

Reflections from the perspective of socio-ecologic transformation

In the beginning I have to come back to the quartet of the 4+2 connection. Globally, energy related activities produce around 63% of climate-damaging emissions and around 77% of all CO₂ emissions. Around 28% of climate-damaging emissions and 36% of CO₂ emissions stem from electricity generation and heating. Transport accounts for around one quarter of climate-damaging emissions. The transport sphere depends on oil for 96% of its energy; oil is responsible for over 95% of the emissions caused by transport. Agriculture produces around 14% of CO₂ emissions; if the CO₂ that is released through forest clearance is included, this figure rises to 32%. However, this still does not include CH₄ and N₂O emissions. The US war in Iraq cost more than the cost of investments into renewables that would be needed until 2030 to stop global warming. During the war, more climate-damaging emissions were released each year between 2003 and 2007 than the annual joint production of 139 states. And the quartet is driven by the high tech and the finance spheres.

But having in mind the ecological footprint of the European Union we do know: if everyone lived according to the lifestyle of the average US-American and of the average EU citizen we would need 4 planets. We know about poverty in both global regions and in the world at large.

More concretely: Let us have a look at the total ecological footprint of an average citizen of the German city of Hamburg. The final energy consumption of households comes to 21% of the total ecological footprint of the "Hamburger", especially caused by the consumption of electricity and liquid petroleum gas. With 33% food is the largest component of the total ecological footprint. It is connected with a high consumption of highly transport intensive products and especially, of meat. Mobility takes a share of 24% of the total ecological footprint, due above all to air transport and to car transport. The category goods brings it to a share of 22%. Only two keywords say enough: waste and the short life of mobiles.

So we see the second side of the 4+2 connection as it determines the consumption patterns. And we know about the capital oligarchies behind them. All that is also connected with social stress: The job must be won and the job won has then to be defended. Childcare and care have to be ensured. The proper medical treatment must be found. Tax and insurance matters need to be clarified, electricity and telephone providers will have to be examined and to be replaced, if necessary. Citizens should be continuously available for employers and potential contractors, internally, as well as for the supervising authorities ... People have to constantly cope with the pressure to be up to date with their mobile phones, notebooks, PCs, and generally with consumer electronics.

In our real society people can only conditionally choose their lifestyle because they do not understand the need. They have not learned how to do. The necessary learning processes are not organized. Environmentally friendly practices are not rewarded effectively. Ecologically destructive behavior is not sanctioned. The production patterns and the societal reality offer only more or less consumption, but in any case only very strongly limited possibilities for individual solidarity and for ecological behavior.

We have to consider at least the following: Large groups of the population, elites, also members of capital oligarchies know that a policy of “business as usual” is hardly possible and all attempts to ignore that or to extend the “business as usual” would lead to a further increase of the already the huge social, ecological and global problems. Therefore, different social and political actors, agents, groups are searching for alternatives and understand “alternatives”, but they do this in very different ways. This larger debate is extremely contradictory, but it offers a chance for the left wing forces capable of dealing with contradictions. The challenge is to make use of these contradictions and to grow stronger by active involvement in real political struggles. And the way to take for that basically consists in bringing together critically thinking people who work in very different fields, especially in science, in consumer, social and ecological initiatives and – in the economic life of the society, especially in production.

Our intervention into the on-going scholarly and political debates should aim in particular to influence and cooperate with the “authentic” sustainability advocates – with the honest supporters of the Brundtland report – and of the more far-reaching Green New Deal projects, highlighting the interests of the socially and globally weakest and the need for a drastic absolute reduction of resource consumption in the global industrial regions. At the same time, we have to realize the common and open-ended work on a transformational concept, which is to be capable of translating our vision of a society of personally free and socially equal people living in solidarity with one another and dealing responsibly with the natural conditions of life in their daily practice: Socio-ecological reconstruction, and the socio-ecological transformation that begins with it, are the bases for our concepts of a profound and complex reshaping and reconfiguration of the social division of labor and of the metabolic processes of society with nature.

“Socio-ecological reconstruction” means nothing less than the beginning of the development of co-operation in solidarity, which uses local and regional resources to satisfy the needs of the population living in the area. Such a development would consistently reduce and minimize the burdens upon the biosphere which have emerged as the social and external costs of development. Such a social division of labor and such a use of resources would involve primary local and regional development, and would necessarily include the use of renewable energies. In this process, labour would be newly valorized, newly distributed and re-organized – among and between women and men, within the communities, between regions and states, and, on a global scale, between economic macro-regions and blocks.

The first, and elementary step for this is go to where people are already acting, here and now, in greater solidarity, and in a more socially and ecologically responsible manner than the mainstream of our societies, so as to help strengthen and expand such initiatives and trends. Such a practice of building a real, alternative has to build upon civic and social activities especially in four interrelated dimensions: *Public funding/social security systems, Development aid, Budget consolidation and Debt cancellation*. It will have to address effectively

- The comprehensive issue of financial markets,

- The “special projects” of the ruling forces, such as privatization, public-private partnerships (PPP), mega-projects, and local and regional problems; these often have to do with energy, transportation, agro-business, and “security/defense,” and hence with the competitive national positions of the causers of problems, and with concrete technologies and investments
- Poverty/social exclusion, discrimination and repression/violence – especially by advocating and implementing sustainable social, democratic and ecological minimum standards; and
- Struggles against existing or planned socially and ecologically destructive projects/practices of governments and international institutions (EU, WTO), such as the TISA, TIIP, EU Services Directives ...

