

The New Social Contract Between Generations

Profiguration

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Introduction

The reason for this book

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1 Introduction

The reason for this book

When one is little, it seems that, like a sponge, he absorbs what he is told, what he is shown and what he experiences in his environment. Many popular sayings, expressions and proverbs mark him for life. In my case, I like to boast about that “conventional wisdom” that my parents had, born in a village in Cordova and who completed their life cycle in the lands of Lleida, where I was born. But now I am not only accompanied by spoken expressions but also by customs that caught my brother’s and my attention and that time proved our father and our mother right.

The common thread of their life with us and the memory that still lasts is kindness, tenderness, smiling, understanding and love. I like to remind myself of Albert Camus’ quote, more or less adapted: “The sun that reigned in my childhood deprived me then and still deprives me of all resentment”. The sun was the love of our parents: light, wisdom increased in old age and warmth, kind ways of being, speaking and doing things.

Love is fundamental in life. Love brings, at the same time, respect, understanding, compassion and humour.

In this way, I want to recall some words of Erich Fromm (1982: 47) about mature love:

Childish love follows the principle *I love because I am loved*.
Mature love obeys the principle *They love me because I love*.
Immature love says: *I love you because I need you*. Mature love says: *I need you because I love you*.

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This was another teaching, another wisdom and another experience with our parents: they needed us because they loved us. Eventually, we also learned that it was so, although for many years we loved them because we needed them.

The title of the book is *The New Social Contract Between Generations: Profiguration*¹. Profiguration is a new concept that I have been developing, already at the end of my adulthood, after different sociological, theoretical and empirical research, which have given rise to this conceptual² formulation.

The concept of “profiguration” (and “profigurative socialisation”, “profigurative education”) is a key element of reflection to improve coexistence and the relationship between individuals. It is about proposing solid arguments that favour intergenerational relations in a profigurative society and progress not only in active ageing but also in an intergenerational dialogue that overcomes the break between generations and ageism (discrimination on the grounds of age, both regarding old age and the youth). In this context, it is pertinent to open a broader, holistic approach to human sustainability, both from the ecological and social point of view: finally, they must be considered together, sustainably coupling nature and society.

The new concept of profiguration and the consequent idea of the search for a profigurative culture society values the importance of interdependence between people to overcome loneliness and face a full life throughout the different stages and ages on a necessary basis of intergenerational relations. This will bring us wisdom as prudent conduct in life, enjoying its deepest meaning. Life experience, in a profigurative society, is linked to wisdom: *ageing* (getting old) and *sageing* (becoming sage, wise).

In short, profiguration (and profigurative socialisation) is intergenerational interdependence. In other words, a new social contract between generations and the recognition of comprehensive socialisation with the competition of all ages.

As Fantova (2019) indicates, the idea of a social contract is a metaphor that reflects large agreements that can be explicit or implicit between social segments with different interests, seeking coexistence and the articulation of society. The author points out, echoing the British “new generational contract” (Resolution Foundation, 2018), three proposals for social policies that favour equitable intergenerational relations: (a) push for new social service policies in the face of the crisis of care and unwanted loneliness; (b) governance

based on economic, social and environmental sustainability; and (c) design a new fiscal policy that enables the financial sufficiency of cohabiting family units and reinforces community and solidarity dynamics and the intergenerational sustainability of life.

In this work, I mainly take into account the implicit aspects of the new profigurative social contract, without forgetting the explicit elements that have to do, as we are observing, with care and unwanted loneliness, coexistence, solidarity (and love) and sustainability. These will be the pillars of the different sections of this book: I emphasise profiguration as a necessary agreement and recognition between generations, highlighting the value of the involvement of the different ages of the life cycle. That is why it is very positive that management teams, work groups, organisations and various institutions integrate young people, adults and older people, who can create knowledge and make decisions in a dialogical way. In other words, based on communication and dialogue (*dia logos*). This dialogue, according to its etymological root, is the construction of knowledge, thanks to social interaction, human interdependence and communication between people. Group judgement is proven to be superior to individual judgement. When research and decisions are made as a group, the results are more likely to be better than if they are developed individually.

