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**

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From the imperial mode of living towards a good life for all

Our current mode of production and living delivers a good life for a few at the expense of others. What strategies can we use to ensure a decent life for everyone? And what might a solidary mode of living look like?

To recap, nearly every sphere of our lives is pervaded by the imperial mode of production and living: from our smartphones and care homes to current accounts and institutions of education; from the products on supermarket shelves to our transport habits. This closing chapter summarises the findings of our analyses on each of these individual aspects of life. Taking these chapters as a basis, we outline relevant areas where pressure can be applied and explore strategies and guidelines for a solidary form of living. Evidently, there can be no simple solution to these complex issues, hence the need to develop a range of complex answers. Inevitably, therefore, some of the proposals in this summary may appear overly simplified and there is not enough room for obvious contradictions. Some of the ideas and strategies presented here still need testing or further analysis.

Our lives: exploiting and being exploited every day

Our mode of living and the form of production that underpins it rely on the unlimited and privileged exploitation of labour and the environment. In the Global North, it is women and the economically marginalised, refugees and indigenous peoples in particular who suffer racist discrimination, who work in inhumane conditions, are paid less, politically excluded and forced to live in dirty, noisy and unsafe neighbourhoods. Nonetheless, nearly everybody living in the Global North disproportionately takes advantage of the biosphere and other people's labour, particularly from the Global South. Meanwhile, this mode of living is rapidly expanding and being embraced by the urban middle and upper classes in the Global South too. As a trend, this generalises a mode of living that only functions if it remains exclusive and is therefore not universally applicable. Increasingly, we are reaching the ecological and social limits to growth and witnessing ever more severe symptoms of the ensuing crises, which, as in the case of climate change, are becoming ever harder to control.[1]

The spread of the imperial mode of living: the model's appeal and its implicit constraints

The imperial mode of living's appeal is one reason, why it is spreading. It promises a relatively comfortable life: consumption of any product at the click of a mouse, shorter travel times to faraway destinations made enticing by advertisements, faster communication, technological innovations that allow machines to take over everyday tasks and delegate seemingly tedious care work to third parties. However, we tend to overlook the imperial mode of living's considerable implicit social constraints. Faster travel is attractive mainly because our societies demand people to be ever more mobile and flexible, both at work and in their free time. Our everyday lives are built around being able to buy food at the supermarket, have a current account, outsource time-consuming care work and gain qualifications. So that we can afford this, we are forced to spend a great deal of our time earning money and in so doing, we are ultimately supporting the imperial mode of living.

Our mode of living: completely normal, deeply entrenched and institutionally anchored

As our analysis of the imperial mode of living reveals, all of these developments are based on (1) socially anchored concepts of what is normal and desirable; (2) the material infrastructure that systemically favours particular behaviours; and (3) the influence of political institutions and stakeholders with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. The notion that equates our mode of living with wealth and progress, and that therefore makes people around the world strive to 'develop' based on the same logic, appears to be rooted deeply in our consciousness. Questioning growth, consumption and work remains a game for radical outsiders.[2] Furthermore, through its form and content, education (Education and knowledge), as well as omnipresent advertisements, consolidate these thinking patterns. A series of infrastructures thereby provide our mode of living's material basis, automatically preselecting certain options and making it much more difficult to take other choices. These structures include roads and motorways, kindergartens and nursing homes, schools and universities, banks and insurance policies, labour markets and employment offices, supermarkets, shopping areas and the logistics that underpin these systems. Policies focused almost solely on economic growth (Money and finance) are also driving the expansion of this material infrastructure. Corporations in particular drive this process, both financially and ideologically, because the resulting growth-oriented developments, such as the expansion of the logistical infrastructure that serves private business or the increasing privatisation of public institutions, are highly profitable. The political and economic interests of diverse stakeholders and institutions therefore sustain the current order. The solutions they propose to solve our global crises, which are based on technology and market-focused

» *Establishing a good life for everyone will depend on our ability to redefine what we consider desirable.*«

approaches, result directly from this combination of tendencies, infrastructures and powerful interests that exist in our society. However, instead of solving our problems, they only exacerbate them (see infobox on "Green economy").

