To set the scene, let's start by looking back at our shared history. We know that the earth is almost 4.6 billion years old. If we scaled down that immensity of time into an easier number to comprehend, say 46 years, it would mean that us humans have been on the planet for only four hours. The industrial revolution began one minute ago. In that brief minute we have already cut down half of the world's forests.

If we now look to the future, the picture is even more discouraging. In 2050, the world population will exceed nine billion people. By then, with said nine billion beings aspiring to the same lifestyle, the carbon intensity of each dollar of production must be at least 130 times lower than it is today in order to ensure our very survival. It is an enormous task that requires a profound commitment to change from citizens, rulers, lawmakers and corporations. It is, probably, the most difficult collective challenge that humanity has ever had to face.

For too long the environmental crisis has been treated as a residual problem. The thinking has been something along the lines of: "First we have to fix the economy and then we can take care of the planet." But this is no longer an option. The environmental crisis is evident, it's many symptoms are all over the news. It is reminded to us by the Swedish girl Greta Thunberg who in every public appearance urges us to act. It is reminded to us by the school children who around the world miss classes every Friday to claim that we stop selling their future to have more dollars in our wallets.

As a society, we're now facing a dilemma: resisting economic growth means confronting economic and social deceleration. To pursue economic growth without reflection, on the other hand, means endangering the ecosystems on which our long-term survival depends. In other words, our main challenge, it seems, is to reconcile the fear of the end of the world with the fear of the end of the month.

Our generation -the generation of most of today's decision makers- has received an academic education from the last century: a structured schooling narrowly divided into specific knowledge that trains us to become experts in our respective, and ultimately limited, subjects. This high level of specialized knowledge has generated incredible advances for humanity, but it has also made us a fragmented community, unable to see any other perspective than the one in which we have been trained. The global environmental crisis, however, requires holistic thinking. There is no silver bullet, no one solution. This crisis will not be resolved with a purely economicist or strictly environmentalist perspective. Reality is a lot more complex, and a solution, if it doesn't work for everyone, is not a solution.

The great challenges of this century urgently demand of us to be well informed on a diverse and large range of subjects. To take on these challenges we need to be able to leave our comfort zone to see reality from another perspective. As the Spanish philosopher Fernando Savater says: "democracy forces us to educate as if every citizen were to be a ruler".

When we established OMINA Foundation in 2017 we set out to create events like this to educate ourselves about the great challenges of this era, and to learn about the many different solutions offered by a plethora of incredibly inspiring people. To navigate the turbulent waters of today, independent and qualitative information is essential to enable us to think holistically and to reorient our lives towards economic, social and environmental wellbeing. Knowledge has the power to transform lives and generate prosperity, and it is through knowledge that Omina Foundation aims to inspire people to take control of our collective future. By being here today, by showing your interest and support, it seems our efforts have not been in vain. It is encouraging and heartwarming to see how many people share in our belief that we must tirelessly search for knowledge, and to share in others' expertise.

For three days, from today until Wednesday, we will explore ways in which it is possible to generate economic prosperity while at the same time reduce our ecological footprint. The circular economy presents us with a momentous opportunity to direct our society towards a more sustainable, fair and enjoyable economic model. Throughout this seminar, we will examine how a circular economy would make it possible to contribute to the decarbonization of Costa Rica, while building social, natural and economic capital.

Our commitment is to present solutions, generating a constructive, open and plural dialogue. Because the climate crisis is not about the left or the right, and the world changes rapidly. A few years ago, ecological thinking was labeled as unrealistic, dogmatic. However today, the dogmatists are those who defend the old world and the system that led us to the threatening situation we now find ourselves in.

A few months ago my nine-year-old daughter asked me if I believed that by the time it is her turn to have children there would still be life on Earth. Psychologists have coined this type of fear of environmental destruction "eco anxiety," and it's a condition that's increasingly widespread. A reconciled and peaceful society is not possible with such a heavy concern about the future. So ladies and gentlemen, let's be realistic, let's be pragmatic. Let's put our personal interest to the side to collectively focus on the real issue at hand. Let's absorb as much knowledge as we can over these few days and apply what we learn. Because, ultimately, that's what we are really here for today: to prepare ourselves to act. It's time to move from discouragement to action. Our children's wellbeing and destiny are dependent on our present actions.

It's a huge challenge, but don't let anyone make you believe that we are too small or too imperfect to face it. This small Central American country has a historical fate. Let us remember our history and respond to our destiny by showing the world, once again, what we are capable of. Let's work together to proudly say: "Blessed is the Costa Rican mother who knows that her child will live in a better world."

Thank you.

Andrea Somma
San José, Costa Rica
June 24, 2019