

# **Occupy Development – Towards a Caring Economy**

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The debt crisis has moved from the South to the North. Interlocked with the environmental, energy and climate crisis and with a broad range of crises in social reproduction, the European debt crisis marks the systemic failure of the capitalist growth economy in Europe. The crisis has shattered the myth of endless growth - an idea deeply rooted in western culture and philosophy. Growth has become a synonym for economic progress as well as for individual development. In the wake of growing indebtedness of nation states, now structural adjustment, conditionalities and austerity policies reach Europe. However, as experienced earlier in the global South, instead of being solutions those remedies reinforce social inequalities between the EU-core countries and the periphery as well as within countries, the restructuring of paid labour towards flexible, informal and precarious employment, the structural deficits in the care sector and social protection, the dismantling of the much lauded European social welfare model and alongside an erosion of social cohesion and solidarity. Economic and financial governance have become a driver of political governance, and increasingly people are disenchanted with liberal democracy.

## **Democratisation from below and many “little” transformations**

On the other hand, new social movements emerge and spread all over the continent: at the squares, the Indignados, occupy/blockupy and around public goods. Through this mobilisation from below, citizens raise two key demands: „real“ democracy and a change of the „greedy“ and unjust economic system.

Parallel to protests and public visibility, everywhere in Europe at the grassroots, alternative projects and practices are revitalised or re-invented. They explore what “buen vivir” could mean beyond the current model of prosperity measured solely by GDP, material goods and individual property and income. Adopting the TATA-principle – there are a thousand alternatives - this multitude of local projects start here and now with many “little” transformations instead of waiting for the “great transformation” to come. They set up new ways of social reproduction and commoning at the margins or outside of the capitalist market economy: food coops and guerrilla gardening, for-free shops and free book cupboards in public parks, cooperative housing, user cooperatives and transition town projects are mushrooming. These initiatives are kind of practical critique of the corporate-driven globalisation with its transnational value chains of production, trade and consumption. The alternative projects reclaim local livelihoods and regional circles of cooperation instead of the reckless global competition. They reconstruct a resource-preserving and -recycling respectful relation with nature instead of the care-less resource extractivism and emissions necessary for GDP-growth.

## **De-growth and Stable State**

It is in this context that in Europe the discourse on the globalised development model is reloaded, a model driven by the logic of growth, efficiency and profit maximation. This is actually the third wave of growth critique after in 1972 the Club of Rome published “The Limits to Growth”. In the 1990s ecological economists and ecofeminists developed a critique of unsustainable and imperialistic patterns of overproduction and overconsumption. As alternative model they drafted concepts of a stable state and sufficiency economy (Herman

Daly, Wolfgang Sachs) and a subsistence perspective (Maria Mies, Vandana Shiva, Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen).

The present search for alternative development paths interweaves heterodox economic critique and ecological concerns. Ecologists highlight once again the limits to growth, e.g. peak oil, peak water and peak land, and the loss of biodiversity. The efforts to decouple GDP-growth from resource use and emissions with the help of technology, increase of efficiency as well as of commodification of natural resources and eco-services are not successful at the end of the day. In some sectors, increase of efficiency even caused a rebound effect which offset the environmental benefits made by e.g. new technology, and lead to even more consumption. The fall out in Fukushima is a metaphor for the persistent recklessness and high degree of risk enshrined in high tech. And it shows dramatically that there are no techno fixes to repair the life-threatening technology and mode of development.

Feminist economists flag that it is the imperative of growth, efficiency and fast return on investment that externalizes social reproduction and regeneration of nature. They are defined as unproductive, outside of the market and of value production while at the same time the market economy exploits them as flexible resources e.g. unpaid care work done by women. Constantly, the capitalist market depletes and destroys its own living foundations in society and nature. However, internalisation of costs is - as the long lasting debate about wage for housework shows - not a simple solution to the problem.

Therefore a change of paradigm is inevitable which would break up the logic of unfettered growth in economic structures, human-nature-relation and simultaneously in people's mindsets. For this change, there is neither a one-size-fits-all recipe nor the one and only lever which would make the rest happen automatically. The challenge is to search for various entrypoints, opportunity spaces and transition strategies to shape other development paths. Women's perspective of liberation has been largely framed by the market and directed towards becoming equal or even better/more efficient homini oeconomici in a system which has integrated them increasingly on terms of neoliberal self-responsibility and self-entrepreneurship.

After a long development period of productivity and efficiency increase implying an intensification of resource exploitation and technology use, it is time to ask: Which kind of growth do we need and do we want? How can we liberate human and social growth as well as prosperity from the tyranny of GDP-growth? How much production is sufficient, how much consumption is enough? What counts for a socially-, environmentally- and gender-just development?

### **Expand the Care Logic**

The growth/de-growth debate is an opportunity for feminists to connect three debates on which they focused in the recent past: 1) the care economy, 2) commons and commoning, and 3) a critique of neoliberal globalisation, and its production and consumption patterns. These three concepts are inherently linked by their own rationales that countervail the logic of ever lasting market-growth and the preference given to accumulation of capital and material goods.

