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Working beyond the job: building blocks for a new economy¹

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1. Post-growth?

Do we need economic growth to get out of this crisis? Or should we change our paradigm and the governance of our society? Authors like Tim Jackson (Jackson, 2009) plead that it could be possible to live in prosperity without growth.

Can we elaborate a collective proposal for a future in which the economy and society would no longer be dependent on the need for a sustained increase of GDP? (IDDRI, 2013). And on another note, is not it time for Europe's economic model and prosperity – based on excessive consumption of fossil energy based production – to be redirected to a post-fossil fuel society?

Our economic paradigm is changing, and perhaps so should the way we look at work nowadays. On one hand, only certain kinds of work are being valorised by paying the people who do the work. On the other hand, we still witness an inequality gap between men and women on the labour market today.

How can we connect solutions for these social and environmental problems? Is there room for ideology in this task? We have become a post-political society without projects for the future, one that doesn't react on threats like global warming. Maybe the lack of an inspiring ideological narrative is why we live so strongly under the dominance of the biggest ideology of our time: neoliberalism. The Green Narrative can help us to escape this deadlock (Holemans, 2016).

2. A new economy

a. Polanyi's great transformation

Polanyi was a Jewish-Hungarian political economist who proposed an alternative for traditional capitalist thinking already mid-20th century. Today his thinking is still relevant and can be a source of inspiration. According to him the most important goal of a stable economy is social peace. He dreamed about a new way of life in a new economy which is good for everybody, not only for the happy few. This is only possible if our current lifestyle and ways of production are radically changed. For Polanyi, the double movement is very important: because a self-regulating market economy cannot last – it would destroy society and nature – a counter movement is arising that wants to limit its harmful effects. This leads to tensions. Polanyi's fundamental point is that self-regulation of the international market leads to unbearable situations for regular people.

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Working class people, farmers and SME's for instance cannot cope with the big fluctuations of the system. Actually, there is nothing wrong with a market in se, as long as it is part of a broader economy, embedded in society. Indeed, a market economy should not be a purpose, but a means for human purposes. Polanyi believes that the key to break the cycle of international conflicts, is in stopping to believe that we have to make our social life subordinate to market mechanisms. Polanyi's message for our time is clear: by strong regulation of the economy, there can be more freedom, not only for the happy few but for everyone. (Polanyi, 1944; Holemans, 2016)

Polanyi interprets the events of the first half of the 20th century as a profound collapse of the liberal utopia of self-regulating markets. In the wake of the Great Depression and the Second World War, this collapse together with the imminent danger of communism, rendered possible a reform project in parts of Europe that would realize freedom not only as a privilege for the few, but as an opportunity for all. According to Polanyi the balance between market and democracy would provide the ultimate social protection and as such, the welfare state would bring a good life for everybody. Because excessive market powers without enough counter power cause trouble, as we can witness today. (Polanyi, 1944; Novy, 2014)

In her paper *Marketization, Social Protection, Emancipation: Toward a Neo-Polanyian Conception of Capitalist Crisis*, the American critical and feminist theorist Nancy Fraser claims Polanyi drew his conclusion too fast. She transforms his Polanyi two-dimensional image of society and market into a three-dimensional image adding emancipation (i.e. autonomy of civilians). Civilians should get more space and chances for participation. A good example of more participation can be a personal budget for disabled people, so they can decide themselves what kind of help they need. These three dimensions always have to be in balance (Fraser, 2011).

Fraser pinpoints herewith some very important complexities. For instance, marketization can have both negative and positive outcomes. It can produce access to the labour market for women, but it can also have the effect of less social protection. Public protection on the other hand can also work oppressively: when the system is based on paternalistic ideas of the nuclear family, women are captured. So emancipation produces liberation but it can also cut in existing solidarities. For example when women have a job, there is less caretaking for elderly and children in the community, so the state and the market take over these tasks. As it overcomes domination, emancipation may contribute to the dissolving of a solidary ethical basis of social protection, thereby fostering marketization. (Fraser, 2011).

b. Organizing the economy differently: a mixed economy

During the economic crisis of the 1970's it became clear that the economy couldn't keep working as it did at that point. People started thinking more seriously about organizing the economy in a different way. But also neoliberalism, as a political-economic paradigm characterized by privatization, deregulation, economization and dismantling of the welfare state, gained importance in the political sphere. The



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inequality gap started widening again, the rich became significantly more rich (Piketty, 2014). Can we reverse this movement? Can we produce a good life and decent work for all? These questions are today more relevant than ever. Current thinkers like Praetorius, Snick, Frazer, Novy and Restakis think further about these problems and provide us with a different look on things.

