Self-rule and the size of communities

In terms of computer programs we speak about scalability. Systems, which work fine with a limited number of users, may degrade rapidly, or even break down completely, when hit by a large number of users. How far is the self-rule of peoples scalable? Differently asked, is there a size of people, where self-rule breaks down?

Basically, as human beings, we need community to survive. We cannot exist without others. An individual can be strong, but by itself will never have much power. Power comes from people grouping together. But the more people are brought under a central political authority, the less influence they have over their own affairs. The individual member of mass societies has no power whatsoever, but is reduced to choosing on the markets for offerings available to them.

How many are enough?

How many people can one personally know well from first hand contact and experience, and how few are close friends?

What is the maximum size of a discussion group? Maybe between 15 and 30, depending on the participants culture of patience and listening. If 1000 people want to discuss an issue, even if only 10% of them actually want to speak, each one an average 5 min, one loop takes 500 min, or more than 8 hrs. Because this won't work for a larger mass of people, the number is reduced through the use of delegates representing various subgroups and interests.

We find that, even using delegates, human organization doesn't scale beyond a maximum of maybe some ten thousands, and more realistically beyond just a few thousand, without fundamentally changing the decision making processes. Moreover, with growing size, the individual peoples progressively looses relative weight.

How large can a people or society grow, before anonymity takes over, where people don't know each others any more, where members of the community turn to strangers? The process of anonymization can begin in groups as small as 100, and may be largely avoidable up to a few thousand. With growing size, anonymity increases and relations become more complex, while our ability to know what is going on is dwindling. The doors are now wide open for the manipulation and distortion of truth.

Representatives and the media

Beyond a certain size of people under a common organization and rule, we are going to increasingly depend upon the media to provide us with information, on which we form our opinions. We mostly can't know even about critical issues and problems by ourselves, or through people close to us, but nevertheless our lives are largely determined by the decisions being made, often even in our name.

We end up with no say, and people representing us, with whom we have no personal relations. To get into positions of authority, one no longer has to earn the respect and trust of the community, but has to run public relation campaigns to create a favorable public image. Trust turns more and more blind, and instead of choosing the most respected persons for critical representative positions, the relation is reversed, and respect being commanded from the position in the hierarchies. In order to make this kind of authority work, we are trained and conditioned to be obedient or face repression and punishment.

Just a few thousand, or masses of replaceable individuals

Experience seems to suggest that the size of communities shouldn't be more than a few hundred people within a broader framework involving some thousand people. If things go wrong, you can still organize among your relatives and friends, and personally talk with a relevant number of people. You can still know first hand about something, or find out through people you know and trust personally. But once we live in a mass society under a centralized authority and dominant organization of production and communication, as individuals among millions of others, we are nothing any more.

On the other side, self-ruled and self-sustained communities can't do what requires much surplus labor, and they remain closely tied to space. We talk small size, low scale, highly redundant with low output per work hour, small tech production with low pressure to sell, with relatively static and stable markets, and clear requirements. That does not mean that all of those technologies developed during the last centuries, which make our lives much easier, could not be scaled small. But surely some things are easier to scale than others, and some are limited to centralized and large. To give an example, a small group of people can build a plane, but mass air traffic requires highly centralized command and control structures and procedures.

Power for ourselves

Self-rule is not compatible with mass society. If we want self-rule, it seems a waste of energy to fight for self-empowerment without fighting for the disintegration of world market and mass society. The way to empower ourselves as peoples is to promote radical decentralization into ever smaller entities, while we constantly re-group and expand our self-organization.

We better be very sceptical towards any efforts to 'organize globally', meaning lots of people flying to distant places to meet and give speeches. We better don't trust any official authorities much, but only ourselves and people we know in person, who earned our trust by who they are.

The key is to maximize power for ourselves, and to gradually gain influence and control over critical aspects of our own lives.

The process is to do whatever we can to weaken and displace the current socio-political order and the world market economy, its factories and lines of communication, and to promote monetary crisis and financial collapse.