



Crisis strategies in Europe

Authoritarian neoliberalism, green capitalism, or the good life for all?

Ulrich Brand – *It's about politics!* - WUK - 6 May 2016

- **starting point: the multiple crisis of neoliberal capitalism**
- **different answers to the crisis**
 - austerity; authoritarian neoliberalism ... one major stabiliser
 - (neo-extractivism) Not in detail → discussion?
 - Green Economy ... it's structural limits
 - socio-ecological transformation
- **the example of Degrowth („destitution“?)**
- **some aspects of emancipatory struggles in Europe**
- **final thoughts**



multiple crisis of capitalism

- **economic and financial crisis**
more severe through austerity politics ... next part
- **crisis of the political ... huge desintegration → fear of many people of representation, of crisis management**
- **environmental, climate and potential resource crisis**
failure of sustainable development, „Rio type of politics“
- **crisis of gender relations**
crisis consequences are „cushioned“ along gender relations (e.g. working poor and house work)
- **refugees cause much irritation; intensification of crisis of political ... strengthens right-wing / neo-fascist answers**



Different answers to the crisis

... „hegemonic projects“ in sense of Gramsci

1. strategies of **neoliberal competitiveness** that turns authoritarian (Global Europe, Lisbon; US)
2. **(new) neomercantilist developmentalism**: state capitalism; still world market oriented (China, Latin America) ... one version: **resource neo-extractivism**, e.g. „oil socialism“,
3. A progressive strategy: **Green New Deal, Green Economy**
4. More profound: **social-ecological transformation**

Others: growing militarisation (Russia, Colombia)



authoritarian neoliberalism

- **EU: neoliberal mode of integration; highly institutionalised, besond actors (Maastricht, Lisbon Treaty)**
- **Integration of European periphery in EU: strengthens center!**
- **„neoliberal constitutionalism“: liberalisation / deregulation; economic and currency union**
- **L. Oberndorfer: „material core“ of neoliberal hegemony is/was**
 - orientation at competitiveness at any cost, gains in productivity
 - fragmentation of the subaltern
 - securing of income and demand
 - increase of public and private debt → financialisation
- **these strategies in danger since 2008**



- **crisis management secures dominant interests**
- **authoritarian neoliberalism through austerity and competitive devaluation within Europe**
 - Budget constraints for national states; state budgets must be approved by Troika
 - Constraints for new public debts
 - Pacts for competitiveness → „structural reforms“
- > **authoritarian competition statism** (Poulantzas / Oberndorfer)
- **fragmentation within Europe**
- **not any longer hegemonic but „just“ ruling ... active consent weaker**



- there is **resistance** but, in principle, passivation of people
- in countries like Austria or Germany: **passive consent**
- repression or cooptation of social movements

- Syriza (1): difficulty to act at European level
- Syriza (2): how to challenge social structures, state form and develop post-capitalist project

role of emancipatory struggles - workshop tomorrow

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antinomy for emancipatory politics
„imperial mode of living“

The global North defends its form of living, i.e. the imperial form of living: access to global resources and cheap labour

- Deeply embedded in production and consumption patterns, in everyday practices of people and in societal relationships of forces (capital-labour, gender relations)
- It presumes an unlimited access to resources (legally, via open force)

it tends to get universalized but it is not universaliseable

Green Economy ?

- **different approaches:** more Keynesian (New Economics Foundation, Greens), more liberal (UNEP)
 - **crucial idea is that „state“ should create adequate framework for „markets“ – more economic policy than transformation of mode of development**
 - **in line with global resource management (FCCC) and ecological modernisation**
 - **emphasis on „green“ capital, efficiency and innovation**
 - **new spheres of capital accumulation**
- **important project - imaginary**, but also dangers: to convert to capitalist modernisation project of some countries at expense of others
- to promote authoritarian politics



What is left out of the GE project?