In a democratic and innovative community there is space for cooperatives, subsistence and care, next to a mode of production that is based on commodities, markets and competition. This mixed economy supporting a transformation towards sustainability, does not adhere to any dogmatic “one size fits all” recipes. In this sense, division of labour often generates welfare gains, but not always. Within this transformation, stagnation in some areas will have to be accompanied by growth of other economic sectors, particularly in the field of care work and socio-ecological investments. (Novy, 2014)

c. The Care (or Core) Economy - Directing economy back to its original meaning

The Swiss theologian and author Ina Praetorius poses that today there is still a lot of (hidden) gender inequality in our societies. Gender policy cannot be successful without abolishing the structural inequalities that have been implemented historically and culturally. Why is it for example, that unpaid (female) care work is rarely taken into consideration? During modernity the dualism between male and female has been kept into existence. (Praetorius, 2015) The Belgian specialist on system change and feminist critique Anne Snick points out that even during first-wave feminism care work was not taken into account in a correct way, women who wanted to have a career just outsourced their care work to women with a lower social-economic status. So the gender struggle became a class struggle. As long as feminism only took sex as an analytical category without at the same time taking into account other categories (such as ethnicity, social class, level of schooling, ...) the power mechanisms at higher levels remained invisible, so that they popped up again between women instead. A multi-level approach and intersectionality are both essential components of gender analysis. It also shows that equality between the sexes can only be sustainable if power is redistributed at all levels, from micro to macro. (Snick, 2012).

Feminist theory poses radical questions about the core of the economy. Therefore, it is important to go back to the oldest definition of the subject, described in Aristoteles' *Politica*. His basic idea is that economy is a function of a good life, and it is therefore subordinate to the political actions of civilians. Next to the economy he distinguishes the acquisition of possessions and of capital. These are only legitimate when they are indispensable for the sustenance of the polis or the family. They are limited to what's necessary for a good life. He criticizes the creation of capital as a goal in itself. (Peeters, 2015) A basic definition of economy is: satisfying the human needs to preserve and sustain life and the quality of life. The way we look at economics today should put this definition at its centre again. Just like Polanyi already said in 1944, the basic goal of



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economy is creating social peace. For example environmental and social policy are causally linked, there cannot be a good social policy while neglecting the environment, because environmental policy is indispensable for the well-being of people. The Environmental Justice Movement proves this: mainly poor people bear the heaviest burdens of pollution and climate change. In this framework Ina Praetorius argues a different paradigm is necessary, the market does not automatically adjust itself and the economy today does not “satisfy the human need to preserve and sustain life and the quality of life”. The paradigm shift should also take into account the work done in the private sphere. This work is different, it obeys to extra-economic laws. Other models of rewarding work should therefore be designed: forms of mutual, non-monetary acknowledgement, unconditional basic income, ... But their appropriateness can only be tested if economists decide to broaden the object of their studies. If unpaid activities are included, economics are no longer revolved around money alone. We should indeed think of other ways of organizing the economy, outside the worldwide ‘money system’. (Praetorius, 2015)

Different types of unpaid activities like child care, looking after sick and elderly, and banal things like doing the laundry are not considered as work at all in our society. Their value for our economy is stunningly high though.

Humankind cannot reproduce itself without care work, and it is especially problematic for women. After childbirth, an imbalance in families arises: men specialize in paid labour and women in care work. This gap causes less social rights, less possibilities for a career and less pension rights for women. (Equal Pay Day, 2016)

But without the unpaid work that goes on at home, the “real” economy would grind to a halt. This is why it is also known as the Core Economy. Properly valuing, distributing and supporting unpaid work will involve long-term cultural change that is reflected in policy too. Therefore it could help to publish the value of unpaid work on a quarterly basis, alongside quarterly growth rate figures. It would improve public understanding of how important unpaid work is to our daily lives, as well as to the economy as a whole (Bristow, 2016).

In short, society needs four forms of work which we should keep in balance. In most cases, only one of them is paid:

- **Productive work:** satisfying material and financial needs (wage work).
- **Self-work:** investing in your own well-being and talents.
- **Social work:** citizenship, engagement, social capital, volunteering, community work, participation, ...
- **Reproductive work:** caring for children, family, ...

d. Alternative ways of working: job apportionment?

In an alternative economy we also have to start working in a different way. Should we all work less to create more work for everyone? In many European countries the unemployment rate is still high since the economic crisis. And in a lot of cases the unemployment rate is even worse than statistics show: some unemployed people are



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not registered, or no longer registered. And then there is still hidden unemployment, people who only have a part-time job but want to work more. Can job apportionment help to solve this situation? (Perbost, 2011) For a lot of families, especially for women, it is impossible to combine a full-time job with the care for children. So these women take part time jobs, which might harm their career and social rights. Job apportionment might be a solution for them.

