

I.L.A. Kollektiv



AT THE EXPENSE OF OTHERS?

How the imperial mode of living prevents a good life for all

With a
preface by
*Ulrich Brand,
Barbara Muraca
and Markus
Wissen*

I.L.A. Kollektiv

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Authors:

Kopp, Thomas; Becker, Maximilian; Decker, Samuel; Eicker, Jannis; Engelmann, Hannah; Eradze, Ia;
Forster, Franziskus; Haller, Stella; Heuwieser, Magdalena; Hoffmann, Maja; Noever Castelos, Carla;
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PREFACE

Democratically minded and socio-ecologically conscious individuals are currently transfixed by the troubling developments on the right wing of the political spectrum. Nationalist aspirations, racist ideologies and authoritarian forms of rule are gaining influence. Neoliberal capitalism has lost its aura; there suddenly now seem to be alternatives. Numerous emancipatory initiatives and concrete approaches have made other options possible. We have witnessed the Arab Spring, the occupations of city squares in many countries, left-wing alternative parties (e.g. *Podemos* in Spain), protests against TTIP and CETA, as well as against the mining and burning of coal or against major projects (e.g. Stuttgart 21), local movements such as Transition Towns, urban gardening and repair cafes, as well as proposals to improve social infrastructure, for a decentralised and democratic energy transition and for public transport. And the list is by no means exhaustive.

It was against this backdrop that a group of academics and political activists met in 2016 for a writing workshop they called “The imperial mode of living: structures of exploitation in the 21st century (I.L.A.)”. The term “writing workshop” and the project’s unwieldy name make it hard to truly grasp the energy and dynamism this project unleashed, as well as the scope of the expertise it managed to unite. However, a quick glance at the resulting text, in which the I.L.A. presents the outcomes of this workshop to a broader public, instantly gives you an idea of the great minds at work on this collaboration.

One of the key findings of the project has been that there is not necessarily a link between the current crisis and the rise of the conservative right with its false solutions lacking both solidarity and answers to the true problems and crises. Moreover, there are indications that we can stop the rise of the right. We have progressive alternatives to halt such movements, and it is possible to confront the existing form of capitalism with its increasingly damaging social and environmental impacts. As much as we will need courage and dedication, we also require in-depth analyses. By setting out to dissect the imperial mode of living, i.e. patterns of production and consumption that are built on an unlimited

global appropriation of nature and labour and which produce both tremendous wealth and extreme misery and destruction, this publication provides the latter.

With a wealth of detail, this text identifies and vividly explores the underlying mechanisms. As the following chapters make clear, many people—particularly in the Global North—live by and profit from the imperial mode of living. At the same time, however, this mode of living exerts a certain degree of coercive power that is hard to evade. Changing consumption patterns at the individual level to be more socially and environmentally compatible—although an important strategy—is not enough. The imperial mode of living entails both promise and pressure. It simultaneously expands and limits people’s opportunities. And even in the Global North, an individual’s social status remains an important factor. Class, gender, and race all define the balance between opportunities and pressure. Car ownership rates as well as the frequency with which people fly or eat meat all highlight this fact. High-income (and, frequently, environmentally conscious) groups generally also consume the greatest share of resources and energy.

This publication mainly focuses on how these and other complex issues affect various aspects of our lives. But this is not purely an analytical text. It also explores the true potential of alternative approaches and concepts. Across the world these ideas are gaining ground and providing an emancipatory dimension to people’s justified anger over social injustices, environmental degradation, and a purported “post-political” lack of alternatives. This book is thus directed at all those who are fighting for energy democracy, food sovereignty, a transformation of mobility, and liveable cities—whatever their background or motivation. Next to prudent analysis, readers will find plenty of inspiration for their activism. We therefore hope this fascinating text will be shared widely and would like to thank all of those involved, in particular Thomas Kopp for his enormous contribution to the project.

Berlin, Oregon and Vienna, March 2017
Ulrich Brand, Barbara Muraca, Markus Wissen

INTRODUCTION

An everyday catastrophe

When you open the morning paper, it's hard to avoid that sinking feeling. We are undoubtedly living in difficult times. Bad news follows bad news: financial crises, hunger crises, thousands of people dead in the Mediterranean, climate change and natural disasters, insecure jobs and cuts to social services, and the rise of reactionary and right-wing forces in Europe and the US. At the same time, we are witnessing growing social inequality and an increasing divide in society. Even though the global economy has grown rapidly over the past decades, 766 million people still live in extreme poverty.¹ Whereas in 2010, 388 people owned as much as the poorest half of the global population, by 2017 this figure had dropped to just eight men.²

Seemingly unrelated bad news appears to rain down upon us. This text aims to highlight and analyse the links between a diverse set of concerns and alarming tendencies. Moreover, we want to find out what we can do to counter these worrying developments. Where must we apply pressure to achieve a good life for all instead of a better life for a few? And why is the struggle for a socio-ecological transformation towards a just and sustainable future proving so arduous?