In the first draft, I played with another subtitle that was “Love that saves. Lucky to have lived”. The first part of the original subtitle honours a title translated as “Redeeming Laughter”, a work by Peter Berger, in which it is postulated that humour has something transcendent and that, in fact, humour is in some way part of divinity that the human being can have. Paralleling this Berger hypothesis, I do the same with love. I believe that love is what saves human beings. Love transcends it and gives meaning to life. Certainly, if there is any divinity in the person, it has a lot (if not all) to do with love. Even from neuroscience, we are reminded that there are hormones that arouse pleasure or make it easier to feel good and at ease, which are intimately related to social relationships of love, fraternity, friendship, sex and compassion well understood. Oxytocin, for example, is popularly known as the love hormone. It is enhanced by hugs and kisses, by displays of solidarity, affection and personal and personalised harmony. But at the same time, it enhances all of this, with which reinforcement is given in both directions. The second part of the subtitle wanted to wink at the meaning of life, at the idea of living well and dying well.

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Whether there is something more—or not—after this life that we know empirically and that we experience, it is important to conclude that we are lucky to be, to live and to have lived. Gratitude is fundamental in social relations, in human interrelation, in the empowerment and strengthening of interdependence between people and, finally, in the very meaning of existence. If we are grateful, almost everything (if not everything) takes on meaning. Meaning, that one giving sense to things and life becomes crucial. And gratitude also has a lot to do with love.

In any case, the subtitle closes, in a way, the interpretation and development of the central title, that is to say, the praise of “profiguration”. And here, after having explained the reasons for possible subtitles, profiguration acquires a new value as also the meaning of life. This is a continuum of generations. We cannot live in a presentism that suffers from past perspectives and future projections. If with us, the individual and individualised person dies, little more remains but resignation to fate, to what is written, to the fatality of human existence. However, if we are part of a whole, which is humanity, this grouping, “This species” gives us a historical legacy and a projection of the future that allows us to feel like a link in this existential chain. This will also allow us to talk about human sustainability, which includes perhaps a more specific part of social sustainability (organisational, institutional) and another stricter part of ecological sustainability. Although ultimately it is very difficult, if not impossible, to dissociate the idea of human sustainability.

To develop this title and subtitle and talk about the subject that is promised, after this presentation, the work is structured in a series of sections and subsections that we will introduce briefly.

After this first introductory section, the second chapter of this book deals with love and its numerous variants, as well as the elements that accompany and enhance it, such as kindness, respect and forgiveness, on the opposite side of love, negative emotions such as envy, hatred, pride and vanity. Next, the various dimensions of love are developed: friendship, sociability, solidarity and the types of love. It highlights how love gives meaning to life and has a lot to do with happiness. Finally, we relate profiguration, life course and love to establish some methodological coordinates that allow us to do an empirical study of what love means between people, taking into account vital development, in the framework of intergenerational relationships.

The third section deals with Education, inside and outside the school (of the educational system), which is why we also understand it as Socialisation in general terms and as a process throughout life. We present various approaches to what it means to educate and some of the fundamental elements of a good education. Likewise, and concerning this framework between education and socialisation, we develop training alternatives around Service-Learning (SL) and Community Engagement Learning (CEL), where educational and socialising elements are united. In this same line, we relate profiguration and education through a clear approach and intergenerational intervention. The main idea is to attract families to school so that they know how it works and thus become more involved in their children's school education. Centres can also organise a school for parents, through which they relate to each other, learn about the education system and unify criteria for action when it comes to fostering values and facilitating habits. There are also examples of intergenerational centres in which the involvement and interrelationship between generations is witnessed every day and integrated into the centre's curriculum and projects. This is how we end this section, with the relationship and the importance of focusing education in a profigurative framework, where all generations are intertwined to educate successfully.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to Sustainability and some of the elements, among others, that are positively or negatively related to it: recycling, capitalism, consumerism in general, critical and responsible consumerism, and the use of things. All of this is related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) proposed by the United Nations and to very current questions about growth, decline or even "thriving". In this sense, we also point out alternatives such as "prolongation" in the face of programmed or perceived obsolescence and the need to repair, recycle and reuse. Finally, at the conclusion of the section, we enter into the debate of the possibilities of profiguration (sustainability and the simple life) as a concept and reality.

