A sign promotes our alternative solar model in the community of Callejón del Sapo in Adjuntas. April 1, 2018.
As a process, globalization implies the expansion of the world’s capitalist system to be hegemonic and dominant, antidemocratic in its political embodiment, and destructive to natural resources. It creates wealth for some, better social standing for others, and for many, poverty and exclusion.

—Mercedes Alcañiz Moscardó, Jaume I University, Spain

Experts in globalization studies indicate that nation-states are being undermined by their growing indebtedness to financial markets. In other words, nations are increasingly dependent on those who control the strings of their governments’ finances. Even countries that have achieved their political independence are moving backward, turning into neo-colonial hostages of the metropolis and global finance. Every day we see more poverty, starvation, food insecurity, and new forms of irrational exploitation and destruction of our planet’s natural resources. There are diverse opinions about this reality. Says Rafael Sebastián Guillén Vicente, a.k.a, Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, of Mexico’s Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZNL):

In the cabaret of globalization, the state does a striptease, and at the end of the show, the only thing it is left with is the power of repression. With its material base destroyed, its sovereignty and independence annulled, and its political status erased, the nation-state becomes a mere service provider to giant corporations . . . These new owners of the world do not need to govern in a direct manner, as national governments take on the task of administering matters on their behalf.

Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire expressed a related idea: “The ideological discourse of globalization seeks to disguise the fact that it is building wealth for a few while verticalizing poverty and misery for millions.”
In the twenty-first century, an alternative process of change has been launched in response to the barriers imposed by globalization: the development of a model of local community self-governance where the social and political change starts with the local community, a bottom-up rather than top-down dynamic. Researchers offer various definitions of local development in the context of globalization. For example, Mercedes Alcañiz Moscardó argues that “local development, without losing sight of a global perspective, is a fundamental tool to achieve, in the age of globalization (and despite how contradictory it may seem), a more humane, sustainable, equitable, and long-lasting development anchored in a specific territory.”

This book, *Casa Pueblo: A Puerto Rican Model of Self-Governance*, has addressed some of the aspects of local development in a global context that characterize our model of community self-governance. Three fundamental ideas stand out from our experience.

- First, the model of Casa Pueblo is one in which we create locally, connect nationally, and project globally. We have exercised this tripartite approach to community self-governance from our origins to the present.
- Second, local sustainable development has a positive, measurable impact on climate change, forests, bodies of water, territory, biodiversity, health, and renewable energy. The local provides a perspective on the universal and makes possible the practice of acting locally and thinking globally.
- Third, weaving together local, national, and global practices involves reciprocal support, solidarity, and friendship, with dreams of shared planetary management and keeping a vigilant eye on the universal values of justice, liberty, and peace and their availability to all humanity.
LOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Local community development—a process of social, economic, political, and cultural change that is both sustainable and located in a specific territory—is one of the most urgent tasks of the twenty-first century. It aims to procure, in the era of colonialism, neocolonialism, and globalization, a more humane, sustainable, and equitable world within a defined territory. It represents a novel strategy whereby the local community generates and builds its own momentum toward self-sustaining alternatives, all the while maintaining its specific identity. The process incorporates local actors in such a way that they become both makers of public policy and the subjects of that policy. It includes them in the processes of planning, design, and growth, and lets them contribute to positive social change. All cases of successful local community development involve local actors who are technically knowledgeable and socially enterprising enough to create a planned society without the tutelage of the state. A major goal is seeing to it that people feel they can transform their reality in ways that are conscious, participatory, and sustainable.

Faced with a governmental crisis marked by both corruption and by popular distrust of the political class, political parties, and the electoral democratic system, communities look to make changes through local sustainable development. As Arizaldo Carvajal puts it in his Notes on Community Development:

Local development is a comprehensive development process that includes territory, identity or culture, politics, and economy. Its aims include the democratization of localities, and a kind of development that is sustainable and that rethinks the potential of the local territory and local society. Briefly defined, community development is an integrated and sustainable process of social change that starts at the community level, is organized in a well-defined territory, and actively participates in harnessing
local human, material, natural, financial, and social resources for the betterment of the community’s quality of life.⁵