Any further analysis of current social activities points to the consolidation of three interconnected strategic areas of action referred to in the contribution before:

- the struggle for democratic, social and ecological standards;
- the democratization of the public space and of political decision-making processes over priorities and principles for the mobilization and use of public finances;
- and the movement for active and participatory local and regional development.

The binding links for such a strategy are participatory processes and struggles for the commons. These are struggles against further financialisation that atomize the members of the society and increase the power of the most powerful on the financial markets – it means the oligarchies behind the 4+2 connection. In this respect, political engagement for the structural improvement of the conditions of life of the socially and globally poorest and for the organization of the actors involved in these processes should be particularly emphasized.

Political confrontations, the struggles against privatization, destructive projects, corporate practices, mega-projects etc., primarily take place at the local or regional levels. Local and regional development is highly relevant for political activity against social and ecological destruction, and thus for the critique and reconstruction of the economies of the energy, transportation and agricultural sectors, as well as for the dismantling of the MIC/security connection – in fact, of the entire 4+2 connection. This is where citizens can and do operate effectively as collective actors, resisting the implementation of destructive projects, mobilizing at the same time for concrete problem-solving and for the formulation of alternatives. This does not imply a retreat to a restricted horizon, or a “not-in-my-backyard” attitude: On the contrary – in defending their own interests, they are forced from the outset to “think European,” because their own concrete problems always have an European dimension, explicitly or latently.

Moreover, local and regional development is important because it constitutes the real opposite existing along-side with globalization, in particular in the six economic sectors named above. I have already spoken about this in my previous contributions. Labour power is not as mobile as capital. It is capable of meeting capital's needs only to a certain extent – and it may itself seek to limit that extent still further. For the social life of the municipalities and the regions, the prevailing social, democratic and ecological standards and the decisions taken on public finance are of key importance. The local and state levels are the arena where actors from various social and political groups come together most immediately, and where alliances at the state, national, EU and global levels are needed in order to impose social standards, rules and laws on public finances – including help for the global poor – and in order to win a perspective for the reconstruction of sustainable economic structures and an appropriate ways of life.

The political confrontations and struggles around the setting or enhancing of social, ecological and democratic minimum standards reflect or change the existing socio-political relations of forces, and their real dynamics. After all, set standards imply the right to make one's claims effective, and therefore they are the object of demands by concrete actors, with their specific interests. However, they can also define limits of what is admissible, or they may also be re-articulated as demands for concrete limits (e.g. maximum working hours). The setting or changing of standards involves complicated processes:

First, those affected articulate what they and others regard as necessary and desirable in order to be able to mitigate or solve problems in a sustainable manner, for example to redress shortcomings in public services, or to reduce traffic noise.

Second, the collective formulation of demands may be at issue – such as a democratic comprehensive school, or the introduction of limits for admissible noise levels, which are primarily addressed to state or supra-state and political institutions, but also to other actors, such as corporations and multinationals, etc. These addressees should accept these demands as binding stipulations for their action, they should use them as the basis for legislation, and effectively regulate their implementation.

Third, struggles must be carried out to realize and reinforce demands for concrete democratic and social rights, for social and ecological minimum standards, and for limits upon socially and ecologically destructive actors.

The following table illustrates by means of examples the role of standards in the confrontation with the “destructive quartet”

Energy economy	Transportation economy	Agriculture	Military-industrial complex
Timelines for exiting from nuclear and carbon-based energy. Reduction of the consumption of particular fuels Increase in energy efficiency. Boosting share of renewable energy in overall power production. Reduction of CO ₂ - and other harmful emissions Boosting share of decentralized producers in energy production.	Reduction of long-distance transport of goods. Boosting share of rail and public transport in total transportation. Reduction of CO ₂ and other harmful emissions. Reduction of land use Decrease in energy consumption in transportation.	Reduction in use of chemicals and plant-protection materials. Phase-out of genetic technology. Reduction of land and water use for animal raising. Observance of animal rights. Agro-diversity. Reduction of CO ₂ and other harmful emissions. Preservation of soil quality. Increase of the tree population.	Cutback in offensive capacities. Abolition of ABC weapons. Abolition of weapons that affect climate and weather. Cutback of troop and personnel levels and armaments orders.

The table shows, among other things, that the confrontation over technology, related investments and, hence, public finance – both over public budgets and with the actors in the financial markets – is of particularly great importance. When you remember what I have already told you about the new activities of EU institutions as parts of capital oligarchies forcing financialization, key technologies, militarization, deregulation and a few aimed regulation or re-regulation, then the problems are, in fact, increasing. It becomes obviously that at this very moment we can and have “only” have to say: STOP! This is not attractive and in the parliamentary and intellectual debate we have to say and could say what is needed and what is possible as a first step. And on local and regional levels as in the parliaments we should use all the small possibilities to act, but the only thing that will really be heard in the entire society, is “STOP!”. But the challenges are extending further:

- Taking the “Ukraine conflict” as a starting point to discuss the economic aspects of international security systems, the underlying interests of the economic agencies involved, and to attempt developing a constructive approach to the issues of energy security and industrial conversion, especially under ecological and peace requirements;

- Addressing the issues of Energy Sufficiency and of Renewable Energy Sources more systematically as a first step to broader conversion processes, with a special urgency due to the on-going changes of strategy in preparation by the new European Commission;

- Re-discussing our findings together with interested trade unionists and with activists in social movements in order to develop concrete strategies for fighting poverty and social exclusion, as well as violence against people, climate change and vanishing bio-diversity at the same time.

“Concrete strategies” here will have to mean strategies capable of starting on local and regional levels, continuing on the national budget and decision-making level and, in parallel, mobilizing against destructive EU policies asking for concrete alternatives to the prevailing policies.