

Red Ibérica de Eco-aldeas





Constellation
of the Commons

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Red Ibérica de Eco-aldeas

Name of the interviewee
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Who are you and what relationship do you have with the “Red Ibérica de Ecoaldeas” (RIE), or in English, the Iberian Ecovillage Network?

Mabel: I'm Mabel Cañada and I live in the Lakabe community. It's north of Navarra and it's one of the oldest communities in the Peninsula right now. It's also a founding community of the “Red Ibérica de Ecoaldeas,” or the Iberian Ecovillage Network.

Toni: I'm Toni Marín, I coordinate the circle of communication in the “Red Ibérica de Ecoaldeas” (RIE). I live and work in a community called Arterra Bizimodu, it's one of the newer ones and we're very close to Lakabe. We're approximately 25 minutes by car.

When, why, and where did the Red Ibérica start?

Mabel: Well, by the time it got started there was already a general trend in the Peninsula of people moving to the countryside to live. A project called Permacultura Montsant came into being. That's in Valencia, Tarragona, right at that border. It's also a very pioneering project here in the Peninsula. So there one summer, we, people that were involved in diverse projects, got together, and we decided to form this network. And Permacultura Montsant wasn't the only one there. Toni was there, who at that time was involved in another project which he's still in, which is Ecohabitar which is a magazine. Ulysses was there, and he's also involved in a project in Huesca, in Artosilla, and he's still there. There were around 10-12 people; there weren't really many more. So, it really got started through the meetings of people, rather than entities; someone called us here, we came, and this idea took shape that we should form a network. It's also true that when these projects begin, they're projects that have a very strong burst at the beginning. They need that burst to get off the ground, but later they find themselves a little alone. So it was time to call on that, all those projects, and create the network.

What year are you talking about, Mabel?

Mabel: I'm talking about the year 1997. Although there were already projects like ours that started in the year 1980, or Artosilla which also started around 1982. So there were a lot of projects--or Los Portales which started in 1985. There were projects that had already begun, but we didn't even know each other, we didn't even know they existed.

What rights and responsibilities does an ecovillage acquire when it becomes part of this network?

Mabel: Well, the rights or duties are a little bit... We don't have it very defined ourselves. What this network does provide is at least the

opportunity to share experiences, the opportunity to ask: “How have you experienced this? What have you done in this situation?” Of course, we're relatively young communities. The oldest one is Lakabe, which is 40 years old. And in one way or another we've had to ask other older communities, “How have you been able to resolve these problems, or what have you done in these situations?” All of us have been getting together for that reason. So that's already a great benefit, to be able to count on people who've already been through what you're going through, and they can explain how they got through it. Another thing that's a benefit of participating in this network is having one unified voice to the outside, like one unified image. We don't each have to be worried about needing to tell the world what's happening or what we're doing. Instead there's a network in charge of doing this for us. There are people in charge of communication. There's also someone who takes care of the website. There are people in charge of making designs. This is for everyone that lives in the ecovillage, because not every person and not every ecovillage is going to have people that can manage this level of technicality, to get their voice out into the world. And that has also been a great benefit. We also organize a yearly gathering in which the ecovillages present part of the work that we've been doing and it's a direct way of communicating with other people, the environment, and the world. We also always invite another community from another country or another continent to come and share their experience with us. More than anything, the network is a space of sharing, of learning together, of growing, of communicating, and of putting out one unified ray of light, so we don't wear ourselves out or collapse in on ourselves.

Toni: Well, maybe to expand on what Mabel was saying, it's true that ecovillages have common behavior guidelines: the ecology, some systems of horizontal self-government and self-management, we treat or try to treat the topic of gender with great care. There are a series of guidelines, so not just any project can integrate itself into the RIE; there need to be very concrete commitments, more than anything these aspects, and maybe another one that I might have forgotten, but it's basically that. In fact, I would say this isn't just only the RIE, but also all of the networks of ecovillages in the rest of Europe and in the rest of the world. Because well, I've mentioned that the RIE is part of the European network of ecovillages, the GEN, Global Ecovillage Network, which in turn belongs to the world network of ecovillages, which I think is headquartered in Washington, if I remember correctly. And well, there are networks in all continents that basically have nuances, different priorities. But the ecology issue, the self-sufficiency issue, and the education issue, we all share.

The RIE is a network linked to the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN). Can you explain what the GEN is?

Mabel: Well, the GEN has a different function because in one way or another ecovillages occupy and work a plot of land. A network doesn't work the land; it works at the level of connections. But a network doesn't work physically in a garden, nor do they keep livestock, nor do they cut down trees. This work is done by the communities. It is perhaps more focused on influence in political spaces and administrations, getting the word out, connecting with other networks, support, supporting the communities. For example, if there is a member that is sick and needs money from a community that doesn't have those resources, then it's collected from all the communities. It's a different kind of work space than the communities themselves, which are each anchored to a territory. Perhaps that's why it's a network and not a community, because also, for example, there are some communities whose function is to sustain the network, which is also another job. In general, though, the difference between the