For Fabio Velásquez, to speak of local development is to allude to an assemblage of economic, social, cultural, political, and territorial processes, around which a community, drawing on their potential and the opportunities provided by their environment, have access to material and spiritual wellbeing, without exclusions or discrimination, and with the necessary guarantees for future generations to also have access to it. For his part, sociologist José Arocena argues in *Local Development: A Contemporary Challenge* that,

[Recent] efforts to imagine alternative designs have led to multiple proposals that speak of human-scale development, of grassroots development, ecodevelopment, sustainable development, etc. These different proposals are attempts at overcoming the model of development that took root during the second half of the twentieth century . . . Local communities exist in territories marked by the footprints of the past. Space is never neutral, as it expresses the history of humans in that space, their ways of life, their work, their conflicts, their beliefs. Collective memory provides meaning to the relationship between past, present, and future, expressing thus the profound contents of collective identity. A return to the past through memory, a reading of these footprints to make sense of ourselves in history, is a necessary condition to action . . . The aim is not to identify footprints, but rather to identify ourselves in them.⁶

There is a great difference between the prevailing style of development that is driving us to ecological ruin, and the practice of local community development, which we are building and learning about together. The prevailing development model has brought misery and poverty to millions of people, all the while
implanting the idea that it will bring us progress and happiness. It also proposes to maintain unlimited economic growth, proclaiming that having more is better, continually wishing for and needing more and more. It proclaims that it is natural for a product to be designed to stop working after a certain period, compelling the user to get rid of it and buy another, which is the capitalist concept of creative destruction. The logic of this model is that to progress means to grow, grow, and grow, and to always want more. It promotes the belief that new is always better, and that the old ought to be replaced. This model of development and unlimited economic growth puts us on the road to global chaos. Local community development is a better alternative when it is self-managed, self-sustaining, and self-determined. It is an alternative model that measures development holistically and not merely in terms of economic growth. It practices coexistence, solidarity, social economy, and continuous education; it values collective wellbeing, peace, and harmony; and it protects the common good so that all can share in the happiness.

SOCIO-POLITICAL CHANGE FROM THE BOTTOM UP

The concept of change from below refers to a process of social transformation that, like the construction of a building, begins with a foundation, and then moves upwards, strengthening the structure as construction advances. Such a process starts small and goes from the simplest to the more complex, like a tree that grows from strong roots. It is a process one must tend to daily, from the ground up, through concrete actions and revisions. This model of local community development challenges the pyramidal social structure where decisions are handed down from the top, where a small group at the top has the power to make decisions for the vast majority at the base of the pyramid. Local community development, on the other hand, is constructed from the base up. It looks for solutions and alternatives capable of achieving social and
political change. Building from the bottom up requires a distinct logic: community logic, rather than the logic of capital. It focuses on changes at the community level, not at the level of political parties or governments. It encourages people to be protagonists rather than spectators. Individuals and their communities turn themselves into creators and transformers of society. They become social actors who do not belong to the power elite, an elite that uses crises as opportunities to enrich and entrench itself by privatizing essential social services, imposing austerity measures that negatively affect the most vulnerable populations and introducing reforms that generate passive discontent. Local community development “from the bottom up, toward social and political change” refers both to the struggle against powerful and predatory interests and to the growth of social consciousness that inspires action and transformation. Local development leads to empowerment and self-governance and breaks the cycle of dependency. It generates social changes, and in the process, builds political power.

ACCOMPANIMENT

The concept of accompaniment in local community development means that community members and external players who can provide their knowledge and skillsets connect with each other. In successfully advancing local development, a variety of communities and sectors at the national and global levels provide crucial accompaniment to the local struggle. This concept, which had been materializing and growing for years at Casa Pueblo, erupted in an impressive bonfire of love after Hurricane María, with the accompaniment of the Puerto Rican diaspora, and the outpouring of support by national and global groups.

SOCIAL COMMUNITY PACT

A social community pact can be defined as an agreed-upon partnership between local actors, local organizations, and local social
groups to link one another’s diverse efforts, abilities, and interests in ways that are complementary and advance common goals. This pact, which can be understood as a process of exchanges and interconnections, includes agreements and associations that work symbiotically to grow local community development projects. Social community pacts are a viable and unitary path to achieving real change in the community, and they build trust.