A life at the cost of other people

The rise of right-wing movements and parties shows that many citizens across all social classes have lost their faith in parliamentary democracy. Right-wing populists around the globe have exploited people's fear of being left behind and stoked feelings of insecurity. Simple answers to complex questions are gaining traction. A nationalist revival, stricter border controls and faster deportations of immigrants are to bring security and wealth.

These simple answers, however, do not do justice to the complexity of the problems. But some of the explanations proffered by the left, who simply blame corporations, banks and the 'one percent', are also too simplistic. Instead, we need to carefully analyse whether these diverse concerns share common causes and clarify which structures provide the basis for the injustices of the current system. Our analysis has enabled us to pinpoint a root structural cause of the multiple and connected crises: the *imperial mode of living*. According to Brand and Wissen³ it is *imperial* because this mode of living steadily expands, suppresses other forms of living, excessively exploits nature and human labour and thereby causes inequality of opportunity and unequal access to natural resources. We have chosen mode of

» Whereas in 2010, 388 people owned as much as the poorest half of the global population, by 2017 this figure had dropped to just eight men.«

living because this system completely permeates our everyday lives. It is a common thread that runs through our processes of production, laws, infrastructure, behaviour and even our thinking patterns. We expect supermarkets to sell exotic fruits from spring to winter and can have practically any product delivered to our doors at the click of a mouse thanks to Amazon, Zalando, foodora and other websites. We do not need

to worry about where these products come from and how they are produced. We expect a stable currency and easy payments. Many countries and regions can only sustain such conditions by implementing the harsh austerity policies dictated by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. We can no longer imagine our lives without a smartphone even though this product is often produced in places where exploitation and state repression are rife. We also expect that someone will take care of our elderly relatives. Care work, however,

is mostly provided by migrant staff working under dreadful conditions. Those who have the opportunity continue to receive qualifications in a process of lifelong learning that allows them to actively participate in our career-oriented society; seldom do they question our fundamental societal structures. These traits, which are inherent to our everyday lives, are part of a global economic system that produces severe injustices and ecological damage. It is based on permanent exploitation: of humans by humans, as well as of nature by humankind.

The imperial mode of living ...

... is based on an unjust distribution of resources

People in the Global North, i.e. those living in the economically strong industrialised countries, consume a disproportionately large share of global resources. The rest of the global population has only limited access to land, water, food, and fossil fuels. Yet also within societies, both in the Global North and in the Global South (GLOSSARY), the high levels of consumption among the wealthy and the vast amount of resources this entails increase their country's ecological footprint (GLOSSARY), whereas people in low-income groups contribute to a far lesser degree. We therefore speak of a *transnational consumer class* (GLOSSARY), i.e. a global upper and middle class that excessively consumes resources and which increasingly also includes people from the Global South.

