



Group Assembly Process (GAP) - Stirring Paper

Unconditional basic income, human rights-based equality and economic degrowth

by Werner Rätz, Dagmar Paternoga

- 1) A deliberately organized economic degrowth is required to prevent the socially/economically disadvantaged from losing the battle over the distribution of scarce resources. An unconditional basic income represents the basis, on which people can have the necessary debate in a *fearless* manner.
- 2) A comprehensive understanding of a basic income suggests that it is more than just a means to facilitate a difficult social discourse. In that sense a basic income would be nothing short of the first step to a completely different type of socialization. The integration of the members of our society would no longer be solely determined by their position in the system of paid labor. Instead, society itself would come into existence because human beings consider each other parts of it. A basic income respects every contribution to societal productivity as well as sociality itself. Participation and a secure existence are fundamental civic economic rights. In a market society, this can only be put into practice, if *every person* has an income. With the unconditional basic income everyone can avail him or herself of this fundamental right.
- 3) As holders of fundamental rights all human beings are radically equal. No one can tell others what to do and what not to do. Taking this into consideration, every person's needs are equally legitimate. However, there are needs whose satisfaction can be harmful to society. Despite the formal equality of everyone's needs, society-wide debates and agreements will be necessary to determine specifically which actions should be encouraged, penalized, allowed and avoided.
- 4) The aforementioned is not only about sanctioning socially or ecologically harmful behavior. If an unconditional basic income is understood as a global social right, this means in consequence that practices in order to assume said right are legitimate and welcome.¹ It is frequently common for those that possess rights to often fail to exercise them. So it has to be legitimate to assume it in this case. Yet

¹ Werner Rätz, Globale Soziale Rechte und Aneignungspraxen, in: Roland Klautke/Brigitte Oehrlein, *Globale Soziale Rechte*, Hamburg 2008.

appropriation becomes simply private theft or collective raid, if these rights, fundamental to overcome the misery, are not debated by the entire society and politically fought for.

- 5) On human rights grounds unconditional social security and participation of every human being is not only guaranteed in principle but also in practice. From this it follows that a society-wide debate about the goods and services that are required to ensure a good life for all is inevitable. Today there exists sufficient wealth in the world, not just monetary but also in terms of goods, services, and knowledge, to allow for a good life for all human beings. However, despite the fact that the world is full of things that no one needs, many people are unable to obtain their minimal necessities. In the context of a discussion to resolve this paradox both the social and the ecological question must be addressed at once. They are no longer separable but identical with regard to the necessary measures. It is a matter of what and how we produce as a society.
- 6) Thus, the relevance of the associated struggles becomes virulent. The social clashes represent the ground for a change of awareness. On human rights grounds it is unjustifiable, to a priori qualify the needs of others as wrong.² Nonetheless, it is obvious that the satisfaction of various needs could be considered negative from an ecological point of view, even if they are not formally criminal or condemnable. It would not only be dubious from the human rights perspective, if I or some one else put ourselves forward and said: „Hey folks, we know what is ecologically sound and what is harmful. So everybody listen to us!“ Nor would this make any sense politically, since such conduct is unlikely to produce the desired effects due to few people actively responding.
- 7) Things, however, are quite different when it comes to common political practice. There are enough struggles around the world, in which the ecological question has become as significant as never before and in which everyone can take part. Complete industries such as nuclear and genetic engineering have been confronted as being useless and unwanted. Senseless and superfluous traffic as much as large-scale projects have also been criticized. If people get involved in these struggles, it changes their minds. No one can be actively involved in such conflicts in the long run, without questioning him or herself about what these erroneous social developments might have to do with their own behavior? But then it is not me any longer who demands them to do something, but instead it is them who undergo a process together with me.
- 8) No one can be actively involved in such conflicts in the long run, without asking themselves one question: „If I do not want that, what do I want instead?“ It is here as well that social and ecological aspects are closely intertwined. Thus, from the unconditional basic income, radically derived from human rights, emerges an independent socio-political awareness for the necessity of economic degrowth.

² More detailed: Werner Rätz/Doris Meisterernst/Dagmar Paternoga, Statt Verdammung "falscher" Bedürfnisse: Demokratische Debatte über Inhalt und Gestalt der Produktion, in: Werner Rätz, Tanja von Egan-Krieger, *Ausgewachsen!*, Hamburg 2011