- predominance of competition, competitiveness and geopolitics: natural resources are part of world market competition (e.g. „fracking“ in U.S.)
 - trust in existing institutions like capitalist firms and state
 - Structural limits of steering capacity of (internationalised) **state ...** competition state, resource state
 - imperial mode of production and living is still hegemonic
- > not an emancipatory project



main point

- Lots of debate about Green Economy project: has structural limits
- **might contribute to a modernisation, i.e. partial greening of capitalism ...**
- but in a selective, power-shaped way and without really solving environmental problems
- complementary to „brown economy“



emancipatory perspective
socio-ecological transformation

- **root causes of multiple crisis in manifold social relations of power and domination ... dynamics of capitalism:** its productivity and destructivity
- **reorganisation of social relations spheres of societal reproduction**
 - food and agriculture, housing and clothing, mobility and communication etc.
- **democracy - process, learning, including forms of production**
 - participation of people in planning, in protection
 - who decides today over development path? – against authoritarian ways
- One example: debate of **degrowth ... destitution?**: new field of emancipatory action (St.Nowotny, G.Raunig)

- Experience: **growth does not lead any longer to prosperity, but**
 - Polarization; stress; illness and burn-out
 - Growth is jobless
 - Environmental destruction
 - Even economic destabilisation: financial markets, also „real“ economy (competition for resources, overproduction etc.)
- **need for different forms to create prosperity and stability**



DEGROWTH

Is a “a multi-faceted **political project** that aspires to mobilise support for a change of direction, at the macro-level of economic and political institutions and at the micro level of personal values and aspirations. Income and material comfort is to be reduced for many along the way, but the goal is that this is not experienced as welfare loss” (G. Kallis)

1) Critique of current dominant development model

- **Against capitalist driven growth and competitiveness at any price**; globally: against neoliberalism; in Europe: against austerity
- **Comprehensive perspectives ... not just economic activities**: linked to classes, gender, state, subjectivities
- **To be transformed is a global development model**:
 - bound together by imperial and inter-societal **politics**
 - bound together by **capitalist world market**: „tendency of capital to create the world market“
 - bound together by **mode of living**, everyday practices (especially in Global North)
 - Powerful **imaginaries**



2) Critique of „progressive productivism“

- **Left-leaning orientation: growth, strong productivism, then distribution**
- **Reference to postwar period: Fordism**
- **Little attention to environmental impacts, concerns ...
Greece: resource extractivism**



3) *It's about politics*

Focus on actors and conflicts

- **Environmental debate often in terms of „humanity“, „planetary boundaries“, „need for cooperation“**
 - most recently Green Economy
- **Existing institutions like state and market, like actors and power relations are not questions**
- **Degrowth** perspective questions this and focuses on power relations, social and environmental actors and conflicts
- **Basis of alternatives; no trust in enlightened or concerned elites**



final thoughts

- Considering emerging **radical subjectivities** ... but not only focus
- How to link **struggles / alternative** approaches with **institutional level** (more than state)
 - dismantling neoliberal EU / austerity
 - Giving durability to emancipatory achievements
- Key seems question of **democracy**; emancipation means to be responsible, be part of society, be able to participate
- **new frame / story** – linked to programme, strategies and concrete initiatives
 - Social-ecological transformation
 - Good Living, Well-Being for all



Thank you for your attention!

***If interested, take copy of
„Brave Green World. The Green Economy myths“ (Berlin 2015)***



2) Ecological crisis understood much broader

- part of multiple crisis
- not a crisis of carrying capacity / planetary boundaries
- but crisis of dominant forms of appropriation of nature → capitalist commodification, valorisation, unequal process
- Currently, destruction of nature especially an issue when a problem for capital valorization
- Danger: ecological crisis can be dealt with from „capitalist perspective“ ... Green Capitalism
- **limits to growth have to be put politically**



Links

<https://www.rosalux.de/publication/38457/brave-green-world.html>

<http://www.boell.de/de/content/die-multiple-krise>

<https://www.blaetter.de/archiv/jahrgaenge/2016/mai/lateinamerika-das-ende-der-linken-epoche>

<http://futureswewant.net/ulrich-brand-green-economy/>

<http://leipzig.degrowth.org/en/?s=Ulrich+Brand&lang=en>