

What role can Emmaus play in developing a social and environmental alternative?

1. *Apart from dealing with emergency situations, Emmaus should seek to encourage a long-term process of reflection.*

The environment is an issue for Emmaus: not just in terms of climate change or damage to our ecosystem (with these issues sometimes seeming very abstract and distant from our everyday lives to many of us) but **also because of the impact these changes will have on the lives of the poorest people, whose numbers continue to grow inexorably, both now and in the future.** The land will dry out, sea levels will rise and natural resources (water and fossil fuels) will only be accessible to a rich minority. **The Emmaus Movement is therefore completely justified in calling for an in-depth debate on the links between lifestyles, the environment and social issues, as this issue is clearly political and not solely technical.**

The values of solidarity and simplicity, defended from the outset by Abbé Pierre, offer the basis for an alternative to modern-day society, which is founded on competition, predation and destruction. Within Emmaus people often think that solidarity and helping the most deprived members of society are not linked in any way to conserving the ecosystem. **However, a fairer world cannot just be promoted by dealing with emergency situations. Attacking the root causes of extreme poverty, inequality and injustice has no impact if we do not reflect about the meaning of our long-term initiatives.**



2. *Is Emmaus an environmental stakeholder?*

Has not a society in which humans are subjected to economic “constraints” and a society which destroys its environment in the name of trade gone truly haywire? In response to worsening poverty in our ravaged world, we can endeavour to **develop alternatives** and put forward a different social model. Living in a different way, trading based on other principles and **fighting for a world steeped in ideals** is still possible.

For 60 years Emmaus has been heavily involved in addressing the root causes of extreme poverty and is

a movement that seeks to **promote a fairer world by placing human beings at the heart of society.** Everything is being done in the Movement launched by Abbé Pierre to improve the situation of those sidelined, excluded or destroyed by society. From the outset Emmaus has endeavoured to “recover” and “recycle” the humans that society has thrown away. **Collecting and recycling unwanted goods** is one of the ways that the Movement has gone about it, **with this work enabling us to collect funds to give the “most disadvantaged members of society” the means to regain the dignity that society has taken away.**

Times and fashions change, and our recycling work has made the **Emmaus Movement** a recognised player in the fight against waste, an **environmental stakeholder** involved in reuse and recycling.

Although **these activities** significantly reduce the impact of over-consumption on our immediate environment by limiting the quantity of waste that is

simply thrown away and then destroyed, they **only take place at the end of the cycle and at the margins and do not address the causes of the problem**, as the Movement has in fact sought to do on other issues since it was founded. Indeed, our discourse does not really call into question the consumer society or the waste that it generates. We help make the system “greener” through our waste work and we acquit ourselves well, **without ever really questioning this society, which is based on objects and humans becoming obsolete.**

3. *What do we want?*

The environment is now one of the Movement’s official concerns due to the emergency climatic – and media – situation. These themes, and specifically the issue of degrowth, have punctuated many debates, from those at the Sarajevo World Assembly in 2007 to those held more recently at the Regional Assembly of Emmaus Europe in 2009, without a real stance on these issues being identified. The questions could be posed in the following terms.

- Do we want to simply become **sustainable development stakeholders** like others? **Making small changes for show to our work would enable us to surf on this green wave and would be a way of gaining recognition from public stakeholders and civil society**, without really having to call ourselves into question or change our culture.

- **Or should we decide to commit to developing an alternative way of life, thinking and acting, not because it is fashionable, but instead based on our ideals?** This commitment would be timely, as it would involve **taking into account issues that nowadays have become insurmountable, while really calling into question our ways of thinking and existing.** Solidarity must involve reflection on international and intergenerational sharing of available natural resources (water, fossil fuels, air and land) and on developing a way of life based on these considerations, which would therefore be simpler and more environmentally-friendly. Building a

socially responsible world today involves making major changes to our lifestyles just so that everyone can live.

4. *What is the current state of play?*

Emmaus can help develop a real alternative to today’s world. Increasing numbers of Emmaus groups are looking into their environmental impact and are wondering how to make improvements in line with the ideas being generated by this process. The ground was prepared at the Lisbon work camp in 2008 for a discussion of potential environmental initiatives that can be implemented by the groups. Despite these efforts,

today we are not necessarily aware within the Movement about what neighbouring groups are doing. **Potential alternatives already exist**, even if they do depend on circumstances. **Initiatives run in all the groups of the European Emmaus Movement have been listed here in order to foster these dynamics and engage a political discussion on the meaning of solidarity in Emmaus against the background of the end of this world of abundance.** This guide aims to publicise these initiatives in order to inform, encourage and challenge. We must continue learning to learn from others’ experiences and carry on developing an alternative way of life, which is sustainable because it is environmentally-friendly, and is based on sharing, solidarity, living together and helping each other. We must continue to address **all** the root causes of extreme poverty because a different world IS possible.

The president, **Julio de la Granja**



“How would the prospect of putting a stop to what is known as “growth” be bearable, without them losing their temper, to those who do not have the bare minimum, unless they could see many of those who do have the basics, voluntarily and willing saying to them, ‘we are doing this so that you too finally have enough because we now want to work together with you.’

Our Emmaus communities, in the current context, in the face of this call for change, can and must be truly great in their smallness, even though they are so small.”

Abbé Pierre, Easter, 1977....What we can do