1) Feminist economists highlighted the rationale of the care economy, based on mainly women's unpaid work, - social reproduction, provisioning, protection, precaution, nursing, subsistence, cooperation and reciprocity - as opposite to the growth and efficiency dogma of the markets. Care work has its own speed (e.g. feeding a baby or a dement person) and

emotional and altruistic constituents – different from the market contract between equals) as it often is a social process between unequal persons (e.g. care for sick and dependant people). Productivity and efficiency can't be increased much. When care work is integrated into the market as service provision for profit maximation, it gets subjected to efficiency standards (time modules for the care for the elderly) and the costs have to be reduced, meaning: flexible, informal and precarious below minimum wage.

Care work is key to giving preference to provision, need satisfaction and enforcement of rights over efficiency and individual utility maximisation as the ultimate goal of economic activities. In order to expand the logic of caring against the logic of growth and profit a triple R-process with regard to labour is necessary: a redefinition, a redistribution and a revalidation. A new definition of labour has to include all forms of labour beyond the market, remuneration and profitability.

In highly industrialised and highly productive economies less and less people are needed to produce and trade goods. At the same time, the need for care work, which reproduces life, provides social security nets, responds to the growing needs of the elderly and the environment, is in many places on an increase. To rebalance this in future, a redistribution of labour, unpaid and paid, informal and formal, care and market labour is necessary, a redistribution between women and men, within each society. This has to go hand in hand with a revalidation of labour which overcomes the prevailing wage and income gaps which are based on the gender segmentation of the labour market, and the feminisation and devaluation of care work.

To create space for the triple R-changes, policy measure should create an enabling environment by limiting the weekly work time so that part-time employment is available to everybody, men and women, by providing a basic income to every citizen, by (forcefully) encouraging men to share half of the care work, by expanding the social infrastructure with more public institutions to support or complement care work done in the household, by introducing not only minimum wages but maximum income likewise, by deriving entitlements to pensions from unpaid care work.

### **Commoning and Change of Production and Consumption Patterns**

2) In the context of privatisation and financialisation of natural resources and public services, a whole movement emerged around commons. This is in line with Elinor Ostrom's findings about the advantages of community-driven use of resources over market- and state-controlled resource use. "Commoning" is about defining and administrating commons from forests to care for kids, from health facilities to digital software, from food sovereignty to public transport. In the process values for citizens and new social contracts are created with rules on how to care for and to use common resources. Sharing of commons benefits more people if equal access for all social classes and groups, women and men, is ensured, and use is regulated democratically. Local public goods and commons can be a good prerequisite for everyone being able to realize their global social rights.

Commoning is a way to protect commons and public goods from privatisation, commercialisation and speculation; otherwise private capital owners and the rules of the market would decide about the common good and the enforcement of human rights. Commons break with the logic of private property as root cause of individual greed for prosperity and accumulation, and open up space for more democratic decision making, economic activity in solidarity and redistributive justice. However, commons and an

“economía solidaria” do neither automatically harmonise the interests of different classes and identities, nor do they change gender stereotypes and the gender-hierarchical division of labour and decision making. Therefore, commoning is a social process of constructing communities, taking into account internal power relations and respecting and negotiating different interests and identities.

3) Following the critique of corporate-driven, resource- and energy-intensive globalisation which does not sustain its living foundations, a reversal of the obsessive industrial drive towards expansion and growth is inevitable. While the care economy needs to grow, the resource-, energy- and emission-intensive superfluous production in the North, e.g. the automotive and the arms industry has to be downsized and converted into resource-sparing and recycling industries. Trade and investment liberalisation, the global race for raw materials, land and water grab, and financialisation of resources have to be reregulated or dismantled while production has to re-turn from export orientation to domestic markets based on local and regional economic cycles. Not producing at the costs of others and of nature is the decisive criteria for sufficiency, the wisdom of knowing what is enough.

Shrinking of growth structures in production has to be accompanied by a change of consciousness and individual behaviour which now are geared at ever more consumption and an imperialistic life style based on the exploitation of human and natural resources. This refers most to global middle classes who lost a sense of sufficiency and measurement what is enough. The North has to pioneer this move because of its historical debt with regard to emissions of green house gas and exploitation of resources in the global South.

### **Links to the Buen Vivir Concept**

Those three cornerstones of another development paradigm – care, commons and sufficiency in production and consumption – could break up the hegemonic logic of unfettered growth. They could re-embed the economy into social relations and caring relations for nature. Putting the economy back from its profit-driven head on its caring feet has a number of consequences for the financial sector. A strong regulation should stop the commercialisation of living organisms and public goods, from patenting of biodiversity and genes to speculation on harvest, ecosystem services and on the life expectancy and death of people. Transnational financial transactions and pollution of global public goods as the atmosphere and oceans should be taxed. The monetary system has to be reversed from financialisation and speculation to its function of exchange and credit.

There are many intersections between those three transition strategies conceptualised from a European perspective with the Andine concept of buen vivir:

- valuation of all forms of work
- creation of collective spaces and agendas of solidarity
- respect for nature, restriction of resource extractivism
- reclamation of one`s own concept of sustainable livelihood
- reclamation of food sovereignty
- greening of capitalism and growth is no solution
- go beyond individual happiness and well-being based on material goods and private property: public goods and citizens` welfare

“Occupy development” means to identify along the rationale of care and sustenance development paths that are socially and environmentally just. It further means to explore transition and transformation strategies on a conceptual and practical level in a democratic,

inclusive, and gender-just way. Feminists should repoliticise development issues as citizens, and stress the emancipatory potential of a caring economy, of commons and sufficiency.