



musée du
c/kapitalisme
museum

GUIDE OF THE MUSEUM of CAPITALISM

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Origin

Hope

Limits

Alternatives



Introduction

Welcome to the Museum of Capitalism.

From August 15 to September 13, 2019, thanks to the Alderman of Culture in Brussels, the Museum of Capitalism is settling in the heart of the capital in a symbolic place: the Stock Exchange!

The Museum of Capitalism aims to offer a series of tools for reflection on our social system, so that each visitor can position himself/herself in relation to it / acquire certain reading keys. This museum will therefore not offer a complete and indisputable explanation of capitalism and its history but will try more to turn visitors into citizens.

Exceptional place, exceptional edition:

- the "Museum des Kapitalismus" from Berlin is present thanks to the support of the International Youth Bureau (le BIJ).
- The Alternatives Room welcomes concrete proposals for alternatives in the form of animations, workshops or mini-exhibitions proposed by Oxfam, Financité, NewB, SOS Faim, PAC and Rencontre des Continents, among others.
- Seven discussion evenings (food, gender, neo-colonialism, ecology, social justice, democracy, finance) and two cultural evenings are planned in partnership with the CNCND and other partners.

A quick question before we start...

In the following rooms, you will receive a lot of information. Before we begin, it is important to stop for a moment, to immerse yourself in the heart of yourself and ask yourself:

<< What does capitalism mean to me? >>

Origin Room

Origin There is no clear origin at the birth of capitalism. Capitalism did not appear at a very precise moment: it is the result of a series of factors, events, various theorizations... Just as for the definition of capitalism, there are several points of view on the origins of this system.

1/ The definition

It is difficult to define capitalism. Most theorists do not agree on its definition. For Marx, one of the most famous theorists, private ownership of the means of production is the central element in defining capitalism. For Wallerstein, the pursuit of profit is not enough to define capitalism but rather the accumulation of capital as the supreme principle. With Adam Smith, it is the notion of market that will be widely used. Max Weber, for his part, is known to have highlighted the cultural dimension and values that have fostered the development of the capitalist system.

The definition presented in the Museum is inspired by Boltanski and Chiapello¹, who define capitalism as “the **requirement** of an unlimited accumulation of capital by formally peaceful means”. Again, all these words may raise questions. We have therefore decided to base our definition on concepts that find consensus: **system, accumulation, profit, private property**.

And you? Do these concepts speak to you? Do they refer to capitalism?

This definition, the common thread of the exhibition, will be repeated in several places: in the hope room and the limit room. Each time, the arrows around the definition will give you elements of answers to the questions asked around the definition.

Relations between capitalist system and ideologies:

CAPITALISM is a system that appeared spontaneously, without having been previously imagined. We talked about “capitalists” before talking about capitalism. The system that results from capitalist behaviour has therefore not, unlike a doctrine, been thought through as a whole. On the other hand, several ideologies support or contest it: communism, socialism, liberalism, social democracy... Not all

¹ « Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme » (1999)

of them are compatible with capitalism. Thus, schematically, communism and socialism consider that capitalism is in its essence a source of inequality and must therefore be overcome. Liberalism considers that, on the contrary, capitalism benefits the greatest number of people. Social democracy, on the other hand, wants capitalism to be regulated and supervised.

2/ The world map

« Where there is profit to be made, no mountain remains untouched, no water will remain untouched. ». *Chinese Encyclopedia Guanzi IV century BC.*

In your opinion, when did capitalism really start?

- with the beginning of the industrial revolution?
- with the generalization of operating processes (such as « triangular trade ») ?
- Since time immemorial, man has been fundamentally competitive, individualistic...?

While it is clear that the industrial revolution has enabled the further development of capitalism, it is still difficult to date the beginnings of capitalism precisely. Once again, theorists do not agree.

On this large map, you will be able to recognize 3 major sets of elements that have helped capitalism rise to the rank of a world system as we know it today. Do you see them? :

1) Technological inventions.

Here we can refer to the notion of progress, which is linked to the accumulation of capital and the massive investment of this capital in the field of research.

2) Natural and human resources and their exploitation.

Land grabbing, human and resource exploitation have enabled new discoveries, new machines, new technologies to emerge (the discovery of coltan, for example, has led to the production of mobile phones)

3) The development of the market, trade and institutions that promote capitalism.

With the birth of trade fairs, the creation of banks and then stock exchanges, material and monetary exchanges accelerated.

3/ The balance

Let's play first....

The balance game allows the visitor to test for himself the different elements that make up an economic system: ownership, profits, natural resources and market management.

Much like in a recipe, **what proportions of these four elements would you put in your « ideal society » ?**

You can then reflect on the consequences of the distribution of the different parameters. What do you get out of it?