networks and the communities is mostly in the way they understand their relationship to the world. This network is also part of another network, which is called Ecolise' and is a space of influence in the UN and the European Union. So, well let's just say that their work, in that case, is not to take care of the livestock, but instead to try to take our political goals or political intentions to the people that can have influence in the moment of initiating conversations, so that these topics that we bring can begin to be valued. And well, what we've seen is that the world itself is valuing us at this particular moment. In other words, we've never heard so much talk about ecology, nor so much talk about plastics in the sea, nor so much talk about ecological agriculture, as after the crisis that we are living--which isn't over, it's only the tip of the iceberg, and this will take us to many other places. But it's true that this is now in the voice of many people that question the policies that are being implemented at the environmental level, the agricultural level, the commerce level, and the nutrition level. In other words, the things we've been insisting and insisting and insisting on for so many years, now all of the sudden are being carried out by voices that we would have never thought would be carrying these messages. And we also think this is a success of the network; it's a result of the hard work of not only working in the field, but also of influencing the immediate environment, and beyond the immediate environment.

Keeping in mind all of your years of experience, why do you think that it's important to link the communities of the ecovillages to such a wide international network?

Mabel: Yes, this is the same as, "Why create a community instead of living alone in my house?" It's that same question but on a bigger scale. When you take the first step, which is deciding that you don't want to live alone in your apartment and relate to people from that loneliness, and you decide to live in a community, the process of transformation that a person who decides to live collectively experiences is of such great magnitude, and such intense depth that it makes you understand with great clarity that we're either all in it together, or we don't have anything to do in this world. And a community, even though it may appear to be self-sufficient, it isn't. For example, in Lakabe we can try to believe that we are self-sufficient because we're self-sufficient at the energy level, no one works outside of the community, we all work in the community, we have a very high level of self-sufficiency. There are many things that we have achieved, which make you say, "But I almost don't even need the outside world." However, even though this may be true at the raw material level, at the level of construction of the self and of what the collective identity is, the identity of the person beyond themselves. You need other people, and you don't need a circle that is too closed off because your growth will also stop, it will also slow. It's all a sequence.

When you're a baby, you only need your mom and your dad, but as you grow up you start needing other people because in a way your deep being needs that continuous feedback from other people to know if I'm going down the right path or what's happening to me, if I'm really adjusting and fine-tuning to what the situation needs, or if I'm responding with my all my being to what the situation poses. And this grows and grows. As you expand your field of action, you need more people, more groups, and more networks. You need people for the immediate situations, you need a community for the social level, you need more communities for the municipal or political level, and you need a network for the world. It's impossible to understand what's happening in India, in Africa, in South America, in a village in Asia, from my living room, as much as I try to imagine it. Living in a network allows you to pick up the phone from my couch, call someone and ask them: "Hey, how's it going over there? What's happening? How are you living through this?"

If this communication doesn't happen, it's not possible to design interventions because I don't have enough references. So a network is essential when it comes to constructing a society because all of these references need to be heard.

When you live in a network, you have that volume of information at your fingertips: ideas, references, studies, measurements, depending on what we're talking about. This is a great gift of the work of all of these years. So you can go and listen to the ecovillages in Germany and they will tell you how they're managing local food with their neighbours, how they're doing it, etc. And this is an impressive gift because when I have to go talk to the Parliament of Navarra, I can speak with knowledge about each individual case, not just from a place of assumptions. I can say, "No, gentlemen, let it be clear that this is also happening in Germany, and that this is also happening in Iceland. That here it is designed like this, and there it is designed like that. And that's interesting, that force is interesting because it isn't something that we are making up, it's something that's happening all at the same time in many places at once. It doesn't matter if we're Irish, Finnish, Basque, or Swedish, we are designing the same thing from intuition, through what we have lived, and we are arriving at the same conclusion. This has strength because it isn't something that was created in an office at a technical level. It's something that comes from inside us, from the gut. It emerges as acquired wisdom that we can communicate in comprehensible language. That's magic.

Is there a legal entity that encompasses the reality of ecovillages as well as this network?

Mabel: The majority of us are not-for-profit cultural associations, some of them are cooperatives, some don't even have a legal entity, which at the time of presenting themselves to society causes problems. The government sometimes asks you, "What could we do?" and you tell them, "Well make a law, first of all"; a law that legitimizes the collectivities as legal and fiscal entities, as a unit. So this can have validity, because if not, many times even though you want to be legal, you can't because you'd have to lie about a lot of things. So I would rather be alegal than have to lie or have to involve myself with these hideous things. There have been attempts. Italy is the most advanced in this, in fact, they have raised it to the Italian parliament without success, but they're working on it. We made an attempt and they didn't even want to pick us up. But with these things it happens like with the plastics in the sea, that with an insisting force, it's recognized in the end. This is the slow and meticulous work that needs to be done.

Toni: As far as we've understood it, there are some regulations or laws that protect indigenous cultures; it's something that comes from UNESCO or some department from the UN. The idea is that these types of communities could have that type of protection. Because it's not only on a legal level, it's at many levels. This would also be linked to the protection of land. But here it's true that the administrations, like Mabel was saying, slow down a bit because they get lost, their legal departments come and they end up running around like a chicken with its head cut off. We should work on that more and hope for society and politicians to mature and to one day accept it.