Part of the reason why the imperial mode of living is anchored so firmly in society is because of the individual advantages it offers people. Moreover, every day we form part of existing infrastructures, are affected by policies and have deep-rooted notions and expectations that we find hard to overcome. It doesn't take long before people who attempt to re-orient their lifestyle by working less or choosing to consume exploitation-free products feel this pressure. Beyond merely changing habits and consumption patterns at the individual level, the situation therefore necessitates changing the *structures* guiding and influencing our mode of living that exist in politics, business, media and not least in the minds of the people. Numerous emancipatory movements and networks are attempting to apply pressure at precisely this point. Examples include the movements for food sovereignty and a just global trade system, solidary modes of living and mobility, struggles for better working conditions in sectors such as care, or concepts and movements for commons and post-growth. All of these initiatives and the concepts they embrace ultimately share the goal of creating a *good life for all* — instead of a good life for only a few.

A good life for all – a tangible utopia

At first glance, demanding a *good life for all* may appear naïve. However, formulating a utopia is a necessary step to increase the appeal and create traction for non-imperial modes of living. As a concept, a *good life for all* describes a global society in which the fact that some people enjoy their lives does not prevent others from enjoying theirs. In such an exploitation-free society, everybody would be equal and live in balance with their environment. This implies respecting ecological and social criteria in our daily activities as well as changing the structures that underpin exploitation, inequality and the destruction of nature.

Establishing a *good life for all* will depend on our ability to redefine what we consider desirable. Our analysis of different spheres has highlighted how society today often drives people to increase their performance and competitiveness (Education and knowledge), speed (Mobility), efficiency (Care) or consumption (Digitalisation, Food and agriculture). But what would happen if we were instead motivated by freedom, dignity, solidarity and a general lust for life? Would new smartphones, 40-hour working weeks or shiny new SUVs still remain our top goals in life? Or would we instead strive for a 20-hour working week to leave enough time to pursue the things we enjoy, be politically active or spend time with friends, children or parents in need of care?

In our crisis-ridden times that are characterised by insecurity and fear, the concept of the *good life for all* has the potential to create positive traction and appeal to many people. However, it is also clear that such a project will not appeal to everybody. Not least due to climate change, establishing a *good life for all* will require highly unpopular measures such as drastically reducing our dependency on fossil fuels, abolishing entire production sectors and putting caps on car and air travel. The politicising nature of stressing that this is *for everyone*, as opposed to *just a few*, can help society accept the necessary restrictions on freedoms that the common good requires. To ensure the participation of the greatest possible number of social groups, the socio-ecological transformation needs to be an open and collective process. Such a process already begins today in small (yet frequently still too socially uniform) projects and initiatives, real-life utopias and 'revolutionary reforms'. In the long-term, they must collectively overcome today's exploitative society. Evidently, this process will not be free of conflict. There are powerful interests at play who oppose change. The term we use for the social negotiation about possible future models and strategies is *socio-ecological transformation*.

Strategies towards a socio-ecological transformation

How can we develop this transformation? How can we oppose the imperial mode of living and the structures that underpin and consolidate it? Based on our analysis of the imperial mode of production and living, and the experiences and practices of emancipatory movements, we shall first present four possible strategies before roughly outlining the direction such a transformation could take. We will highlight the possible cornerstones of a socio-ecological transformation that aims to create a solidary mode of production and living. At this point, we again need to emphasise that a simple solution or *one* perfect model society does not exist. While we need to recognise the complexity and challenges we face, we must not allow them to paralyse us. The following strategies and cornerstones are therefore by no means exhaustive.