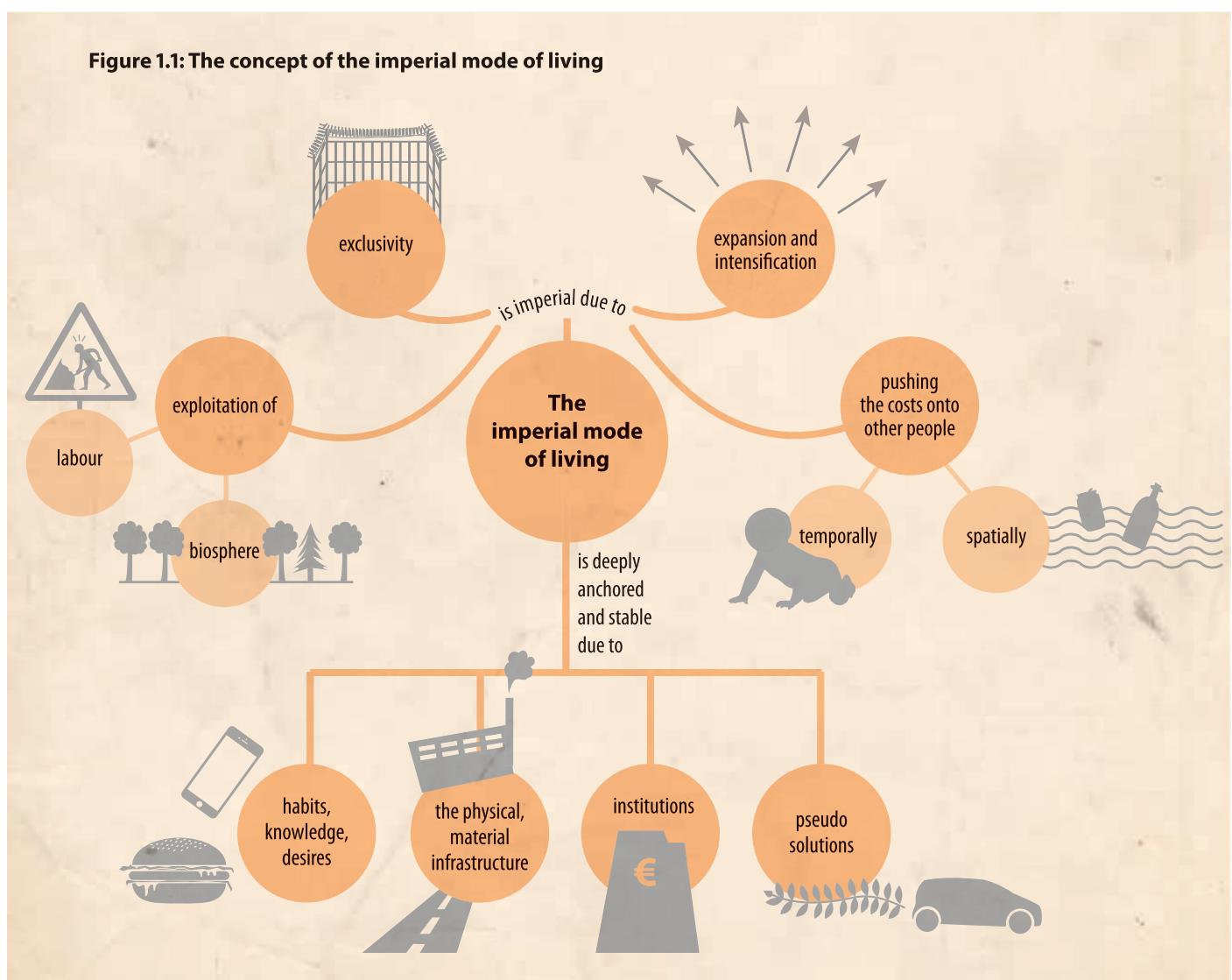
... relies on inhumane labour

The imperial mode of living of this class of consumers is directly related to an imperial mode of production and exploitative labour relations. Extremely cheap products are not purely the result of increasing technological efficiency, but are also mainly the result of global imbalances and hard, poorly paid, and insecure work. Such harsh conditions are also faced by people in Germany, for example, those working in slaughterhouses or restaurants. In Turkey and Bangladesh, entire mines and factory buildings collapse with workers still inside. The low social and environmental standards in many places ensure consumer goods stay easily affordable for a middle and upper class growing throughout the globe. The same job pays significantly less in the Global South than in the Global North. People in the Global North therefore have access to significantly more hours of work—in the form of produced goods—than people in the Global South: working one hour in the Global North allows me to buy a product that would require me to work significantly more hours in the Global South. Many citizens of Europe and North America therefore have the entire world at their disposal, and this is also true when it comes to travel (e.g. applying for visas). In contrast, people in the Global South are often literally penned in by border fences (see infobox on “Freedom of movement”).

... exploits nature

The overexploitation of natural resources is a further injustice that we not only commit against our fellow human beings but against the natural world. ‘Nature’ has an intrinsic value and is not merely a resource for human needs or a dumping ground for waste. It is becoming ever clearer that our modes of living and production, which are based on infinite economic growth, are not feasible on a finite planet. Current extinction rates are around one thousand times higher compared to the time before human influence, and the number of species lost is set to rise.⁴ Since the year 2000, an area of tropical rainforest the size of Germany has been cut down every five years.⁵ Various estimates predict that by 2050 around one billion people could become displaced as a direct result of climate change.⁶ From a historical point of view, human-caused climate change is a product of the Global North’s imperial modes of living and production, a fact we will consider in more detail in the following historical overview. Mobility in our societies is extremely car-centred, every household owns numerous high-energy appliances, and resource-intensive industries, such as steel production and the aviation industry, are heavily subsidised—all of this contributes hugely to global warming. A substantial share of the emissions these activities cause is no longer attributed to the Global North. This is not only because the

Figure 1.1: The concept of the imperial mode of living



INFOBOX

An overview of the imperial mode of living

The imperial mode of living

Our hypothesis is that one of the root causes of our current problems is the global expansion of a profit- and growth-based economic model. However, the global economic system is not a separate, independent structure that exists somewhere 'out there'; it is deeply embedded within people's lives.

The imperial mode of living is built on the ideal of a comfortable and modern life based on the permanent availability of consumer goods. In order to make this dream a reality, people around the world have to work hard, mine natural resources and slaughter animals—and they have to do it on a scale that pushes the earth to its ecological and social limits. The consequences are outsourced: to the Global South, future generations and marginalised groups in societies everywhere.