Mabel: Yes, and on top of that they're scared. There are changes that need to happen and we're still waiting for the politician that will have the guts and willpower to do it. You have to be very courageous in politics to make changes that need to be made, and those politicians don't exist yet. This is what we're seeing.

It's like when you want to ask for a scholarship and they ask you how much

your rent is and you say, “No, well I don’t live in a rental home.” “Well, then buy it.” “No, but I don’t have a house.” And they tell you, “Well I can’t give you a scholarship because you don’t have an entity.” There are difficulties that you sometimes find yourself in and it’s absurd, but that’s how it is.

Presently the RIE is a broad network of diverse communities. How is an organism of this type governed collectively? What difficulties have you found?

Toni: Great question.

Mabel: That is a big question. It doesn’t just have to do with how you govern a network, but with how we imagine that the world can continue to be governed. One thing that’s out of date are our systems of governance at the national level. We, and the networks, and the communities, and many alternative movements have already spent many years trying to investigate and design systems of collective governance that also allow us to make quick decisions because the collective systems have decision-making systems that can sometimes be harmful. You spend many hours making banal decisions and it’s an incredible giant waste of time. If this was put in terms of money, we would be embarrassed about what we’re doing. We’ve already spent many years investigating this. Sociocracy brings many answers to this question. Equality from a feminist point of view also brings many answers to this question, because we can’t ignore that in a system, equality is a factor and it has to be brought forth through continuous evaluation, or else it falls into being a system of subtle domination. Any system that wants to be put in place to manage a network, an organization, a community, or a country needs to consider these variables. At least these 2 requirements need to be met: agile and sometimes very fast decision making, and the guarantee of equality of all people of that network or of that entity. That’s the basics. What’s being worked on, not only with sociocracy, is breaking the patterns that we have in our minds of what a government system is. Because sometimes we think that a government system is simply managing the operation of an entity, of a company, of an organization, of a network, and it’s more than that. It’s not only the operation, it’s also managing resources, managing the human environment; not only the environment, but also the human environment of organization, the people who are in them, and taking care to allow people to carry out their public and private lives in harmony. We can’t get rid of one thing at the expense of the other, they have to go hand in hand. Many times, at the social level, there is a discussion about family conciliation, but it’s more than a family conciliation. It’s that people can really live well, satisfactorily, and be comfortable in both spaces, because the private is still very important to the human being. We don’t know if this is an imperative of the culture or if it’s something inherent to the human being, but at the movement it’s not something that the human being is willing to be deprived of. And the collective needs a lot of energy, a lot of dedication.

I don’t know, maybe in a thousand years, or 500, let’s be optimists and say all these structural aspects that we’re changing and modifying take root at a societal level, and that people don’t have to use so much energy to support the system. But we don’t know what will happen. We don’t know if we’re going to have to invest hundreds of years in this or if it’ll be a faster change.

Our system of governance, at the moment, depends on tact and continuous evaluation. We adjust it based on dialogue. Sometimes you also need a lot of group facilitation, in order for people to understand the system that they have come to live in. Because it’s a system different from your family, which is what we carry in our genes, it’s a

system different from being oneself, which we also carry in our genes. We don't yet carry this collective aspect of selfhood in our genes, and we have to build it. We tend to believe that this simply just means living together and that's it, but no, living together means much more. It's another gene that we have to incorporate into our DNA because we don't have it yet and it's terribly difficult to build it and terribly difficult to insert it into your own genetics. So, we are still in that stage.

Group facilitation provides a lot of information too. And this is what we're doing now so that groups and entities that make up the network can live out an equilibrium of improvisation, intuition, goodwill, well-being, and the science of group facilitation or science of living collectively, we could say. It's that stage in which a person confronts themselves and says, "I have to change many registers, my vocabulary, my form of expression, my conception of gender, of age, of race, of power, of leadership. By a lot." You also need to understand that we come from a military culture based on victimhood and where "poor me" is what matters the most. In fact, we still find ourselves in dialogues about who is suffering more, you or me? And when you find yourself in a dialogue like that, that's when you say do yourself, "Mabel, you've got it all wrong. Go take a walk. You can come back to this conversation later."

At a societal level, we're still in this dialectic. In fact, much of the budget goes towards suffering. First, we have a huge budget, which is to create suffering, which is war. Then we have larger budgets for the suffering that is made by that war, and on and on. This is what sells the most today at the societal level, and therefore also in groups, because we are still very attached to this culture, we are still under those patterns. There's a lot of change to be made for these systems of governance to be at that optimal situation where we respect each other, we consider each other as equals, we respect the spaces of equality, carry out power in a semi-horizontal way, understanding that sometimes there will be people that will push for something more, others will push more for something else, others will focus more on something else. But at each step we will return to the circle and we will return to our system of equals and from there we will disperse again. Governing isn't just about shopping up and having people follow your lead. It's about, "Here I am. Let's do this together. Let's go back to the heart of it. Let's go back to the circle. Let's reclaim our equality, our system of horizontality," and then other people making that movement. So, I will have to lead sometimes, and I'll have to follow other times, and sometimes I'll have to rest, and that's how we'll see if we can manage to live in a city that isn't under so much stress

Can you explain what an ecovillage is?