1. Changing everyday habits and resisting

As trite as it may sound: true change also begins within each individual. This is, however, not (only) about changing consumption patterns. Many people are now changing their daily habits in the US, where the Trump administration is implementing an authoritarian government agenda. Americans are participating in demonstrations, engaging in political organising and resisting. They are questioning what they have until now considered a *normal* way of life, one that consists of going to work, shopping, attending sports events and watching TV. In Europe, too, more and more people are actively fighting for *climate justice* (Glossary), bike-friendly cities, a transformation of the economy and gender justice, and through this process are making new daily life experiences. A key aspect is to stop avoiding conflict and instead confront powerful stakeholders, such as transnational corporations, and oppose the dismantlement of people's right to democratic participation.

Yet, a transformation of everyday life can also take place in other, less obvious ways. For example, through

people becoming members of a community-supported agriculture project, or opting to ride a bicycle instead of driving, and getting their smartphone repaired instead of simply buying a new one. Or they could divide household chores more equally between male and female family members. All great transformation processes build on people questioning their everyday habits and changing the patterns they live by. An important strategy for change is thus to offer people opportunities and spaces to live new experiences that allow to change daily habits — for example in schools, community centres or do-it-yourself workshops.

2. Influencing public debate

What we do and do not consider to be normal and worthy of support is obviously determined by our everyday lives, but equally important in this regard is public debate. Whether it is *globalisation, full employment, economic growth* or *global export champions*, the media inform our common perceptions, as well as the political landscape, through the use of specific terms and narratives. A true socio-ecological transformation will depend on anchoring and legitimising new concepts and narratives in public opinion. We have referred to some examples here, such as a *good life for all, time prosperity, degrowth* and *commons*. Direct actions, demonstrations, campaigns and discursive interventions can shine a light on social issues and give voice to dissenting opinions.

The lightning fast pace of media reporting remains a problem, as does the fact that social media give far greater preference to simple answers over complex analyses. There may be the odd debate over free trade agreements, climate change, the curbing of social rights and democratic freedoms or lignite mining, but they are quickly eclipsed by seemingly more urgent headlines. A key task will therefore be to develop groups that focus on and continuously highlight specific issues in the long term. Even when there is no upcoming climate summit, the global climate justice movement relentlessly emphasises the pressing need to change energy and environmental policies. And the care movement is permanently fighting for just forms of and needs-oriented care, even though this issue receives hardly any coverage in the media. As our text highlights, similar forces underpin these diverse issues. Movements thus need to join the dots between the individual issues they are working on. There are already examples of such groups that attempt to link a diverse number of issues and spheres of action, allowing them to develop alternative narratives based on community-oriented modes of living to counter the 'new right's' overtly simplified and resentful interpretations. The growth-critical concept behind the degrowth movement is capable of uniting a diverse set of groups: from anti-coal to pro-basic income and animal rights movements.[3] Attac struggles for a form of globalisation that takes greater account of social and ecological aspects, and thereby link issues ranging from global trade to communal level self-administration as well as flight and migration.[4] And the group *Interventionistische Linke* unites radical left-wing activists from anti-racist, anti-sexist and capitalist-critical backgrounds.[5]

3. Transforming institutions and infrastructures

Institutions (Glossary) hold great power. To enforce change and implement concepts for a *good life for all*, it therefore makes sense to work together with and within the existing institutions. However, institutions usually follow their own cumbersome logic which can hardly be questioned or changed. Unions, for example, fight for higher wages for their members, but rarely do so for workers in the Global South. NGOs can organise campaigns and protests, yet only if they keep their donors happy. Ministries can develop new policy proposals, but they often need the support of business or particular voter groups to implement them. To a very limited degree, companies can change their form of production, yet they cannot prevail against the logic inherent to the system.