Nonetheless, the desire for and practice of this mode of living is spreading from the North to ever-greater parts of the world, together with its inherent ecological problems and social injustices. We consider the imperial mode of living a norm. It is borne by deep-rooted *notions and ideas* of what is desirable (i.e. 'growth' as a personal and economic policy goal), our *physical, material infrastructure* (motorways and coal power stations) and *political institutions* (the European Central Bank, the International Monetary Fund or free trade agreements).⁹ It is clear that multiple elements are at play here, which is why we refer to the phenomenon as a *mode of living* (as opposed to an individual consumption habit or the general relations of production).

Its multiple layers and the tacit but active approval by many people stabilise the imperial mode of living. This results in false solutions for real problems such as climate change (one example is increasing technological efficiency; see infobox "Green economy"). However, there are just as many varied approaches to realising a socio-ecological transformation. People everywhere are politicising everyday life by renouncing their consumption habits or uniting in initiatives, unions, and alliances to fight for the democratisation of institutions and modes of production.

imperial mode of living is spreading, but also because the production of many goods is outsourced to countries in the Global South (GLOSSARY: *virtual emissions*). The goods may be produced elsewhere but that does not change whose consumption habits and profit margins the lion's share of greenhouse gases are being emitted to feed.

... and divides society

Certain people are disproportionately affected by these injustices. Those who have little money or who are discriminated against on the grounds of gender or race suffer more from unjust working conditions, environmental degradation and climate change.⁷ Here the dividing line does not only lie between a wealthy Global North and an exploited Global South: the fault lines also exist within societies. There are those in the societies of the Global South who profit from globalisation as much as there are 'losers' in the Global North. Poverty or unhappiness caused by pressure to perform at work,

The imperial mode of living: key phrases

The concept of the imperial mode of living creates a link between the individual, the economy, and global problems.

The imperial mode of living is imperial because it grants certain groups an disproportional share of other people's labour and the biosphere at a global level and outsources the impacts.

The imperial mode of living is on the rise globally.

The state, the economic system, and social consensus consolidate the imperial mode of living.

Mode of living describes a complex web of relationships between individual actions, business, and political institutions.

A socio-ecological transformation has to tackle the imperial mode of living at every level.

hypermobility, or fine dust pollution are by no means rare occurrences.

Our internalised imperial mode of living

The imperial mode of living does not stop at our doorstep either; it culminates in many people's desire for permanent self-optimisation. This is true not only with regard to people's careers—making more money and moving up the ladder—but also in terms of enhancing efficiency at work and leisure time as an end in itself. The prevailing belief that responsibility lies exclusively with the individual, and not with businesses or the state, drives this trend. Unjust forms of business conduct can then, for example, be blamed on the unethical choices individuals make when they go shopping. People are not sick because they suffer from occupational diseases (or have simply had bad luck), rather it is their own fault because the food they eat is not sufficiently healthy, or because they have not meditated enough or done enough exercise (e.g. to recover from work).

The imperial mode of living as an attempted explanation

The concept of the *imperial mode of living* can help explain why, in spite of increasing injustices, progressive alternatives have so far been unsuccessful. It tries to understand why a *socio-ecological transformation* (GLOSSARY)—i.e. a fundamental change in our society and economy to achieve a good life for all and for future generations—is being blocked. The term was coined a few years ago by the sociologists Markus Wissen and Ulrich Brand.⁸ This text attempts to illustrate how the concept applies to different areas of our everyday lives: our food and mobility, our education system, private finance, care, and the digital world. We ask how the imperial mode of living manifests itself in these spheres and try to ascertain what its stabilising factors are.

Change in sight?

Profit-oriented globalisation (GLOSSARY) reveals and perpetuates itself in our everyday lives, our work, our consumption habits and our ‘normal’ activities and ways of thinking. Only when we become conscious of our problems and their causes can we effect true change. Among many people in both the Global North and South there is an increasing awareness of the problems mentioned.¹⁰ However, it is the classes with the highest incomes and best education that contribute the most to the destruction of the biosphere and the exploitation of people (MOBILITY, and EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE).¹¹ Whereas many in this group tend to buy ecological products, their high income means their levels of consumption are also higher than average.