Toni: There are many types of ecovillages but, basically an ecovillage is a space where the people decided to live collectively, that is, not living alone or isolated in an apartment in the city but instead living with more people and sharing. I'm not saying that this means throwing away our individuality, which we still have, but living like this is choosing to share. We're not the only ones talking about how community, sharing, living with more people and working with more people is the future. Many people are saying this. Many people in ecovillages from 50, 60 years ago started to realize that the way of life that the capitalist system was proposing isn't working. Ecovillages are a change that has evolved and a teaching of something that comes from before. And basically, it's this, a place where there are many models, I insist, because imagine, an ecovillage in India has some parameters and ways that are very different from an ecovillage in America or European ecovillages. In all

ecovillages, like we've said before, there are a series of relatively fixed parameters that have to do with ecology, with gender, with sociocracy, and I'm forgetting one. Maybe Mabel would want to go more in depth or further explain what I've said.

Mabel: The ecovillage is a personal decision to live collectively. When I say that there is a decision I mean to say that there is intentionality. There needs to be collective decision-making; a way to share the economy, not totally, but there is a different way of working with the economy that is very different from what capitalism aims for. And we have common goals. Many times we share a territory so we also share the management of this territory. There is usually a core value that is very linked to the concept of universal love.

Keeping inequality in mind, which is an inherent factor of the colonial, patriarchal, classist, and ageist capitalist system, how do you live together given the diverse inequalities within this community?

Mabel: Yeah, well, it's different negotiating this to the outside, to society, than negotiating this within a community. Lets say that within these communities the level of difference would only exist to the extent that your difference limits you when it comes to expressing your voice or limits you at the time of exercising your right to access resources, or the economy, or any situation. In other words, in reality, marginalization exists because, at the social level, the fact that you have that difference reduces your chances of accessing resources, especially in this time, or power. So within a community this doesn't exist; structurally, there are no impediments for anyone with whatever difference they may have, whether it be free access to resources, free access to power, free access to decision-making systems and to having a voice. Here we work on discrediting this system, and we explain that the structure of the ecovillage does not maintain this system of differences. That is no longer here and we have to begin breaking those patterns. Many times in the exercise of power, the same as in that of leadership or decision making, the structure of repression that exists outside doesn't weigh as much as the structure of repression within me. Sometimes I don't even give myself the permission to experience the full power that I do have. And I always go from lows to lows instead of highs, which makes growth not as easy.

What are the challenges that a person that decides to live in an eco-village faces?

Toni: For me the biggest challenge is this type of virus that we bring from the system outside. Becoming caught up in a series of traps that are very hard to get out of; for example, individualism, the victimization that Mabel was talking about before, the subject of the economy. Not all ecovillages have a shared economy. Detachment is very complicated. In other words, all of these are big enemies and there are others that I'm forgetting about. And if you realize, they are mostly more internal than external, even though there are also external ones. Sometimes ecovillages close themselves off, and by being so opaque they create ghosts to the outside world and misunderstanding. An ecovillage should be transparent and should influence the outside world. There are many examples of ecovillages that are in some way helping their surroundings, helping the community around them work on ecology, lowering the carbon footprint, and educating them on many things. Of course we have challenges, many challenges.

Mabel: Perhaps the biggest challenge is managing to influence the world without creating panic. Right now, what is most frequently used as a tactic for people to react is inciting fear, panic, uncertainty, and disgust. And we don't want to do that. If

people want to transform themselves and transform the planet, we want them to do so coming from other values; from values of sharing; from the common good; from seeing the terrain flourish, the territory, the land; from abundance; from generosity. This paradox of scarcity has us very trapped and, nevertheless, we live on a planet that is beautiful, that is abundant, that is generous. I mean, it's totally the opposite of what they sell us, you know? It's like, do we people not have 2 eyes to see that you can walk over there, throw some seeds and 2 years later you'll have some sunflowers? You don't realize that all of this is real and that everything else that they are telling you is a fallacy. So, this other culture is the one that we want to reach all people, but not through fear. We want it to reach people through contemplation, through love, through understanding, through compassion, also through critical work, because there's a lot of critical work. These are the values that we want to work with. And if people don't want to transform through these parameters, then they won't transform. Of course, we aren't going to come in and tell people, "If you don't do this we're all going to die tomorrow." Well then we'll die, we will die. The planet doesn't care what we do, it's indifferent to what we do. The planet will stay alive, we are the only ones that will die. It will seem to us that the whole universe dies, but only we would die, and we are just another race, just like if we were spiders or mosquitoes, or elephants, it's all the same. We have it very clear that we don't want to create a culture of fear and shortage. We want to create a culture of trust and abundance, because the world in itself is like this.

What demographic characteristics do ecovillages have?

Mabel: Well here in the Peninsula, specifically, in what is the Ecovillage Network, the majority of people are from the Peninsula. There are some people that have come from outside it, but not that many. There are some people from Belgium, from Holland, from Germany, but very few.

Toni: Tamera, for example, which was founded by German people. Los Portales by people from Belgium...

Mabel: ...But its people from Belgium and from Cataluña, it's like a mix.

Toni: Local people start to integrate little by little, people from the outside...