In Western countries, there is a problem of long-lasting absenteeism because of stress on the job, burn-outs and ageing. Also for these reasons job apportionment can provide a solution. Job apportionment has to be implemented together with some other important measurements. Extra staff has to be recruited, otherwise workers will not be able to take their extra time credit and there just has to be done more work in less hours. Job apportionment can, if it is correctly implemented, create a great difference in wages for families, because there is less disadvantage working full-time. (Van Parys, 2016)

Redistributing paid work can help to valorise unpaid work in a better way. Reducing the length of the working week could rebalance paid and unpaid work across our society. Reducing the working week to for example 30 hours would create more opportunities for sharing paid and unpaid work more equally between women and men. Changing expectations about what is 'normal' will help, over time, to change attitudes and patterns of time use, and gradually to break down gendered divisions of labour and give an answer to the gender imbalance. (Bristow, 2016)

Job apportionment has to be implemented collectively, only this way social norms can be changed and work and family can be structurally balanced. Can implementing it in the whole European Union be a good idea to prevent unfair competition? Not all jobs can be redistributed easily. Highly educated jobs and management functions are harder to redistribute than lowly skilled jobs, where the exact hours of work are more important. (Pintelon, De Spiegelaere & Deschacht, 2015)

Working thirty hours a week sounds very convenient for work-family balance, but would it all work in practice? And would employers and firms co-operate? Declines in hours only occur when there is strong counter-pressure to firms' preferences. In the absence of trade union pressure or state regulation, firms have typically structured jobs as long-hour positions. Those jobs that do allow short hours (many women's jobs) typically exact penalties for working less, like failure to carry benefits such as medical insurance or pensions. Individual employees usually do not have the right or opportunity to negotiate for shorter hours, or to trade wage increases for time off. Sociologist Juliet Schor points out that this kind of lifestyle, with many hours of work and little free time leads to a consumption-intensive and natural-resource-intensive way of life. People who work a lot for example fly to far-away holiday destinations and eat a lot of ready-made food. A structural flow in the operation of labour markets lies at the heart of unsustainable patterns of production and consumption. (Schor, 2005)

The shift towards working less has already started in Sweden, where experiments are being held with a six hour working day. Some firms and also a retirement home are already trying it and are showing good results: the staff is more productive during the



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time they are working and their work-life balance is better. In the retirement home people also report there is a higher standard of care. (Crouch, 2015)

Juliet Schor connects the need for a shorter working week with a successful path to sustainability. When we confront our commitment to growth, this will ultimately entail a stabilization of consumption through reduction of working hours. But will reducing working hours also reduce consumption? Do people not just have more time to consume when they work less? People would for example have more time to travel too, this could be a bad thing when people start flying more. But it could also be translated in more slow travelling. Could promoting this kind of slow living alternatives help? As the economy shifts to a situation of “time surplus”, a decline in the demand for speed and convenience is indeed possible. Inhabitants of the global north can and should opt for a new economic and social vision based on quality of life, rather than quantity of stuff, with reduced work time and ecological sustainability at its core. This is needed because people of the global south have the right to ecological space as well (global justice). Such a vision has the potential to create broad-based pressure for an alternative to the current system of ecologically destructive, inequitable consumer-driven growth. But this all will not happen without a shift in the state of mind of people (Schor, 2005). Policy is needed to implement these changes. A carbon tax is a good example of a policy which helps to make the shift towards a more ecological way of life.

3. Solutions in the autonomous sphere

The last few years there has been an enormous upswing of citizen initiatives, also. In very different domains we can see a search for other ways to organize the society and the economy (De Moor, 2015). What is necessary to change things is already there: people and groups who are prepared to take the first steps. There are numerous examples from very different backgrounds. For example the *Network Care Revolution*, an action conference that brings people from various contexts of care together to exchange experiences and to motivate them to join forces and take political action. People feel the need to take action, how can we organize care work in families when governments cut support for families who combine care and wage work? (Praetorius, 2015)

a. Care in the autonomous sphere

Active citizenship should not be an alibi for the government to move its responsibility to individual citizens though. The government has to create the right conditions for the participation of citizens (Peeters, 2015; Snick, 2016). In the industrialized North social care is damaged by decennia of austerity policies and free market ideas about public services. Democracy is essential to protect the services a government should provide for its citizens. Social care should not become merchandised. Can civil society take these public systems that were left by the government back from the market? Can



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social care be humanized? Standardized care systems by the state often do not treat people like individuals, they do not work for everyone. This growing failure offers possibilities for civil society and for cooperatives to show alternatives. Reciprocity challenges the current market vision on society. It also challenges the duopoly state-market. According to John Restakis, a researcher in co-operative economies and globalization, the state nowadays functions at the service of the market. Governments especially put effort in cooperation with the private sector, they often forget how important cooperation with civil society is. Because of bad government programmes for disabled people, people are now founding cooperatives to take care of their disabled family. In these cooperatives, caretakers and family members share control (Restakis, 2010). In this kind of models for caretaking there has to be attention for people who cannot afford to invest money in cooperatives. They also should get the chance to contribute in a different way. This is one of the many reasons why the state should keep on being the preserver of universal rights.