» *A true socio-ecological* TRANSFORMATION *will depend on anchoring and legitimising new concepts and narratives in public opinion, such as a* GOOD LIFE FOR EVERYONE, TIME PROSPERITY, DEGROWTH *und* COMMONS.«

Changing institutions is therefore key to being able to implement a socio-ecological transformation. This requires applying pressure to institutions, both internally and externally, to unleash their transformative potential and broaden their functional logic. For example, the concept of the *transnational social strike* aims to improve networking between the struggles of unionised and non-unionised workers from multiple countries. Businesses could be organised as cooperatives, and companies and banks could shift their focus more towards the greater common good, which would oblige them to commit not merely to making a profit, but to primarily fulfilling social and ecological goals.

Alongside institutions, the material infrastructure visible in the shape of motorways, container ports, gigantic supermarkets or the design of cities stabilises the imperial mode of living. This shows why it is important to prevent cities from building new elements of this imperial infrastructure, such as airports, instead of investing in railways or increasing a city's attractiveness for cyclists and pedestrians. One group that pursues such a focus is the *System Change, not Climate Change!* group in Vienna.[6] We need to dismantle or find new uses for the existing infrastructure. We could transform roads into pedestrian zones, dismantle industrial plants and use them as spaces for cultural projects, or transform military barracks into residential buildings. There are many such projects already in existence.

4. Creating alternatives

The strategy of transforming institutions and infrastructures has its limits. Ultimately, to survive on the market, also cooperatives and public service-oriented companies need to make a profit. Parties and governments are, in essence, incapable of overcoming the framework provided by the growth economy. Mainly, this is due to the fact that the economy remains driven by a deeply anchored principle: the system rewards competition and profit and makes co-operation and solidarity hard. This is why creating something new and establish-

ing systems based on a different logic is of such fundamental importance. Alternative economic approaches, however, remain underdeveloped. We do not yet know how to turn a solidary mode of living into the new *system*, thus allowing it to maintain itself. Regardless of the countless initiatives and policy concepts, none of them has (so far) led to coherent alternatives.

For the strategies of transformation we have mentioned so far, this gap is a key problem. If co-operative forms of housing, working, caring and doing business were widespread, many people would find it easier to transform their everyday habits. Public debates could point to established alternative models and it would be harder to dismiss criticisms of the current system as destructive and aimless. Instead, institutions and infrastructures could build on these alternatives and help consolidate them. If we wish to develop a realistic strategy that outlines ways to implement a good life, we will need a coherent concept of a solidary mode of production and living. In the following, we shall thus sketch out some of the key aspects such a concept might contain.

Cornerstones of a solidary mode of production and living

Global Social Rights

The *good life for all* demands a different kind of globalisation. This is not about anti-globalisation in the sense of nationalist protectionism propagated by right-wing globalisation critics. Globally, right-wing politicians are blaming 'foreigners' or 'the others' for current socio-economic problems, and their misanthropic rhetoric declares isolationism to be the solution. Also politicians from the 'bourgeois middle' attempt to perpetuate the exclusiveness of the current mode of production and living by 'promoting business as usual'. Such a policy approach, however, is blind to the actual problems. It aims to shape a socially exclusive project that secures wealth and an imperial mode of living for a small minority.

» By upholding a community-oriented form of globalisation, the call for Global Social Rights stands in direct opposition to the right-wing rhetoric of renationalisation.«

The call for Global Social Rights (GSRs)[7] stands in direct opposition to the right-wing rhetoric of renationalisation and upholds the goal of a solidary form of globalisation. GSRs maintain the positive aspects of a culturally open world connected across borders. On the other hand, they aim to reconquer spaces to develop political and economic approaches and push back the negative consequences of an unjust globalisation. The fundamental GSRs comprise comprehensive economic as well as social rights. They also include rights to self-determination such as freedom of movement and food sovereignty, as well as environmental rights. They apply to *everybody*. Faithfully implemented, GSRs would prevent people from living at the expense of others. In this regard, GSRs do not contradict the notion of universal human rights. Human rights, however, often seem to be purely theoretical demands, which are directed at state institutions, who are to ensure them. Frequently, the transposition of human rights into national legislation transforms them into citizens' rights. Yet, if you are not a citizen, you are also not entitled to rights.