Mabel: But now many of us have constructed ourselves a certain way. We were sort of born out of this impulse to take care of the earth and live in the countryside. We come a little bit from this dream that came late, but has a lot to do with "May 68," and that arrived almost 10 years late. Not everyone survived, logically, almost all of the communities fell apart. But the ones that remained had enough momentum to anchor this perception of living a different way in the different territories. There are two or three communities where there are people as old or older than me. I'm 67 years old, and there are people that are 70, 75. In some communities there are already people that have passed away that were in their seventies. And there are also a lot of young people too. It's a place highly sought after by young couples with kids who realize that they can't raise and educate their kids how they would like to in the urban or semi-urban environment because these spaces don't offer a sufficient quality of life for their children. And this is the profile that comes the most. Right now a lot of young people call, from kids that are 19 years old, but also couples over 50 that want to retire soon. There are also a lot of women who are 60 that are partners and are retiring now and say, "Well, let's go live in the countryside. Let's live our dream from when we were young." That's sort of the profile.

Does the concept of an urban ecovillage exist?

Toni: Yes, but we don't have them here in the Iberian Peninsula. There are some in the United States and a few examples in Europe. Here they are oriented in rural areas, more or less far away from the city. It's true that at the beginning there was a lot of movement to escape the city and a lot of movement toward land occupation, some ecovillages are very far away and positioned in remote places because here in Spain the access to land has been very complicated. It's very expensive and it's in the hands of administrative people or banks. So the topic of occupation has gone very well or it's been our example that we have started to work inside a building that has already been built. So, it is true that many ecovillages have not worked due to a lack of space. Basically, the two downfalls of ecovillages are the lack of a group management system, in other words, conflicts, and the inability to find places because of the price, because they are expensive and then the administration won't let you build them.

How does the issue of property play out in the context of an ecovillage?

Toni: There are many models. Each ecovillage is a world, there is everything. You have ecovillages that were occupied first and were later granted the space by the administration, like Lakabe. You have ecovillages that have rented a space and are working there, like us, like Arterra. You have ecovillages that have bought a farm, a space, and are working there like Los Portales have done. There is everything.

Mabel: Some family inheritance.

Toni: There are many models. It's very interesting in the case of occupations, that in the end, the administration realizes how important this human group that's working there is, that in the end there is a secession. It has happened in Artosilla, it has happened in Lakabe, it has happened in various places where the administration has realized that it's easier to let these people live there, because they are really doing them a favor.

Mabel: The Aldea de Olla too, right?

Toni: Yes, in Aldea de Olla, too.

Toni: Yes, in Valencia. There the administration realized that we are really doing them a favor and they kind of looked the other way, they turn a blind eye, because, well, the law wouldn't allow it. The law that doesn't permit it.

Do you know the estimated number of ecovillages within the RIE?

Mabel: Currently, there are around 20 of us networked who have more than five members. Then there are like a lot of small groups of three people, two couples, a family entity with grandparents. There are many varieties. Then there is an occupation movement that is not related to the movement of the Red de Ecoaldeas, but that has its settlements and some are big and powerful. And then there are some groups that are simply their own way and have some similar concepts.

Toni: They're also a part of this.

Mabel: Yes. And then there are also some youth groups that have a more religious or spiritual origin and that are also building communities. Really, the

biggest entity that could at one moment bring together all of these groups, tiny and small groups, is the Red de Ecoaldeas because they have a very well-worked structure. The Rural Occupation and Preoccupation Network has tried at times to create its own network, called "Rizoma," but there wasn't enough energy to sustain it. But from time to time it rises from its ashes and forms some movements. But, well, in one way or another we are in a network. In our case we're involved in this network for reasons related to land occupation. Another community with a more spiritual focus might be involved in another network. Others with an environmental focus are connected with another network. Others are linked by education issues, because there are many small communities that have come together for the education of kids. So there is another network. There is a world that is moving out there, that time can be a big motivating force.

Thinking about autonomous communities, is there a difference between the support that the ecovillages receive?

Toni: I would say that there are some communities that receive less support. Sorry for the joke. Navarra, maybe, has been the one to receive the most. With the previous government they realized and were working on a project, which Mabel promoted and...

Mabel: Yes, we worked a lot...

Toni: ...that was called "Rehabilitar la Tierra." That was a really beautiful project. Basically it was a project to legally rehabilitate the towns. But the rest of the Peninsula is complicated and there are even administrations that are opposed to some young people going and living in a place that is a little bit dilapidated and fixing it up. Since we are in a protected zone, they take legal actions. For example it happened in El Calabacino where people started to rehabilitate a whole town. They have been working for years, they do a project to expand their vital needs and the administration comes to strike them down. Precisely, there is less help than help.

Mabel: The most there is is that they ignore you and leave you alone. This is the best, at the moment. And later, when they actually listen to you, it's generally to give you problems. We'll see if we can find a local government that wants to get more involved. Huesca and Navarra are the autonomous communities that have advanced the most. It has been very little, but they have advanced more than the rest in the management of their territories.

What should someone that wants to go live in an ecovillage do?

Mabel: To start off, visit the ecovillage various times. Stop by during community work or arranged visits hours and open houses. Let yourself be seen little by little, let yourself be known, do not pressure, do not demand, because this really makes us mad.