SOCIAL POWER

The concept of the social power of Casa Pueblo aligns with the thinking of prominent Puerto Rican educator and independence advocate Eugenio María de Hostos. He wrote that social power “...is the opposite of power under colonialism. Instead of using it to accumulate political power at the top, it is used to increase the power of the base. Instead of aiming for the dominance of the many by the few, it aims for the mastery of individuals over themselves. Instead of endeavoring to fabricate political parties out of thin air, it goes out of its way to cement in the consciousness of our sad homeland the notion that we have rights, a knowledge of our duties, and the acknowledgment of our responsibilities.” At Casa Pueblo, social power manifests itself in the independence of our decisions in support of the common good. Our social power relies on the moral reserve of the Puerto Rican people, the real protagonist of our victories, as evidenced by their determined and massive support of our struggles and eventual triumphs against mining (1995), the gas pipeline (2012), and the municipal and legislative attempts to seize the old school grounds (2017) that we have used for over fifteen years as the site of our Community School of Music, Art Gallery, and more recently our Solar Cinema. We see social power in the transformation of the proposed mining zone into a forest reserve managed by the community for over twenty years now. We feel it when we achieve significant changes in public policy. The strengthening of social power is vitally important
if we want to protect the gains and the growth of self-sustainable community development.

COMMUNITY SOVEREIGNTY

The concept of community sovereignty refers to the power and the liberty of a self-governing organization to make decisions for itself, to set its own goals, and to undertake its own alternative projects. It is a concept in continual construction, with a committed and consistent practice in community self-governance rooted in the common good. It is acting with independence and in accordance with one’s standards when developing community policies. In the face of an obsolete system that does not serve the country well, community sovereignty slowly generates the ideological principles of an alternative society. Casa Pueblo’s political model is one of self-governance, sustainability, and community self-determination. Put into practice via the intertwined concepts of positions, struggles, and concrete projects, we define community sovereignty. Community sovereignty manifests itself as economic self-sufficiency via projects like our Madre Isla Coffee, our artisanal store, and similar initiatives that increase our community’s freedom. This is all amplified through the exercise of energy, ecological, educational, and cultural sovereignty, as well as through self-sustaining local projects like the Forest School, the Community Music School, Casa Pueblo Radio, and Casa Pueblo Solar. At this historical juncture that is Puerto Rico in 2018, Casa Pueblo continues to work toward community sovereignty, without the interference of political parties or governments, to make a qualitative and quantitative leap in local community development.

MORAL BEAUTY

The lived experience in the house of community self-governance (a house that is at once humanitarian, caring, and alternative) obliges
me to add some final remarks. It so happens that in April 2018 we offered a university course at Casa Pueblo called Advances in Microbial Ecology. The course, taught by Dr. Larry Forney and Dr. Eva Top of the University of Idaho, and Dr. Arturo Massol Deyá of the University of Puerto Rico Mayagüez, is part of a self-governing educational system that has been active for fourteen consecutive years. At the end of the course, I had the opportunity to ask the enthusiastic students: “How do you feel after the intense educational journey that included fieldwork in the Forest School and the People’s Forest?” I was curious about what moves so many people—like those who visit and engage with us—to feel happiness and attachment for our self-governing projects and to make our dreams their own? What is it that moves them to bid us farewell with hugs, smiles, expressing their hopes of returning? The students responded, speaking about Casa Pueblo’s work formula, which combines science, culture, and community as the basic elements to produce change. They expressed that they sensed peace, tenderness, passion, and energy; they perceived justice, self-governance, self-esteem, and the work of liberation. They said that they were grateful for the attention they received and our commitment to our community and our environment. They were surprised by our achievements, they fell in love with the project, and the initiative made them want to return and be part of the community’s self-governance. They said they were happy working with us. As time passed and I reflected on the experience, I kept thinking that there must be an explanation to summarize these feelings. Finally, I found the words to express it: moral beauty. Moral beauty is engaging in positive activities and doing good. It is the practice of loving one’s fellow beings. It is fighting for justice, equality, and social transformation. Moral beauty constitutes working for the common good in specific, local ways while contemplating the universal dimension of that work. It is the beauty of the good that should be made into a work of art, into a masterpiece; the brighter a work of moral beauty shines, the greater the happiness one feels.
“And what is the supreme good of humankind?” asks Augusto Boal in *Theater of the Oppressed*. “Happiness!,” he replies, noting that “each human action is limited in scope, but all the actions together have as their ultimate goal the supreme good of humankind.”