



Franco Maestri - Argentina

My name is Franco Maestri from Argentina, and I have, mainly, two proposals to make today. The first one is about what is known worldwide as the 'junior business movement'. This movement of junior companies is a group of independent civil associations that have as their main characteristic the fact that they are composed only by students, and in connection with an institution of higher education, i.e. are linked to universities. Currently, the movement links more than 200 universities around the world, and tens of thousands of students.

The main objective of junior companies is, on the one hand, the training of future professionals, not only in the technical development of tools that one acquires in the university, but also in the formation of values, ethical training, in the training as a human being. In turn, what they do is transfer that knowledge to society, through the diagnosis of problems, through the proposal of solutions, and work in this way with small and medium enterprises, producers, and even with institutions that otherwise would not have access to this form of knowledge, or often do not even know that such solutions exists, or maybe do not have the funds to acquire them.

In general this movement produces several benefits. We can classify them in three sets. On the one hand, students obtain practical-professional improvement; students have a real entrepreneurial experience and develop their entrepreneurial spirit. They acquire social and environmental values, and they are also empowered and promote them so that they become real agents of change in the world. The students of junior companies are energetic, socially aware and hardworking. They are people that – paraphrasing Francis – “shake things up” (according to an Argentinian expression that the Pope uses: “hacer lío”).

In general, in regard to local development, the junior companies movement enables access to tools and knowledge; it allows to generate a climate in which solutions and innovations are developed, especially for small entrepreneurs, producers and small and medium-sized enterprises. This fosters new startups, not only within growing companies, but also created by the students themselves, and in this way, employment increases in quantity and in quality. It is a way of strengthening the local market, since it is an essential way for a country to grow later on. No country can grow if it does not foster its local market first, and that is what then leads to the social and productive development of a society.

Finally, that brings us to its benefits to the world. Everyone who participates in junior companies has a sense of global belonging, it brings them closer and contacts them with the rest of the entrepreneurial world because of the impact they make and the reach they can have with the rest of the world. It promotes social responsibility and sustainability, and since its last world congress, it has as one of its main focuses the Sustainable Development Objectives. What it seeks is to generate a new social paradigm, through collaboration, co-creation and cooperation, in what we call the “Co-Era”. It is a movement with many benefits that have already been proven, because this movement was born in France in the '60s, that has grown a lot in Europe and Brazil, and has also generated many benefits in both areas.

In summary, the proposal, in my particular case, is to promote the development of the junior business movement in Argentina. I am the founding member of the second junior company in the country. But it is also a proposal for all the other projects that are generated and approach junior companies, because these are people with a big desire to work and very skilled, but who also possess a very interesting human value to take advantage of, that is very aligned with what we are all looking for here. In general, the proposal has a lot to do with what is Goal 4, quality education, and Goal 8, job creation and economic growth; but mainly with Goal 17, that is to say, to propose the movement of junior companies as an ally for the network, since we work with the same interests.

The other objective, the other proposal on which I am working is sustainable food. Today, we all know that we have reached a critical point, environmentally speaking, that requires immediate action and we have to focus on the large agents that generate these damages. Currently, my goal is to go against a particular industry, which is a company that generates the highest percentage of greenhouse gases, and is the main cause of extinction of species in the ocean, habitat destruction, pollution and waste of water. This industry is one that nobody wants to talk about, in general. It is the livestock industry. An industry whose existence is funded everyday by all of us. It is an industry that requires 16 times more soil to produce food than if we were only producing vegetables; it is the main cause of the disappearance of the Amazon, and the main cause of deforestation in the world, because it requires a huge amount of space to produce meat, as well as a huge amount of water. 15,000 litres of water are needed to produce 1 kilo of meat! It is the main cause of climate change, but no one talks about it.

We are facing the sixth mass extinction of the planet, but this time it is generated by us, human beings. Even if we were to abandon the use of all fossil fuels today, we would still be exceeding the limit proposed by carbon dioxide. With fewer and fewer forests and fewer plants, it would be very difficult for us to recover. All this is because every day we make a very important decision that is: what we eat; and what we eat is going to affect the world.

There is another very essential topic here: inequality. It takes 6 kilograms of vegetable protein to produce a single kilogram of animal protein. That is to say, it is an industry that consumes much more than it generates, and while thousands die of starvation, we give our grains to the cows; and while thousands die of thirst, we spend thousands of litres of water to produce food for more livestock.

Health is also an essential issue here, but it is not of concern, because we have to take into account what the WHO (World Health Organization) has said about this, when it tells us that it is not necessary, at any stage of life, to eat meat. We do not need it at all, and not eating meat is even recognized as an advantage to prevent multiple diseases, and also to treat heart disease, high blood pressure and various types of cancer. That is, it is also useful as a means to improve public health. My proposal is to promote and raise awareness about responsible consumption, that is, to work on Goal 12; but also to combat world hunger in this way, which is Goal 2; improve health, which is Goal 3; avoid pollution and waste of water, which is Goal 6; promote action against climate change immediately, which is Goal 13; and save animals' lives in water and land, which are Goals 14 and 15. It is not possible in any way to be sustainable as long as we finance this industry. Cutting financing for this industry is essential to ensure the satisfaction of the needs and aspirations of the present, but without compromising the possibilities of future generations.

In short, I want to close by saying that we did not inherit the land of our ancestors, but we are just borrowing it from our children.

Thank you very much.