

**UBIE conference ‚basic income and degrowth‘
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Workshop „societal working relations, individual working hours, basic income and degrowth”
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To get into our theme, a little excursion into political economy is necessary at the beginning. This is not the best start in a didactical sense, but because this is a ‚work‘shop and thus all about work, it might *work*.

1. In capitalism, as a rule, no one produces goods or services, because he or she needs them personally. The producer of trousers doesn‘t suffer the cold, the taxi driver doesn‘t want to get from A to B and the shares of the weapons‘ company do not belong to a group of paid assassins. Whoever invests into production of anything in capitalism does this, because of the expectation that products will be sold and there‘ll be more money in the till at the end than what was invested in the beginning. Not the provision of people with goods and services is the motive for investing, but the expected profit.

The investors can count on this profit, because the terms of capitalist economy rule that products do not belong to those who make them, but to those who put capital into production at the start. But this doesn‘t help the investors, if they cannot sell what‘s being produced. So investors carry out market analysis beforehand.

Goods which people would need, but which they cannot pay for, will not be produced or will only be made in very small quantities.

Nevertheless the whole process bears risks, because the sale of produced wares – and with that the profit – cannot be guaranteed at the time of production or even at the time of market analysis.

Investors want to produce the things that people are prepared to pay for again and again – even when they are superfluous. So within certain boundaries they do, which leads to the discrepancy that a huge number of people does not get what they urgently need, but that the world still is full of things which nobody needs. The constantly fuels an increased use of resources and energy.

2. If there wasn‘t the risk to be left with unsold wares, even more would be produced, and even more superfluous things. A new and increasingly more common way to deal with this risk is to shift the risk to the workers. If the leaseholder of a supermarket doesn‘t buy products anymore, but a (non) independent sub-entrepreneur; who also stores, displays and advertises the products to the customers, in a word: everything an employed salesperson used to do; the boss has delegated the risk. When companies only employ people depending on order volume, hold them in zero-hour-contracts or loan them from temping agencies as needed, the workers carry the risk of low degree of capacity utilisation.

This becomes especially apparent in many new forms of freelancing, in which people do not sell their labour any more to one company, but carry out tasks in their own name and sell the results. Freelance contracts are a widely used practice to organise employment nowadays. A new and especially precarious development is the so-called clickworking. This means that people carry out assignments which are offered on special internet platforms. In Germany alone there are more than 40 of such platforms, the biggest of which, ‚clickworker‘, having 700,000 people competing for assignments.

The oldest of such platforms is ‚mechanical Turk‘ (mTurk) from google, where you can earn about 2-5 Cents for age rating of a picture or 50 Cents for a 10-minute survey. You only get paid for whatever the purchaser actually buys; he decides if a task has been fulfilled to his satisfaction, or

whose result he wants to buy if many have delivered them on one task. But the rights to all the results sent in belong to him, nonetheless. The majority of clickworkers on mTurk earn hourly wages of 1-3 Dollars. The very experienced who only accept the most attractive orders can make up to 5-8 Dollars.

3. This is not really enough to live on for anybody. So many do these types of work on top of one or more other contracts or work very long hours. This is mainly an option for people who do not have other responsibilities, like unemployed people or pensioners for example. I don't have to explain that those types of jobs are not enough to achieve social security. They mostly aren't jobs formally subject to social insurance contributions, neither do they pay enough to pay for security or insurance privately. Why would someone do this totally precarious work for such little money, which eats up the entire free time? One reason surely is the pure economic need. Whoever lacks another income will do anything. But to some these types of jobs also mean an increased freedom. You can choose when and how much you work. You can freely decide, which jobs to apply for. There is variety. With clickworker for example you can choose between 'writing of plagiarism-free texts' or pure web searches, the 'sorting of great amounts of data into suitable categories', 'surveys and feedbacks' or 'field research, analysis and verification of data'.

4. Apparently the correlation between paid work, social standing and social security is dissolving more and more. Not just the above mentioned (pseudo) self-employments – also all other 'atypical' work arrangements (temping, part-time employment and 'Minijobs' – a special German kind of marginal part-time jobs) do not save employees from the poverty trap and social decline. This is also true for many full-time jobs.

What is completely impossible to deduce from pay or social standing is how important and useful the tasks and jobs are for society. Many jobs who are pointless and damaging are being paid, many jobs who are necessary aren't. The old socialisation through paid employment has stopped working. It never worked to the degree the supporters of the policy of full employment would have us believe. Women, the disabled, anybody dependent on third parties have never been fully integrated into the social state here in their own right, and outside of the capitalist core countries most of the men aren't, either.

But in developed capitalism there have been some decades, in which the social position of your paid employment correlated with your standing in society as a whole. Social standing, income, claims to the welfare state depended on the position of the individual in the labour system. This stopped being the case some time ago, the whole structure of socialisation is dissolving. People can do the most meaningful and necessary things and still hit rock bottom, because there hardly is any social net anymore. As described above this leads to a dramatic break down of all time limits. To prevent hitting absolute rock bottom individuals are putting up with all sorts of impositions. They mobilise their final resources, not just in terms of economy, also in terms of their own productivity and creativity. Those weren't required in work processes in fordism. The division of labour in the factories dictated every step of production and the conveyor belt dictated the frequency. Productivity was organised by automatic collaboration of the individuals at the belt. The workers went into their free evenings after their shift and into the weekend on Fridays. It was boring, dull, but manageable and stayed in the factory. Individual resources weren't touched and the production process stayed collective.

'Toyotism', as the next models of division of labour are often called, already brought significant change. Production took place in small groups, supporting competition for ideas and establishing control amongst the workforce.

Modern models take this to extremes and utilise individual creativity and productivity for the company. In a sense, these individual skills are now being sacrificed for collectivism, if you want to perceive a company as a collective or a society.

5. This collectivism does not have a purpose for society as a whole, though. It is being used as an advantage of one company over its capitalist competition, trying to tap into human resources as effectively as possible. Productivity and creativity are not being used to decrease society's cumulated working time, increase leisure, reduce material or energy waste or for any other altruistic goal.

The goal is, in fact, to be the first in the race for more superfluous production and sales. With that this socially and ecologically ruinous competition is taken to extremes, thoroughly accelerating the destruction of the environment and climate.

And yet it would be the same productivity and creativity of individuals, paired with their collective application, which could make sensible solutions to many of society's problems possible.

Comprehensive, publically organised and free for users mobility needs less resources and time than each person standing in a traffic jam in their own car. Free basic energy contingencies, free means of communication, education and care from kindergarten into old age, general health care, public culture programmes and the like save resources and money. In the end, all infrastructure that everyone needs at some point in their lives should be provided publically. That could all be viewed as part of unconditional basic income, as people would not need to spend money on most of those things then.