Toni: ...Don't say "I would do this like this" ...

Mabel: ...That also makes our blood boil. And after you've introduced yourself, start a conversation with some of the people. Every group has a person that is in charge of welcoming the visitor. So then you're in contact with this part of the community that is in charge of this function, and you can see what the specific protocol of that community or group is. And from there, well, begin the process and have patience. We understand that when people are so fed up with how they are living, they need

a change, and they want it now. But that is their need, not ours. So, that then creates a need for us that we did not have, to take someone in, because we didn't have it before. Sometimes we cannot even accept that request because we ourselves are in a situation of reflection or we are in the process of change, or we are in the process of remodeling, so we cannot accept everything that comes our way

We can also ask people, when they see that they are not content with how they are living, to begin taking care of themselves, to learn other trades. I say this because if all you know is how to take notes, as it happened to me, then when you get to the field you get scared. Because here everything is gardening, firewood, milking, shearing, well a number of things, that you say: "Oh, God. I'm so ignorant, I don't know anything." So we advise people to worry about themselves and start taking care of their own necessities, learn other trades, study other things, and visit other places where they can learn. That would be my recommendation.

Toni: A lot of requests come to the Red Ibérica de Ecoaldeas, from people, families, individuals, and the answer is always the same: Get in contact with each community. Online we have a list with all of their email addresses, and write your own request. There is always someone, like Mabel was saying, that will answer back and tell you to go visit one of their open houses to meet them. For example, a very important point in all of the ecovillages, especially in the bigger ones, is the issue of volunteering. Volunteering is a very easy way to get to know us.

Mabel: ... It's beautiful ...

Toni: ... Well, yes, but that's not all. I'm in love with the world of volunteering because some young people come that are absolutely charming.

Do the ecovillages have their own medical and educational services or do they depend on public services from the state?

Mabel: Both, I mean, I think that many communities have their own healthcare structure for everything that is basic, and then there are things that are out of the ordinary and you have to go to medical centers. Some ecovillages have their own doctors and nurses because they are members of the community and continue to practice their profession within the community. Then there are also people that don't want to develop their job within the community.

The ecovillages that don't have doctors within the community have learned the basics throughout their lives and we can give each other advice. If your son has a runny nose, or has diarrhea or coughs a lot, or has a fever, those are very basic things that we can tackle with good results. But from there you have to get a doctor to get an accurate diagnosis, with all of the tests that your body needs and then each person has the freedom to choose the healthcare system that they would like.

Toni: And in the issue of education there are ecovillages that have their own school, especially if they are small schools. Lakabe has its own school for young kids and others go to nearby schools. Here, for example, they go to the neighbouring town that has a school, and the parents are very happy and they think it's great. There are many models. To maintain a school, as you know, is complex and requires effort but it is done because in the ecovillages we strive for self-sufficiency at all levels: energy, food, education. So, we're pushing for that.

Thinking of the people enrolled in the ecovillage school, what is their transition to an educational system outside of the ecovillage like?

Mabel: I have four sons that have gone through this process along with the other kids that were in the community at that time. They were a group of 15 and the first group was made up of 5 kids; they had a great experience because there were 5 of them. They felt that they were part of a group and they could maintain part of their identity within that larger group. Now we are experiencing another process, that of the daughters and sons of those kids. We have only two cases, two girls that have started to go to a school that is very close by. It's 13 kilometers from home, and they are both very happy. It's also true that the time comes when the girls and the boys, like we were saying before, need other references, they need to widen their scope of references and so they miss being with many more girls and boys. Of course, if they are part of a large community, say 70 adults and 20 boys and girls, well maybe then they'll have sufficient diversity to satisfy their needs. But they can leave the ecovillage and meet more people, meet other teachers, other subjects, expand their knowledge. Now that we have a new start to the school year, which although it has been difficult, is face-to-face, well, the two girls are going to be thrilled.

You have mentioned that the ecovillage seeks to be self-sufficient and have energetic sovereignty, could you explain what this means?

Toni: The sovereignty is for food, energy, education, etc. In other words, this is what the ecovillage is actively seeking. Sometimes they are able to get it. Lakabe, for example, at the energetic level we are sufficient. Los Portales is self-sufficient at the energy level, at the food level. For example, during the summer, 80% of what we eat is ours. But not in the winter. How about you all?

Mabel: ... For us it's similar. What happens is that we, for example, make meat, we make cheese, we make other foods that you all don't have and that make up for our lack of vegetables for a portion of the year. We mix it up, we conserve a lot to have a little of everything, we have greenhouses. But it's hard. And it's not that we have to be, it's that we want to be simply to investigate how this works, to inquire, to be prepared for when we have to translate this to a bigger scale or to other sites.

Toni: All of this has repercussions on something that is very important today, which is the carbon footprint. There isn't a general study for each ecovillage, but we do have studies of the Lakabe ecovillage, the Arterra ecovillage, and we have calculated that in Lakabe the carbon footprint, the CO2 emission, is of one ton per inhabitant per year. Ours, that of Arterra, is two tons. The average person in Pamplona, in Iruña, has from 4 to 5, even 6 per year. But, ecovillages are examples. What we want is to demonstrate the belief that you can be happy without wasting and throwing waste and more waste at the planet. We can do it better, for sure. But well, that's what we're working on, trying to do it better and better.