GSRs emphasise that fundamental rights must apply to everybody without exception — at all times and in all places. This implies that we should not wait for states and courts to ensure our GSRs, but rather that we can appropriate them where necessary and help others to acquire them, too. The climate justice movement, for example, sees resorting to actions of civil disobedience to block fossil energy projects in industrialised countries as legitimate — an approach now endorsed annually by the *Ende Gelände*[8] campaign. Ultimately, the emissions produced by such projects are a major factor that causes people in other countries particularly affected by climate change to lose their right to a self-determined life and a healthy environment.

A solidary mode of living can only become a reality once neither the legislation nor our everyday actions differentiate between people of different genders, sexual orientations and social or geographic backgrounds. GSRs are therefore a necessary basis to *decolonise* our economy and our living environment. A *good life for all* needs the Global North to critically revisit and give up its historically dominant global position. This means to consistently claim the improvement of the living and working conditions of all people from a global point of view. Adopting high social and environmental standards globally would make it harder to outsource costs to other places and to other people. An imperial mode of living would already become untenable if fundamental labour rights were equally applied to plantation workers in Brazil, Polish care workers in Switzerland, IT factory workers in China or German delivery drivers. Moreover, effectively preventing neocolonial forms of displacement and oppression will require the realisation of the rights of indigenous peoples to exist and to self-determination, which have long been enshrined in legislation (*land* and *green grabbing*, Food and agriculture and Money and finance).

Decolonisation, however, also requires us to question our thinking patterns and to become aware of our privileges as well as to constantly discuss and dismantle the racist and discriminatory structures present in our society. Taking GSRs seriously will lead to questions. Why, for example, do we allow refugees to drown at Europe's doorstep? Why are black Germans more likely to be stopped and searched at German train stations? Why do we not pay Polish care workers the minimum wage?

Social infrastructures for all

To establish a good life, it will be necessary to ensure that everybody can equally fulfil their basic existential needs to enjoy a decent life. Effective and comprehensive public services would take us one step closer to achieving this goal. A socio-ecological infrastructure would have to include the energy and water supply, public transport, the internet and its relevant digital platforms, healthcare and care, critical and emancipatory education — also outside of the established institutions — and a right to affordable housing. These basic services would have to be free for everybody, i.e. either publicly financed or available at a socially acceptable cost. Enabling the public and collective use of goods

could partially replace the individual consumption and the damaging impacts this entails. In contrast to our current system, major consumers such as companies would bear substantially higher costs or be disadvantaged by other means.[9]

An unconditional social infrastructure would immediately eliminate social insecurity and would thus grant people more freedom to decide how they want to live. Such a system would also reveal what we truly need to exist. Our concept of wealth would change. This is a further reason why we should oppose the commodification of fundamental social services and press for them to stay in public or community hands and remain universally accessible. With sufficient political pressure, it is possible — even today — to demand the implementation of a social infrastructure for everybody and defend established structures in our cities and municipalities. In May 2014, when the Greek government decided to bow to the pressure of the Troika and attempted to privatise the waterworks in Thessaloniki, citizens fought back by means of a successful referendum and ensured the city's water supply remained in public hands. In numerous German municipalities, citizens' protests have prevented the closure of public libraries and adult education centres *(Volkshochschulen)*.