The scale panel aims to show that capitalism is a constructed system, which results from choice. The determination of parameters (wealth, resources, property, etc.) tilts the balance towards one or the other system but also towards one or the other degree of capitalism. There are several "kinds" of capitalism and these depend on proportions, political or economic choices. An economic system is therefore modular according to the choices made. It also means that no system is really immutable. The possibilities are extremely diverse and each choice has an impact on our lives.

What is differentiated perception?

In reality, there may be several possible interpretations: an American will speak of Europe as the « worst statism » (the state intervenes too much in the economic system) and some Europeans will conceive it as insufficiently interventionist (not sufficiently regulated by the state). So the debate remains full... it depends on which sector we are talking about, when we are, etc.

Hope Room

Welcome to the Hall of Hopes. This room presents different hopes raised by capitalism, in a context of industrial revolution and trade union struggles. These hopes or focus are food, health, work, living comfort, social advancement, globalization. The arrows that start from the definition represent hopes that have been linked to capitalism. Some arrows refer to more than one theme, and some focus is found in several comments.

1/ The definition

Hopes, presented in the form of a “focus”, are hopes that have been carried by societies based on capitalism. These are therefore hopes that have been made possible by the accumulation of capital and its investment in a number of areas. It should also be noted that capitalism alone has not enabled all the hopes of this room: indeed, beyond capitalism, it is trade union struggles, the industrial revolution and innovation that have made these hopes possible. Although technological development has probably been accelerated by capitalism, these advances could probably have taken place in other systems as well.

Do you see the links between the themes presented in this room and capitalism?

The film “The Gates of Abundance” on TV transmits the spirit of the time, the faith in the hopes that capitalism held. Under the guise of a hymn to progress, this excerpt broadcast in 1953 is an apology for productivity. The film was broadcast as part of the Marshall Plan. Presented by President Truman in 1947, this plan consisted in granting loans and grants to Western European countries to finance their reconstruction and modernization. For the United States, it was a question of exporting their skills and their model in order to consolidate their domination. But the objective is also to contribute to Europe’s economic recovery so that it can once again become a trading partner and push back communism.

2/ Globalization

Capitalism has accelerated its growth at the same time as globalization. This resulted in the diffusion of an ideology (liberalism), a currency (the dollar), a tool (capitalism), a political system (democracy), and a language (English). And the world has become a village.... Globalization is an old process. On the other hand, the fragmentation of geographical constraints, made possible by the increase in the transmission of information, is a more recent phenomenon.

How many English words integrated into our daily vocabulary could you quote?

3/ Social Ascension

The American dream brought the idea of individual success: everyone can succeed in life, whether they are the son of a worker or a diplomat. This idea is translated through a gallery of portraits and biographies of self-made (wo-)men who have achieved a dazzling social rise.

Do you know any others? And in your immediate surroundings?

4/ Work

Industrialization has had the effect of continuously reducing the sphere of self-production (no one sews their clothes, bakes their bread...). As a result, we produce much more, faster and often better, with less and less work. Everyone, with their salary, can buy many more goods and services than they would be able to produce by and for themselves.

The annual working time was 4500 hours and today (2007) it is between 1400 and 1800 hours depending on the country and with a tenfold increase in production².

In what way has capitalism allowed these technological advances?

> « The "Energy" Bike »

With the industrial revolution and the boom in the use of machinery and oil, productivity has exploded. The bicycle represents manual work.

How long does a worker have to work to produce the energy equivalent to 1L of oil?

This revolution in the relationship to work brought with it the hope that man would gradually be freed from work.

5/ Health

The main idea of the health focus is that we live better and longer. In a century, life expectancy has almost doubled in Europe. On average, it has risen from 48 to 79 years of age. This goes hand in hand with the rise of capitalism and economic growth: they have contributed to the development of the health sector and more particularly to the pharmaceutical sector. It should be noted that the contribution of capitalism concerns above all the production and access to medicines.

² Texte tiré de l'interview d'André Görtz : livre audio - André Görtz, Vers la société libérée

Would penicillin have been discovered if there hadn't been capitalism? Would this have been possible under another economic model?

6/ Food

At the beginning of the century, we mainly consumed what we produced ourselves. In the middle of the century, we found on our plates what we bought at the local shop (small grocery store, farmer...). Nowadays, food can come from all over the world and the seasons no longer matter so much. You can eat anything and anytime.

How many times a year will you buy your food products directly from the producer?

Limits Room

You are now in the boundary room. As in the Hall of Hopes, different themes are discussed. It is up to you to walk around and explore the ones of your choice.