Mabel: Yes, that's why we want to try everything to see what this would be like, how this other thing would be, what could be better. In other words, we don't want to say that we have the truth, we're simply saying that we're trying different things and there are things that work, things that are very cheap, the effort required is minimal, and it makes you ask yourself- what are we doing?

Are the ecovillages part of the social and solidarity economy network?

Mabel: The broader networks are included. The network of ecovillages is not, but for example, the European network, when many of us join together, then we are part of this network. When we want to put pressure at the political level, at different levels or different positions, then there, all of us, all of the networks come together because we really have a common root, and the network of ecovillages has a more global approach than perhaps a network of economy, or permaculture, or restorative justice. But even so, it doesn't have a study as exhaustive as the Social and Solidarity Based Economy Network does. Everything that that network has worked to break down, the ins and outs of what is liquidated money and all of those games, we have not done that, we have simply limited ourselves not to be a part of it, but we have not done that work. This network hasn't done it. We welcome all of those networks that do all of that work.

Do you all have a complementary currency?

Toni: Yes.

Mabel: We at Lakabe do not. But within the region that Arterra and Lakabe and many other towns are in, yes there is a local currency attached to our waste system. I've been head of waste management for ten years. Little by little, we have included things that can be placed in different containers for a region made up of 11 municipalities. We have invented a complementary currency, and we buy plastics that aren't packaging that would otherwise go directly into landfills. With this complementary currency, we buy plastic from the people who will sell it to us clean, and we can take the plastic from the mix that's in the green containers. And with this currency you can access many shops that are in that region, mainly in the biggest town, which has almost 3,000 inhabitants, but also in other smaller towns of 500 inhabitants. You can go to the hairdresser, to the pharmacy, to the bar, to the hardware store, etc. And that's where we are, pushing forward some of our ideas as far as we can.

Toni: The ecovillages in the Iberian network are small and they don't have a sufficient critical mass, in many cases, to sustain a complementary currency. So, in this case, this is done in a region, in an area. There are large ecovillages in Europe that can do it, but because they have this critical mass. We do not have it yet. What is true is that ecovillages always favor barter systems. Sometimes it's very comfortable because we have them right next to us and we can trade things all the time.

Mabel: Yes, we trade things all the time.

Toni: Maintaining a barter system with, for example, an ecovillage that is in Seville is very hard because they are pretty far. However, when you are near you can do these things.

How would you describe the relationship between the RIE and institutions ?

Mabel: Look, we, Toni, me and five or six other people, both from Arterra and Lakabe, have been working with the administration of Navarra for some time, and many times the problem is that at the interpersonal level, they perfectly understand what we are talking about. But to carry that out, in other words, going to the department and changing the environmental policy from top to bottom, well they don't dare to do that. Even though at the personal level they understand it and even share in it, they don't see how that can be embodied right here and right now and what

embodying it would consist of. Sometimes they attempt it through a program but the administration doesn't realize that they consume a lot of the economic resources only to make paper. All they do is make paper, they don't make anything. And that goes into the same system. Why have citizens stopped believing in the political system for 200 years? Because it hasn't done anything in 200 years. Here in Spain at least they have made Social Security which--blessed be, seeing what is falling apart in the world. They are all studies, there isn't a single action. Studies to do actions. But when will those actions be done? We have spent 20 years doing studies to make actions. I mean, we can't do it anymore. You say, "Come on, let's take a vote of confidence, one last effort," but I was really running out of patience the other day. It makes you want to make an appeal to all the European ecovillages and occupy the 20 empty villages that the Navarra government has and thus respond to its depopulation policy. It makes you want to go into direct action because nothing is being done. It's all paper.

Toni: They live in fear. I remember when we were proposing a series of ideas that were a bit advanced how, more than anything, the lawyers would wrinkle their noses. They are scared of changing things. I don't know if it's because they'd have to work more. I don't know.

Mabel: Look, in Huesca and Navarra, the local governments have many villages in their ownership. They are not private properties. It's the government itself that has these villages. It wouldn't cost them anything to make an agreement with the network of ecovillages to give up five villages to see how the occupation turns out, to see if we can then do another project with another five or twenty, or all of the villages. They could do it because they have the property. We aren't asking for ownership, we're just asking for management and land, not ownership. But this terrifies them. It's like crossing a line which, at a personal level, these people aren't prepared for. They haven't done their job as politicians, and they aren't prepared to go beyond the limits of the brutal culture that we come from. They aren't prepared.

The RIE is a political project, without a doubt, but what kind of politics are we talking about?

Mabel: Yeah, we have not designed a political project as it is understood, but we have some clear working lines that mainly have to do with the culture, that we have to transition to a more participatory, more community-like culture. So, how can this be done? This has to be worked on with every neighbour. It cannot be done starting from the top, it is not a model you can just implement. It is something that you need to build little by little with these people. So, every village that will be rehabilitated and rebuilt will have to have its own design because it's all very organic. But in it there will be the ecological dimension, the cultural dimension, the economic dimension, and the dimension of a vision of the world. There are these four lines of work and it's from there that we get all of our wisdom of the ecovillages in these 4 paradigms. And we are designing a fifth one that has to do with transcendence.