A solution might be to have an increase in collective provision of care work, but also to have a mix of paid and unpaid time for care work. This results for example in the case of child care in a mix of childcare cooperatives (collectively owned by parents) and more public provision of childcare. (Bristow, 2016).

There are three good reasons for promoting cooperative models for social care:

- **Relational goods:** in cooperative structures power is shared between the provider and the user of the care. Education and healthcare are no merchandising. They refer to social relations that are totally different from merchandising for profit, because in these sectors personal involvement is very important to be able to provide people with the right care. There should for example be no market relationship between a nurse and a patient.
- **Form and function:** because state systems for health care are universal they are adapted for the average patient, not for individuals. They are inflexible and standardized. Small cooperatives can be more flexible, and could be a better solution for some people.
- **Democratization of care:** users of care get more control. We need democratization to transform social care to a humane system of social relations. (Restakis, 2010).

Restakis actually pleads for different layers in the provision of care. The state still needs to provide a legal frame and state subsidies for care, but cooperatives should get the chance to perform care tasks, so patients have a voice. This way we can create a context in which relational goods are possible. Here we can also make a link between Restakis and Fraser, they both think that public institutions for care and other social security do not always work emancipatory, because they are embedded in a patriarchal and bureaucratic culture. From PPP (Public Private Partnership) we could go to PCP (Public Community Partnership).

b. Other initiatives in the autonomous sphere

Another example of the development of a new economy is the solidarity economy. Solidarity economy begins from a core belief that people are deeply creative and capable of developing their own solutions to economic problems, and that these solutions will look different in different places and contexts. The core idea is simple: alternatives are everywhere and our task is to identify them and connect them in ways that build a coherent and powerful social movement for another economy. Solidarity economy is a process of economic organizing. Shared values are very important in this economy: diverse initiatives (care cooperatives, CSA's, ...) should be connected and build a movement through the creation of shared identity (Miller, 2010).

c. Alternative monetary systems

Another building block for our new economy is changing the way we think about money in our societies. Collaborative models supported by complementary currencies (LETS, Totnes Pound, ...) are appearing worldwide. Can this be part of the answer for the various current crises? Nowadays private banks have a harmful monopoly on money. Governments gave banks the exclusive fiat to create money, and require taxes to be paid in this national money. These currencies are interchangeable worldwide, and bank fiat money has become the main means of exchange for the global economy. This causes interdependency and vulnerability. Fiat monopoly is to the financial system what monoculture is to an ecosystem: it seems efficient in the short term, but as the crisis in 2008 showed, it is not resilient and makes the system vulnerable (Snick, 2016).

There are three important arguments for changing our money system and using Complementary Currencies. The first is that banks are competitors among others but at the same time have exclusive (fiat) power over the medium of exchange in the competition. Banks can afford to take huge risks and let governments pay the damage, for they are 'too big to fail'. A second argument is that complementary currencies are necessary because the world can never grow out of its debt problems if it only uses money created as debt, as Heinberg argues in his book "The End of Growth" (Heinberg, 2011). The third argument is that complementary currency can help to strengthen the economy, because if there is not only one kind of money, different systems can prevent it all collapsing at the same time. Because complementary currencies are independent, they are also more resilient. People can decide themselves what purposes a complementary currency serves. In local economies with complementary currencies we can work with "green money", which can only be used for green purposes. You could use it for example for taking the train, but not for taking an airplane. Policies should allow and help these complementary currencies to exist. (Snick, 2016) Complementary Currencies are a democratic design, they arise in a certain context with a clear purpose. For example in some cities in Japan people can



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use “Fureai Kippu”, a care currency. People can help each other in exchange for coins, and at their turn get help too when they need it. This is a nice example of a complementary currency.

4. Conclusion

We can think about life and work in a post-growth society in various ways, but some important aspects always come back. Undervalued care work is very important in the feminist critique on how work is organized in our current system. Job apportionment could be a solution for this, and it could also be a good way to work and live in a more ecological way. There is also a new trend that the best creative alternatives and solutions come from the autonomous sphere, from citizens who take things into their own hands and create the new society and economy themselves. They do this by means of care cooperatives or developing alternative local economic systems like LETS as a counterweight to the international powerful banking money. But it would be naïve to think citizens can make the shift all by themselves. There is need for new ways of governance, to support citizens in this transition. Out of different building blocks a new vision of the future is emerging, with concrete projects growing towards a Public Community Partnership.

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