

## **Time use in an Alternative Degrowth Society**

### **Wolfgang J. Fellner**

This paper is part of the special session called: “Exploring Transformation to a Radical Alternative Gesellschaft: Economy, Ethics, Ecology” (RAGE). All papers in this session will be 10 minutes and presented in the first hour of the session. They are split between introductory and topic based presentations. Presentations are meant to guide the discussion of the following five questions in breakout groups that will take place in the second hour of the special session.

1. Drivers: What is driving the current system?
2. Objectives: What needs to change?
3. Barriers: What are the barriers to transforming the current system to a more social ecological economy?
4. Means: How can change be achieved?
5. Actors Role: Who needs to take action and what action should they take?

The overall aim is to explore whether the degrowth community can form a synthesis for a radical alternative world view and how to achieve this.

### **Abstract**

A time use perspective in economics has to recognise that time is more than an input to commodities, produced by households. Time is not money! If anything, time is life. How we spend our time provides us with skills as well as information. It determines the formation of habits and preferences. The activities we pursue with great motivation and enthusiasm, be it paid work or any other activity, substantially influence our personal abilities, attitudes and perception of the world. Dealing with time use has the capacity to reveal cultural patterns detrimental to a degrowth society. It also has the capacity to find out about necessary societal changes. In this short presentation I try to make concrete recommendations how time use has to be changed to achieve an alternative degrowth society. Those recommendations also require institutional change and changes in corporate behaviour.

### **Work to earn enough but no longer than that**

An important pattern in capitalist societies is the “earn and spend cycle”. It basically states that people do not try to earn enough money to meet their consumption practices. People earn as much as they can and adjust their spending to what they have earned. Since the 1980ies Austria’s real GDP per head more than doubled. People could have reduced their working hours without a deterioration of their material living conditions substantially. Nevertheless, in the same period of time, normal working hours have stayed the same and long hours have increased dramatically. This phenomenon highlights the incentive to “make money” as a means to social status, power and independence. Another incentive that focuses people’s attention on the activity ‘paid work’ is the threat of being unemployed. Instead of trying to earn as much as possible, social institutions should encourage and enable people to become aware of how much money they need and which activities to spend it on. Breaking the vicious circle of raising money and social status may increase people’s contentment in many ways. Besides reducing the speed of a devastating race for social status that increases financial inequality, it would free substantial amounts of time for other activities than paid work.

### **Become less dependent and able to live with less**

In ecological economics reductions in resource requirements related to consumption practices are often associated with the ideas of ‘sufficiency’ and ‘subsistence’. Subsistence requires for example spending time on growing your own food. It makes people less dependent on

monetary income. Sufficiency can be interpreted as exercising activities that are less resource intensive. Reading a book (from the library) is far less resource intensive than driving a motorbike for fun. Sufficiency can also be associated with exercising the same activities in less resource intensive ways. During the summer month people can swim in a close by lake or fly to the Caribbean to swim there. Watching birds may just require binoculars or it may require extreme amounts of resources when it is done at the other end of the world.

**“Rent and share” instead of “buy and own”**

Irrespective of which and where activities are performed, their necessary resource requirements crucially depend on product life times and use-intensities of the involved products. To substantially increase use intensities requires sharing products. Product life time is largely technically determined. Reducing resource requirements for activities requires that companies provide long lasting products as well as sophisticated systems of sharing. Institutional structures that guide corporate behaviour have to be altered in that direction.