Transcending above this whole capitalist culture, transcending this system of inequalities, transcending this shortage, this victimization because this is not what life is about. Life is splendor, it's scattered, its abundance, it's color. I don't know how to tell you, it's just that life is something else. So, how do we bring this into space? In the villages, in reality, when there is just a bit of movement, this emerges, you can see it. The flowers emerge, the vegetation emerges, the girls and boys emerge, the schools reopen. So, the strategy would be to go from the

bottom up. In other words, let's create life at the bottom, let's rehabilitate villages, let's rebuild a community-like culture, and then from there, a new way of being in and with the land will emerge, because we can't do anything without the land.

Politics have to be at the service of the world that we have to build. There is a lot of talk about putting life at the center of everything. I don't know if it's life, I don't know if it's nature, I don't know if it's Gaia, I don't know what it is. What I do know is that what we need isn't what we have right now. And that is something that we need to start building because we are still too attached to the individualistic capitalist culture, we know that whatever we build and design will still be very infused with this. This is why we work little by little, so we don't build and stick to something that later gets old fast. We are going to work slowly, so we can create and rejuvenate at every step, because that's the way that the planet will be able to endure, and to rebuild and build with the planet, according to its demands as well as society's; to build together, with these two enormous entities in harmony. Go with the earth, may the earth also contaminate us a bit with its rhythms, with its deficiencies, its seasons. Go from revelry to rest, from that melancholy that the fall brings to go into the winter and then that explosion that the spring brings. Well, bring all of that to our lives too, incorporate all of these rhythms within ourselves, allow ourselves to rest, to hibernate, because hibernating is marvelous. And then be ready to push forward in the spring and enjoy it all. This is life, it's not what they sell us. And many people with this confinement have realized this, even though it has been really tough, but people within themselves have found this and said, "Look at that! There really is a life beyond this life," and there, there's a force that's going to emerge.

What do you think of the environment of ecovillages in the 15M movement?

Mabel: Well, it was a beautiful moment, very spontaneous. A lot of young people came to ask us questions, and it was a time in which we worked a lot on facilitation because this whole movement realized, a year and a half into existence, that it had reached its limit. They didn't know what else to do, or what to do to keep the public spaces open, with a very open, greatly expanded decision-making space and with a certain horizontality. It was monopolized very quickly. A lot of men seized leadership and power, and the movement fell apart almost entirely. Only a few remnants were left. We can say that "Podemos" is the political party that we've had here in Spain for about five years that was born out of 15M. This party is what's left of that explosion of popular power. But look, power is an energy that's hyper contaminated by the patriarchy, by capitalism, and by individualism. So when a person enters in this energy, they either have it very clear within themselves or, in a short time, they are possessed by that kind of maelstrom. It's the exact same thing at the collective level. When you enter, you know that you'll have to compete "for power." It isn't as much competing but holding onto your power strongly. If you aren't prepared, and if you don't clearly understand what the values of your power are, the power owns you. So I think this is a bit of what happened to 15M. It was a spontaneous movement, but it hadn't figured out: What does horizontal power mean? What does collective power mean? What does sharing the power mean? So it quickly sort of trapped itself within this concept of power.

What does growing in the context of an ecovillage mean?

Mabel: Well in a way it would be like achieving a balance between my desires, the desires of the collective within which I live (whether it be

a family, a group, a neighborhood, a village), the territory in which I live, and humanity in the moment that it is in and its necessity.

Thinking of all the conditions of adversity described as well as the climate of political disaffection that seems to exist, what keeps the engine of your hope alive?

Mabel: For me personally, my connection with life keeps me active. I feel super connected with the earth, with life, with humanity at the collective level. And perhaps that's why my vocation is not only to live in community, but to investigate what collective life is, how it can improve, what we can contribute to people, how we can create collective structures more easily. I have spent my whole life working on this actually. And this is what keeps me excited and eager. I get up every day as if it were my first day and say, "Wow! I'm here, It's dawn." And I think everything that comes to me is great. Sometimes I say, "Wow! There are so many things, I can't do it all, I'm going to have to drop something." And I have to evaluate. I marvel at everything that I have at my disposal every day, to live, to enjoy, to grow, to transform. I enjoy it.

Toni: Well, I'm doing what I want to do. I mean, I'm motivated by what I know I have to do. To explain it quickly, since I was 17 years old, and even before then, I wanted to live in a community. Something within me was telling me that what was outside wasn't real, it was something they were imposing on me. I knew that there was an idea of a tribe, a concept of a tribe, that was better for me; I'm not saying that it was better, but that it was better for me. And in the end I'm doing what I know I had to do, and that's what moves me. And what moves me is being honest; being honest with the planet, being honest with people, being honest with what surrounds me, it's pure honesty. And I get mad when I see an aluminum beer can thrown away and I say, "Holy cow, but how can this be?" I get mad. And I get mad with myself too. I haven't been on a plane in years, and when I have to do more miles than I need to, I punish myself a little bit. But it's doing what you know you need to do.