We are witnessing a significant increase in so-called ‘solutions’ based on consumption. One example is the steadily increasing market share of fair trade products.¹² Or when people pay to offset the CO₂ emissions caused by their flights as well as car or bus journeys. For only a few euros, the company Atmosfair offers ‘CO₂ neutral’ flights.¹³ The developers of the Fairphone strive for production to be as “fair as possible”,¹⁴ which means trying to avoid as far as possible resources from crisis zones and not exploiting employees.ⁱⁱ

The approaches these solutions are based on, however, often focus too narrowly on consumption and their scope is limited. People can now decide for themselves whether or not to buy coffee produced through worker exploitation, but exploitation nonetheless remains the norm. In many cases the suggested solutions simply represent forms of greenwashing, as in the case of CO₂ offset payments (see infobox on “Emissions trading and offsets”). An example of one such pseudo solution are Western nations’ attempts to repair the damage caused by their own agricultural policies by providing development aid, for example, food relief. The political strategy behind green growth (see infobox “Green economy”) is also to reduce the impacts of our economic system without fundamentally changing the system itself. The basic structures that pave the way for and promote injustices remain untouched. In most cases, therefore, governments and international organisations

INFOBOX

The dream of a green economy



The green economy (green growth) suggests that we need only make our economy ‘green’ to solve our environmental problems; reducing our levels of consumption isn’t necessary. Proponents of the approach in fact argue the opposite, claiming it will even drive economic growth. To break the link between economic growth and the consumption of natural resources, our fossil fuel-based industry is to be successively replaced by bio-based forms of production. Petrol will be replaced by agrofuels (see infobox on “Agrofuels”), coal by hydro power, and so forth. Market instruments such as emissions trading are a key element in such concepts (see infobox on “Emissions trading and offsets”). Moreover, controversial technology-based solutions such as geoengineering and carbon capture and storage are to ‘neutralise’ unavoidable emissions. The green economy is backed by a powerful alliance of organisations such as the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), the UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme), the World Bank, some of the major environmental organisations, green parties and several corporations and banks. By taking on the role of ‘green pioneers’, these firms hope to increase their competitive opportunities.

However, it is unlikely that such a green economy can actually be realised. The necessary increases in efficiency go far beyond our capabilities and we are unlikely to witness such rapid technological progress.¹⁶ The presumed dematerialisation, i.e. the focus on a purportedly emissions-free services sector, ignores the sector’s dependency on a physical infrastructure and energy requirements.¹⁷ In any case, these efficiency gains would—according to the dominant (neoclassical) economic theory—not only reduce emissions, but also, due to lower product prices, increase consumption (see *rebound effect* in the GLOSSARY).¹⁸

are merely treating the symptom rather than the cause.¹⁵ Still, these strategies ensure the veil is not lifted and that we feel safe. After all, something is being done.

The contradictions between an increasing awareness that there is an issue on the one hand, and the growing problems on the other are obvious. Vaguely, we feel that climate change could pose a serious threat and that the unfair production conditions in agriculture and the textile and electronics industry are untenable, i.e. that something is not okay with our current mode of production. However, this does not lead to new progressive policies or attempts to cut down on or fundamentally change our living standards.

Even more problematic is the success of simplistic yet false narratives and projects from the right wing, and with them the rise of right-wing populist forces. One explanation is that many people are aware of the problems we face and feel a certain degree of uncertainty. As part of their nationalist rhetoric, right-wing populists use the crisis to promote isolationism and secure the imperial mode of living for their own nation. The mainstream parties are also reacting to this social climate with increasingly isolationist tendencies. While

i Since its market launch, 111,000 Fairphones have been sold, a figure dwarfed by the 219 million iPhones Apple managed to sell in 2016 alone (DIGITALISATION).

the established parties, unions, and industry associations speak of change and sustainability, their policies are characterised by a continuity that cements and escalates current socio-ecological problems.¹⁹ This fact is reflected, for example, in the austerity measures the EU imposed on Greece (see the chapter on MONEY AND FINANCE).

Deeper and more inclusive projects of transformation that aim for a more socially just and ecological transformation have so far not been able to win people over to the same degree. One reason is that they often use complex and esoteric language. Moreover, they are often vague and, at the same time, far more complex than the simple solutions offered by the right. People are therefore uncertain as to how a socio-ecological transformation would change their everyday lives. It also does not seem to be clear how a transformation of production structures and modes of living could work in practice at the local, regional, and global levels.

This publication aims to offer a more detailed analysis of why hardly anything is changing as well as explore which stakeholders and structures in specific parts of our everyday lives are standing in the way of a transformation towards a society based on solidarity. Finding answers to this question is a necessary and first step to overcoming injustices. We shall then subsequently show how a socio-ecological transformation could be driven forward.

Our approach: an overview of At the Expense of Others

The following chapter provides a historical overview of how the current situation developed. We show how imperial modes of living came into being throughout the course of various economic and social developments that took place between the 16th century and today, and how they were able to spread and take hold. Based on six thematic fields, we then analyse how imperial modes of living permeate different spheres of our everyday lives and pinpoint the ways in which human labour and the environment are exploited in these areas. Moreover, we reveal the stakeholders and conditions that stabilise them.