Self-organisation and the collective development of internal rules can produce systems that enable people to secure their livelihood and meet their basic needs outside of state structures. Such commons (Glossary) cannot be bought; users themselves create and care for them. One very well-known example is the network that develops the Linux operating system (Digitalisation). Knowledge, technology and licence systems can all be organised as commons, as can farms, food stores, open workshops and other spaces for alternative forms of production or areas linked to the environment, such as land or seed.[10]

Redistributing money, work and environmental impacts

A more solidary lifestyle will depend on a radical redistribution both within and between societies. This would imply the fair distribution of financial wealth. In addition to social infrastructures, a basic income can contribute to social security. In discussions, this is often referred to as *unconditional basic income*. It would be paid to everybody equally and without expecting any performance in return (Care and Money and finance).[11] Ways to finance a basic income and social infrastructure include closing tax havens, increasing taxes on wealth and income, levying an environmental tax, socialising large inheritances and introducing a financial transaction tax. Redistribution could also be pushed by introducing capital levies for the rich and corporations and by granting debt relief.

When partnered with an effective social infrastructure, an unconditional basic income could contribute to develop new perspectives on work, since it can partially free us from dependency on a wage or salary. We could reduce working hours significantly, particularly in destructive economic sectors as opposed to socially valuable ones. This could allow us to find just and inclusive ways to redistribute the selectively reduced amount of work. People could use the time gained to take part in very different everyday activities that would eventually become as 'normal' and as cherished as the eight-hour day is today. It would also allow for getting involved in politics, caring for people and the environment, or enjoying self-determined leisure time.

Yet not only should the burdens of labour be distributed more justly between people; we also need to tackle the unequal exposure to environmental impacts.

Reviving and expanding democracy

The increasing success of authoritarian parties and governments suggests a growing number of people are unhappy with the current political system. It is thus more crucial than ever to radically reenergise the term *democracy* and create awareness of the true meaning of the word: democracy means *rule by the people* and not by kings or corporations. Democratisation is not limited to elections and parties; it demands far greater participation in political decision-making processes. Interesting concepts that people have already begun to experiment with include direct democracy approaches such as referenda, more inclusive voting rights, establishing citizens' councils[12] as well as the proposal of urban citizenship.[13] Moreover, democratisation would require the absolute transparency of state structures and a democratic overhaul of the media.

Beyond the purely political sphere, democratisation would also have to apply to the economic sphere, not least due to the fact that a direct link exists between low levels of political participation and increasing levels of economic inequality. Institutions without sufficient democratic legitimacy should therefore not be able to take important political decisions such as those concerning austerity measures or structural reforms. Otherwise, they effectively circumvent the elected representatives in national parliaments; the actions taken by the Troika in Greece is a prime example (Money and finance). Moreover, people will have to gain greater influence over the organisation of the production, consumption and distribution of goods. In food councils, for example, citizens and experts, such as farmers or scientists, co-operate closely with municipal councils to ensure cities develop a sustainable and just food system (Food and agriculture).[14] *Energy democracy*, on the other hand, demands the democratic participation of all citizens in energy production, an environmentally sustainable transformation of the sector and universal provision of access to sufficient energy. This requires limiting the power of major energy corporations.[15] The concept of social infrastructures and the organisation of commons could very well be interpreted as new forms of economic democracy.

Opportunities to democratise processes and businesses also exist within the sphere of private business. Here labour struggles and nationwide unionisation play an important role. Efforts to establish worker self-organisation in the form of cooperatives, in which workers themselves define production processes, go even further.

To grow this kind of democratisation from the grassroots up, it is imperative to encourage people to see themselves as active citizens and strengthen their desire to participate in social processes from a very young age.

Democracy cannot remain a one-off 'chalk and talk' lesson in schools. Children instead should be able to develop a passion for reaching decisions and collectively shaping the world they live in. Democratic schools are one example (EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE).

Needs-oriented, solidary and environmentally friendly economies

A solidary mode of production and living will have to be needs- and not profit-focused, and must aim to fulfil these needs in an environmentally and socially sustainable manner. There are already established solidary forms of economy in which producers and consumers cooperate in collaborative and non-hierarchical forms. Examples include community supported agriculture projects (FOOD AND AGRICULTURE) and collaborative open source software (DIGITALISATION). Moreover, there are a growing number of social movements where producers and consumers work collectively in the pursuit of the common good. The movement for food sovereignty brings both farmers and the consumers of agricultural products out onto the street (FOOD AND AGRICULTURE); those providing and those receiving care jointly promote the *care revolution* (CARE). Short transport distances, renewables, regional products, re-utilisation and recycling are key building blocks in a solidary economy. This is what a *good life for all* — for people, animals and ecosystems — is about.

