

The right to meaningful work as key component of a new European social contract in the light of the socio-ecological transition

Keywords:

new social contract / decommodification of work / meaningful work / cities in transition / active citizenship

The on-going destruction of humanities' livelihoods as well as constant high unemployment rates across Europe ask for a new social contract, in which individuals collectively assume responsibility for future generations without neglecting their own right on a good life. The decoupling of gainful employment and income can be seen as the basis of the development of meaningful work activities on the local level and would accelerate and multiply these already existing and currently emerging numerous initiatives that are pushing on the socio-ecological transition.

Key words like "think global, act local" illustrate the necessity of local re-embedding processes in reaction to the global dis-embedding of economy, showing that the local level is paramount for sustainable development.

All over Europe self-organized civil society movements are emerging on the grassroots level to tackle local challenges, becoming active players in local governance processes, practising an active citizenship. These social experiments have even been intensified as a result of tight public local budgets.

Their activities can be designated as meaningful work, contributing to the functioning and well-being of a European society aiming for social, ecological and economic sustainability. For their development, an enabling, innovative and fostering local policy framework is necessary, allowing for constructive interaction with local politics and administration.

The empirical part of this project will look at such evolving meaningful work activities in several cities across Europe. Interviews with representatives of the initiatives and of local politics and administration will be conducted to determine the role of these activities in the socio-ecological transition. This will be supplemented by expert interviews with scholars, politicians and representatives from the private sector on their ideas of the role of meaningful work in a new social contract.

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