Nearly all of us own a smartphone and actively participate in the digital world. The third chapter on digitalisation focuses on how resources from conflict regions and neocolonial economic relations allow us to buy and use smartphones, how our lives are becoming increasingly digitalised and what consequences this has for our social fabric and our economy. Our lives are based on and reproduced by the care work provided by the people who take care of others. At whose expense the current organisation of care in our societies comes and the stakeholders that help maintain this system are the focus of chapter four. To maintain our daily lives, we need money. How this and the other apparent norms of our money and finance economy connect us with global injustices, indebtedness and exploitation is the theme of chapter five. We have all enjoyed certain levels of education and acquired knowledge. The sixth chapter analyses how our education inculcates the imperial modes of living within us, represses other

forms of knowledge and how Western knowledge production leads to the exploitation of nature and other epistemologies. The food we eat also severely impacts people and ecosystems elsewhere. Chapter seven highlights the links that exist between the food we eat and global hunger, climate-damaging agriculture and the market power of food corporations. A further important precondition for imperial modes of production and living is our mobility—whether it's the miles we travel for our holidays or those covered by the T-shirts in our wardrobes. The impacts and contradictions of the accelerated, oil-based transport system is the focus of chapter eight.

These spheres of our everyday lives are select examples that represent key realities for a large share of the global upper and middle classes. They allow us to vividly show how the imperial modes of living are at work in our everyday activities. Moreover, our analysis reveals why nothing is changing and we ask which concrete concepts, policies, and infrastructures strengthen and stabilise the current system. Chapter nine provides an overview of the results of the preceding analysis and reveals points of leverage and strategies to overcome the imperial mode of living. Whereas alternatives to our imperial modes of living will require large-scale shifts in the modes of production and our everyday lives, they do not necessarily imply a loss of quality of life. On the contrary: community-based and cooperative forms of living, working, caring, doing business and living together are possible and already exist. We could expand them, create networks and turn them from an exception into the rule.

Endnotes

- 1 UNDP, 2016
- 2 Credit Suisse, 2017; Forbes, 2017
- 3 Brand & Wissen, 2017
- 4 Pimm et al., 2014
- 5 Kim, Sexton & Townshend, 2015
- 6 International Organization for Migration, 2009
- 7 Bauriedl, 2014; IPCC, 2014
- 8 Brand & Wissen, 2017
- 9 Brand & Wissen, 2017
- 10 Svampa, 2012
- 11 Wuppertal Institut, 2005
- 12 Fairtrade Deutschland, 2016
- 13 Atmosfair, 2017
- 14 Fairphone, 2017
- 15 Ziai, 2004
- 16 Karathanassis, 2014
- 17 Wölfl, 2003
- 18 Jackson, 2011; Santarius, 2012
- 19 Fraser, 2017

GLOSSARY

This glossary provides short explanations of some of the terms used in the text. However, the list is by no means exhaustive.

Agroecology describes a social movement, academic discipline and agricultural practice. They all share the notion of adapting agriculture to prevailing natural conditions, cycles and local needs. As an approach, agroecology combines traditional and local knowledge with modern scientific methods.

Biodiversity: biological diversity, diversity of species.

Biosphere: the earth's 'life zone', i.e. the totality of all organisms, living creatures and ecosystems on the planet. Often we consider terms such as 'nature' to be a realm entirely separated from humans, and words such as 'resources' implicitly view nature merely with regard to the benefits it provides to people. The term biosphere attempts to avoid these shortcomings.

Capitalism: under capitalism, the market principle largely defines the social fabric. The means of production are concentrated in the hands of a few, thus forcing the majority of people to work. Competition and profit orientation lead to an intensification of the global exploitation of people and nature.

Carbon Capture and Storage: the process of capturing and storing CO₂. The aim is to capture, liquefy and store underground the CO₂ from industrial processes—in spite of considerable risks and the fact that the technology still needs to be further developed.

Climate justice: a political concept that serves to highlight that the climate crisis does not affect all people equally. While the global upper and middle classes, in particular, contribute towards climate change, those who suffer its consequences most acutely tend to contribute the least to global warming.

CO₂: carbon dioxide.

Colonialism: the violent subjugation of foreign territories (in particular in the Americas, South and South East Asia as well as Africa) by European countries. The structures and relations of power that developed during this era persist until today (see also 'neocolonialism').

Commons: goods such as water, seed or software that are used by a community. It describes forms of property, organisation and production that are not based primarily on private or state ownership and competition, but on community ownership, co-operation and participation.

Data mining: the systematic statistical analysis of large amounts of data or 'big data'. The method aims to produce (economically exploitable) knowledge or predict future developments.

Ecological footprint: the space that would be required to maintain the lifestyle and living standard of one person (under the current conditions of production) for all of humanity permanently.