1/ Agri-food industry

Three key elements in this focus illustrate the problem of agri-food: **the multiplicity of actors, their interdependence and the vulnerability** that this entails.

The increase in the number of actors in the chain, and especially intermediaries, has weakened

farmers: their profit margin is the lowest while the distributor makes the greatest profit. To illustrate this, we have chosen the example of the dairy sector

To better understand the milk box:

The milk market is in the form of an hourglass.

- > **At the top: a myriad of small producers**
- > **At the base: an infinite number of consumers**
- > **In the middle: a thin filter of collectors, transformers and distributors.**

For producers, demand does not come from the consumer but from the “buyer of the milk”: either a dairy, usually in the form of a producers’ cooperative, or a company in the agri-food industry that will collect the milk, process it and sell it.

In the agri-food chain, buyer demand is therefore very concentrated (through central purchasing bodies, for example large dairy companies such as Danone). Distributors and processors are very large multinationals which, thanks to their small number and the resulting monopoly, have the possibility to dictate their prices to both producers and consumers. Thus, distributors emerge as winners in the food chain. Liberalism encourages the country to specialize in international trade (by introducing competition that encourages specialization). However, when a country specializes too much, it loses its autonomy (food for example) and becomes very dependent on world markets.

2/ Well-being

After answering the question, putting your coloured cube in the box and reading the panel, here are some additional thoughts...

- > GDP, which is based on economic growth, is the only indicator of society’s progress. But what about quality of life, well-being? How can we explain that we have an ever-increasing GDP and a measure of satisfaction with stagnant life? ³

should we not also take other indicators to measure the progress of our societies? Which ones?

For example: an elderly person who is cared for at home by his family does not contribute to the GDP, unlike an elderly person who resides in a home.

3/ Democracy

³ Cassiers I, Thiry G., Au-delà du PIB : réconcilier ce qui compte et ce que l’on compte, Regards économiques, n° 75, 2009.

Turn the wheel and discover 3 examples illustrating key concepts: plutocracy, unfair competition and the notion of single thought (or dominant system). Do economic interests prevail over the interests of the people?

Today we live in a democracy and not with a single party. Nevertheless, we often think that the capitalist system is the only viable system.

This “single thought” or “dominant system” gives the illusion of a single solution, that provided by the market, for all the activities of our society (cultural, sporting, medical, etc.). The focus proposes, among other things, to question the idea of “single thought” or “dominant system”.

Around this wheel, also discover three “did you know? ”, stories illustrating conflicts of interest (and always asking the same question about what matters most, economic profitability or the voices of the people?).

4/ Moral

In this focus you will find a quiz “Which capitalist are you? ». This fun and offbeat activity will allow you to experience capitalism as a series of daily reflexes of behaviour and thoughts.

Indeed, is capitalism, this system that is often defined as economic, not also part of our culture, part of our values? Are we aware of its impregnation in our daily lives? Are we able to think differently, culturally?

5/ Inequality

The general idea of the focus is to learn about the different problems that capitalism poses in terms of inequality and exploitation: both North-South and North-North inequalities. The world's wealth has increased, but it is not redistributed equitably. Moreover, this increase in the wealth of some is based on the exploitation of the countries of the South and of workers.

The characters drawn discuss the existence of inequalities in our system: colonies that have allowed enrichment, inequalities in the distribution of benefits, social reproduction of inequalities...

6/ Environment

The water you see flowing and stagnating represents the earth's resources. These resources always regenerate at a constant rate. The factor that changes is the speed at which they are consumed, you can determine the years with the small crank, the amount of water that flows out of the sphere indicates the state of resource consumption at that time. It is up to you to find the year in which resource production equalled consumption. Be careful, it is a flow set and not a static set.

Overall, we consume more resources than we produce. We would need 6 planets if we all consumed like Americans, 3 planets if everyone consumed like a Western European... Do you have a solution for that? It's all about balance... 1972: the year we started consuming more than the earth could offer us. Returning to this balance does not mean returning to the Stone Age.

Think back to your parents, grandparents: how did they live?

The concept of profit accumulation implies to produce more and more, which implies the ever-increasing use of resources. In other words, capitalism is inherently productivist. The resulting economic growth is therefore incompatible with the planet's limited resources.

Is growth, whatever its type, a sine qua non condition for evolution, for life?

7/ Finance

The general idea of the focus is to illustrate the logic of profit maximization in banking and financial activities through a mechanism of profit privatization and loss collectivization.

You are here in the setting of the Rising bānk, a fictional bank created by students in 2008. This bank had the particularity of openly offering its clients financially interesting but unethical investments (it proposed to invest the money in armaments, child labour, etc.). The purpose of this staging was to show the number of "potential customers" willing to invest in immoral companies to take advantage of high interest rates. The result? More than 60% of the fictitious clients replied that they agreed...