In terms of the overall economy, the goal must be to shrink socially and environmentally harmful economic sectors in a controlled and socially just manner. Degrowth or post-growth are economic concepts that already offer an alternative to our fixation on growth. In return, we need to strengthen sectors related to the fulfilment of people's fundamental needs and that are environmentally sustainable. This requires inclusive public debates on what is socially more desirable: do we want more subsidies to develop public transport or tax breaks for high-emission company cars? Should we promote environmentally friendly peasant farming or industrial-scale factory farming?

At the global level, transnational networks of production and finance are the backbone of the imperial mode of production and living. Strict regulation of businesses, banks and the cross-border movement of capital, as well as a ban on socially or environmentally harmful businesses and business practices, could be a first step towards more just forms of production. Moreover, we need to develop new forms of economic democracy on a global scale.

There is no blueprint for a solidary economic framework. It can only emerge from the exchange between pioneer projects, social movements from both the Global North and South as well as institutions. We must do away with the notion that the best way to ensure a functioning economy is to keep markets outside of the political realm and thus outside of people's sphere of influence. The wide-scale social resistance to the TTIP and CETA free trade agreements showed that many people no longer want to relinquish their say in economic and trade policy and are willing to fight for a new economic framework. Ultimately, this is about reversing the trend of increasing deregulation that has handed over ever-greater spheres of our lives to the market, i.e. the aim is to free an increasing number of elements vital to production and our lives from the grip of the market and transition them to a solidary economic system.

What sort of transformation do we want?

The cornerstones described here to establish a solidary mode of production and living, and the strategies presented to implement a *good life for all* are far from exhaustive. Making a global, socio-ecological transformation a reality represents a huge social challenge. Alternative concepts remain underdeveloped at the conceptual level and need to be more robustly linked. At the political level, firm alliances still need to develop, as do long-term strategies for the implementation of alternatives.

Nonetheless, alternative approaches are not utterly hopeless. The imperial mode of living is increasingly reaching its limits and distorting our societies and our environment. This damage, and the rise of right-wing social projects that aim to secure the imperial mode of living using an authoritarian approach, lead to an increased need for solidary alternatives. 'Business as usual' seems to be increasingly unrealistic. The question is therefore not *whether* there will be a comprehensive transition, but *what* shape this will take and *who* will lead the charge. Without our active involvement, such a transformation could potentially arrive as an ecological and social disaster, while market-based pseudo-solutions and dangerous right-wing alternatives become ever more established. We should take this moment filled with multiple crises and tremendous social challenges as an opportunity to pool the strength of existing projects, policy proposals and stakeholders (both radical and reformist) in order to stand up for *a good life for all* together.

Do you agree?
Then get involved! More information is available on our website *www.attheexpenseofothers.org.*

Endnotes

1 Kallis, 2016
2 Welzer, 2011
3 Konzeptwerk Neue Ökonomie, 2017
4 Attac, 2017
5 Interventionistische Linke, 2017
6 System Change, not Climate Change, 2016
7 Klautke & Oehrlein, 2008; Rätz, 2007
8 Ende Gelände, 2017
9 Steckner & Candeias, 2014
10 Habermann, 2016; Helfrich, 2012
11 Lammer, 2016
12 Land Voralberg, 2017
13 Verein Sand & Zeit, 2017
14 Ernährungsrat Köln, 2017
15 Weis, Becker & Naumann, 2015

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 CO_2. The aim is to capture, liquefy and store underground the CO_2 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.

CO_2: 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.

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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 borne 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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