Externalisation: the process of outsourcing social and environmental impacts to other places, or leaving them for future generations to solve. For the imperial mode of living and production, this constitutes a fundamental process.

Food sovereignty: the right of all people to decide over the processes of food production, distribution and consumption. Key to this concept is the development of a socially just and sustainable form of agriculture.

Genetic engineering: the transfer of isolated DNA sequences across different species. Genetically modified seed has drawn criticism because of the way it affects biodiversity, the unknown impacts it has on health and the environment, its emphasis on monoculture production without reducing the need for pesticides and seed patenting instead of promoting free seed exchange.

Global North/Global South are not geographic terms and describe the distinct position of countries in the global political and economic order. The terms also highlight the different experiences with colonialism and exploitation that underpin today's order.

Globalisation: the age of globalisation describes the recent great increase in mobility of information, goods and people. While this mobility has existed for thousands of years, its intensity has increased sharply since the middle of the 20th century.

Good life for all: the realistic utopia of a peaceful and solidary society that includes all people living in harmony with the biosphere. Today, pessimism and fear rule, making the concept seem utopian. From the standpoint of civilization and technology, however, it is a realistic vision.

Indigenous peoples: the descendants of a region's original inhabitants. The term stresses the self-identification of culturally, socially and economically distinct groups in society that may even have their own language. Human rights specifically for indigenous peoples guarantee their right to self-determination and to land.

Industrial agriculture: aims for efficiency in production instead of caring for animals, the environment and people. Monoculture fields and mass production as well as the use of chemical fertilisers characterise the system. It promotes large agricultural corporations instead of smallholder farming. Often, instead of catering to regional demand, this form of agriculture is strongly export-oriented.

Industry 4.0: the Fourth Industrial Revolution after mechanisation, mass production and automation. It aims to 'intelligently connect' digital technology and the physical systems of production. The German government, industry associations, unions and researchers drive this process forward.

Institutions: long-term established organisations that shape society such as parties, unions, churches, international organisations or education establishments. Some definitions will also include institutions with unique characteristics, for example, companies, the (mass) media, as well as parliaments, courts and ministries.

Land grabbing: a colloquial term for the heightened economic interest in agricultural land and the global increase in large-scale land buy-ups. Frequently, while legal, they lack democratic control over land access.

Market-based: according to economic logic or the fundamental principles of the market, i.e. driven by prices, supply and demand, etc.

Modern slavery: all forms of forced labour, human trafficking and debt bondage that (illegally) continue even over 150 years after the abolition of slavery. Globally, an estimated 30 to 50 million people work in slave-like conditions, in particular in agriculture, households and care, as well as forced prostitution.

Neoclassical economics: mainstream economic school of thought taught at universities since the middle of the 20th century. The concept is based on assumptions such as profit and utility maximisation, perfect competition and complete information. It omits or only insufficiently considers aspects such as questions of distribution, differing degrees of power, ethical concerns and environmental issues.

Neocolonialism highlights the economic and politico-structural dependencies that persist in spite of the formal independence of former colonies. Certain trade agreements, for example, force countries of the Global South into the role of suppliers of cheap raw material.

Neoliberalism: an ideology and economic policy model that purportedly promotes a 'free market' and insists that it is best for society to limit political interference in business and the economy as far as possible. Examples of neoliberal policies include demands for liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation. Originally, the term described ordoliberalism, the theoretical basis of the social market economy.

Network effects: an effect particularly prominent on internet platforms and in digital services whereby the attractiveness of a particular site increases with the number of its users (as seen with Facebook, Airbnb, Wikipedia and others).

Precarious employment: a job is considered precarious when the worker earns below a certain threshold, is not sufficiently protected and their salary does not allow them to participate fully in society. Gainful employment is also deemed precarious when it stops being meaningful, lacks social recognition and offers people no security to plan for their futures.¹

Privatisation: the transfer of community property (owned, for example, by the state, communities or indigenous peoples) into private hands (owned, for example, by individuals, companies or corporations).

Racism: a balance of power that exists within society globally that sees people differentiated and hierarchized based on physical and/or cultural attributes and/or their origin or nationality. Being 'white' and 'Western' is judged to be superior to being 'black/non-white' and 'non-Western'.²

Re-feudalisation: the global trend towards the unequal distribution of money and power that resembles feudal medieval societies in which only a tiny elite enjoyed a comparatively high standard of living.

Rebound effect: the phenomenon of absolute energy and resource consumption not dropping in spite of efficiency gains in production, management and logistics. When productive efficiency increases, this leads to goods becoming cheaper, potentially causing consumption of that good to increase.

Sharing economy: a broad term for a growing economic sector that emphasises the shared use of goods or services (either on or offline). For successful companies in this sector, profits and not sharing are the main goal.