The fifth part develops the theme of conflict and coexistence: cultural and class conflicts and their violent correlation with racism and classism; gender conflicts and their correspondence with male violence; and generational conflicts and their relationship with ageism. Alternatives to violent conflicts in general, through mediation, are also explained, highlighting the importance of dialogue and the concept of "conversation" and the sociological field it implies. Finally, we relate the improvement that the profigurative component can bring

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in the field of mediation, the result of the combination of experience and training of older adults and young people. Let's not forget that the etymological root of coming to an agreement, of agreeing, is *ad cordis* (from the heart), which means to *unite hearts*. Therefore, a profigurative approach is the most advantageous to be able to work on an agreement, within the framework of dialogue (the construction of knowledge thanks to human interaction) and experience, training and joint exchange between generations.

The sixth chapter develops the topic of happiness, a sociological topic that is sometimes treated only in psychological terms, thinking that it is only an individual matter. But precisely what makes it social is that it is an individual matter for each person. Because it is an individual matter, it is also social. This does not mean that it should not be treated from a psychological perspective; on the contrary, we cannot forget or leave aside the importance of the sociological perspective in the analysis of this topic. Happiness has a lot to do with feeling at ease and feeling good on a personal level for health, material well-being and quality of life. But it is no less true than the other substantial component of feeling good is a sociological component that involves social relationships, loving and feeling loved and, above all, giving meaning to one's life.

The book closes with a final section of conclusions, in the framework of profiguration as a new social contract between generations, necessary to give possibilities to the historical legacy and the projection of the future that we mentioned above, as a link in the existential chain. We take care of each other intergenerationally, and taking care of ourselves means socialising and educating ourselves in love, sustainability and simple living, in coexistence reinforced by dialogue, and in the happiness of a good life. These are the themes of the book. Intergenerational care requires thinking and acting on the present, mainly, but without neglecting the future, with the lessons learned from the past. New interdisciplinary proposals are glimpsed in an embryonic way to link the various generations in sustainable co-responsibility. Among others, we highlight the Japanese movement called Future Design (Tatsuyoshi Saijo, 2020), which could be loosely translated as design (of) the Future and which questions the types of social systems necessary to leave environments and societies to future generations sustainable. This is a great goal that involves all generations, young, adult and old because otherwise it is meaningless and lacks viability. We talk about a human trait, that is "durability",

with which people experience an increase in happiness because they decide and act following benefits for future generations. And also of “generativity” among young, middle-aged and older adults, which involves actively participating in behaviour that creates value for the next generation. It is proposed to develop, within the framework of a change in modern mentalities, an “imaginary future generation” that establishes a new social contract based on strong altruism towards the generational future (Saijo, 2020). All this necessarily involves social and personal relations, structure and action; that is to say, socialisation in love, sustainability, dialogical coexistence and the happiness of good living. In short, in the conclusions and the book as a whole, one advocates living and drinking life with sips of happiness, profiguration and love.

Notes

- 1 Obviously, this essay has an informative nature, trying to “serve as a stimulus for reflection and debate on social reality, providing a plural vision”. In this sense, this book aspires to raise ideas and analysis that help to understand our world from critical perspective. In other words, this work wants to spread forms of critical thinking, offering information and diverse points of view, but also “emotions and action strategies”.
- 2 In pragmatics we consider *speech acts*, especially as perlocutionary acts; That is, situations that when pronouncing something imply carrying it out, jointly (who says it and who listens to it): if we talk about peace, calm, dialogue, coexistence, we will probably already be pacifying, calming, dialoguing, coexisting. If we talk about “profiguration”, we will be “profiguring”, establishing respectful, complementary and enriching relationships between generations to also involve an integrative action of intergenerational socialisation. It is the power of words.