In this setting, two videos on finance are available:

- The first one looks back at the 2008 financial crisis and how banks were finally saved despite their mismanagement.
- The second video is an excerpt from RTBF's Journal parlé on the Rising B@nk project.

Do you have any idea what your bank is doing with your money?

8/ Work

How did you feel after trying the proposed game on the desktop?

The profit accumulation requirement that defines capitalism induces systemic pressure on the whole society. For the machine (of capital accumulation and investment) to work, shareholders must make more profit. To do this, companies must always be more productive, and therefore their technologies and workers must also be more productive and have the lowest possible costs. Thus, the pressure of the system, characterized by a requirement to accumulate profits, has repercussions on all levels, until it impacts the worker in his daily life.

The pressure on the work can be enormous. Whether it is a pressure for profitability for workers, a pressure to find work for the unemployed, the loss of losing one's job..., this pressure is now part of the world of work.

9/ Overconsumption

On these walls: 500 words. Words of things. Things that we personally own or want; things that we care about a little, a lot? Some of them we share? That we offer? Things used and reused?

Often, we buy them all these things, so we spend time on them to earn the corresponding money, we feel that they meet our needs. The requirement of **profit accumulation** pushes us to want more and more.

What physical sensation do you feel when you pass through this space of over-consumption?

SAS Room

This room is a transition from the Limits room to the Alternatives room, which is dedicated to possible changes. The objective is to give the visitor the opportunity to breathe, and to contrast Margareth Thatcher's ("There is no alternative" - capitalism is the only possible way) and Susan George's ("There are thousands of alternatives" - capitalism is only one system like any other, it is not the only one) vision.

The only thing that is permanent is change. Look around you, everything is constantly changing. Slowly or quickly, but everything will change sooner or later.

Can you name one thing in your life that has not changed or will never change?

(Never means: not in the second, not in the year, not in the thousands of years that follow). Change is the universal law of nature, of life. Being aware of the change and taking part in it is a way of being able to direct it towards what we think is right and to live fully and serenely.

Alternative Room

The first part of the visit is over, and it is important not to stop there, at the observation of the limits of the system that surrounds us.

In this room, many alternatives are presented (in the cogs on the wall, in videos...). **You are also invited to add your own via the stickers to the white structure.**

Alternative yes... but let's keep our eyes open!

All the initiatives and projects you will find here present solutions either to one of the limits related to capitalism or to capitalism itself. All these alternatives are therefore not especially alternatives to the whole system; they do not always go beyond the logic of profit accumulation or private property...

A simple example: a wind turbine set up by a company will solve energy and environmental problems. On the other hand, the company will not emerge from a logic of profit and private ownership (energy in this case). Let us now imagine a wind turbine set up by a group of local residents, whose primary goal is their energy autonomy; this could belong to the group and, if it is designed within the framework of an ethical charter, could leave the logic of profit or engage in a sharing of energy resources. It is therefore advisable to always remain very attentive to "alternatives". Remaining vigilant and aware of the current situation will make it possible to gradually improve these alternatives in order to adjust them gently.

However, all these are necessary in order to start a transition. The transition movement can only be envisaged collectively. Reactivating oppositions could well be sterile.

1/ Objects

The objects you will find here are dedicated to school visits. Nevertheless, thanks to these everyday objects, you also understand that capitalism is not an abstract system explained in books about our uncle's library. Capitalism is also present in our everyday objects, in our actions, in our way of thinking...

By becoming aware of the causes and effects of our thoughts, actions and gestures; we allow ourselves at every moment to gradually readjust our lives and the world to the one we want.

What hopes and limitations can be attributed to these different objects?

Free price

As you may have noticed, this museum does not have a fixed price, it operates with a system of free price or conscious remuneration. What is it? What is it? Conscious Remuneration means that in view of the exhibition and his own means, the visitor decides how much he wants to donate. The factors that define this amount are among others: the pleasure taken at the exhibition, the things learned, the time spent on the exhibition, the visitor's current salary... You know better than anyone what you can put in this urn!

Did you like the exhibition?

Subsequent editions of the museum will need your opinions (positive or negative) and ideas! Feel free to leave us your comments in our guestbook or send us an email at contact@museeducapitalisme.org.

Want to participate in the adventure of the Museum of Capitalism?

There are 1001 ways to integrate the museum team: whether it is for graphics, scenography, communication, translation, relaying with partners, logistics, construction or to bring new ideas or a fresh wind. If you are interested in starting the adventure with us: contact us at contact@museeducapitalisme.org

We look forward to meeting you!