Sinks: parts of ecosystems that people use as deposits, for example, the atmosphere, seas or the soil under landfills.

Socialisation institutions: the reciprocal and open process, which shapes people and turns them into members of a society that is, in turn, shaped by its people, is called *socialisation*. In many societies, this process begins in families and schools, which would in this case be *institutions of socialisation*.

Transformation, socio-ecological: a fundamental transformation of political and economic systems away from fossil fuels and the growth logic and towards an economy that ensures a decent life for all. This goes deeper than a reform, yet is less abrupt than a revolution.

Transnational consumer class: includes the global middle and upper classes that follow a consumption-oriented lifestyle. When considering this concept, it is important to remember that discriminating structures such as racism and sexism persist.

Transnational corporations: since the end of the 20th century, the largest and most profitable companies are no longer bound to a particular country. Rather, they act as a network and secure advantages in production (cheap labour and resources or lower taxes) on a global scale across numerous countries.

Virtual emissions: emissions produced in third countries that are ‘imported’ by importing goods from these countries for further processing or consumption. Whereas production-related emissions in the Global North have stagnated or even declined, the imported emissions from the Global South are rapidly increasing.

White and black do not describe the colour of a person’s skin but political and social constructs that underpin both discrimination and privilege in our racist societies. The term ‘white’ is mentioned here explicitly to underline its dominant position, which otherwise often goes unmentioned.³

Endnotes

1 Brinkmann, Dörre & Röbenack, 2006

2 glokal, 2013, pp. 12–13

3 glokal, 2013, p. 10

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THE PROJECT AND THE AUTHORS

The I.L.A. Werkstatt, a project organised by the non-profit association Common Future e.V., began on 1 April 2016 and ended on 31 May 2017 under the leadership of Dr. Thomas Kopp. The I.L.A. Werkstatt is an interdisciplinary collective of 15 young researchers and activists. We jointly developed this text over the course of a year. As a group, we hold university degrees in economics, development and agricultural economics, political science, political economy, international relations, pedagogy, environmental sciences, sustainability studies, history and law. In addition to participating in the I.L.A. Kollektiv, we study and work at universities, in non-governmental organisations, social movements as well as in and alongside trade unions. We are part of a diverse set of emancipatory movements within the broader field of global justice. This text aims to make the concept of the imperial mode of living accessible to a wider public and contribute towards a community-oriented mode of production and living.

If you have questions regarding content, feedback on specific chapters or would like to request a speaker or arrange a workshop with us, any of the members listed below would be happy to help. Please direct your queries to ila_info@riseup.net. Further information is available at: www.aufkostenanderer.org.

Introduction:

Samuel Decker, Hannah Engelmann, Magdalena Heuwieser, Thomas Kopp, Anne Siemons

Historical overview:

Samuel Decker, Jannis Eicker, Ia Eradze, Anil Shah, Lukas Wolfinger

Digitalisation:

Anil Shah, Lukas Wolfinger

Care:

Carla Noever Castelos, Anne Siemons

Money and finance:

Samuel Decker, Jannis Eicker, Christoph Podstawa

Education and knowledge:

Hannah Engelmann, Ia Eradze, Maja Hoffmann

Food and agriculture:

Franziskus Forster, Stella Haller, Therese Wenzel

Mobility:

Maximilian Becker, Magdalena Heuwieser

Summary and outlook:

Samuel Decker, Jannis Eicker, Franziskus Forster, Magdalena Heuwieser, Maja Hoffmann, Thomas Kopp, Carla Noever Castelos, Anil Shah, Anne Siemons

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Today it feels like everybody is talking about the problems and crises of our times: the climate and resource crisis, Greece's permanent socio-political crisis or the degrading exploitative practices of the textile industry. Many are aware of the issues, yet little seems to change. Why is this? The concept of the imperial mode of living explains why, in spite of increasing injustices, no long-term alternatives have managed to succeed and a socio-ecological transformation remains out of sight.

This text introduces the concept of an imperial mode of living and explains how our current mode of production and living is putting both people and the natural world under strain. We shine a spotlight on various areas of our daily lives, including food, mobility and digitalisation. We also look at socio-ecological alternatives and approaches to establish a good life for everyone – not just a few.

The non-profit association **Common Future e. V.** from Göttingen is active in a number of projects focussing on global justice and socio-ecological business approaches. From April 2016 to May 2017, the association organised the I.L.A. Werkstatt (Imperiale Lebensweisen – Ausbeutungsstrukturen im 21. Jahrhundert/ Imperial Modes of Living – Structures of Exploitation in the 21st Century). Out of this was born the interdisciplinary I.L.A. Kollektiv, consisting of 17 young researchers and activists. Their goal: dedicating a whole year to the scientific study of the imperial mode of living and bringing their results to a wider audience.



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