

Puzzle of Alternatives - Examples of Initiatives for Change

Accompanying material for the workshop “Caring4future”



Overview

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Resisting exploitation

#MeToo

The hashtag #MeToo went viral on social media in 2017 after several women* publicly reported sexual assault by a US film producer. The phrase "Me Too" was coined in 2006 as part of a campaign by activist Tarana Burke to promote empowerment through empathy among African-American women who had experienced sexual violence. The hashtag has since been used millions of times worldwide and has sparked a broad social debate about sexist assaults.

Protest against the Famatina gold mine

In 2005, the Canadian company "Barrick Gold" wanted to open a large gold mine on Mount Famatina in northwest Argentina. This would have had massive ecological and social consequences, significantly endangering the regional drinking water supply. The local population resisted, founded a self-organised neighbourhood council (vecinos autoconvocados) and organised various protest actions. The provincial government passed a law the following year banning open-pit mines. However, as the interest of multinational mining companies in the area did not diminish, resistance continued. In 2017, civil society organisations from the region demanded that Mount Famatina be declared a national park.

DREBT - Representation of the interests of Live-In care workers

The organisation DREPT is a self-organised group of Romanian Live-In caregivers and activists in Austria who fight for better working conditions. The group emerged from within the Live-In care community to improve their working conditions to give protection against exploitation. For example, they demand employment for all migrant Live-In care workers to overcome the prevailing pseudo-self-employment. The organisation's main services include education for the rights and activities of caregivers, as well as individual counselling and support, crisis intervention, press work and political lobbying.

Zelena akcija / Friends of the Earth Croatia

The Croatian organisation Zelena akcija is part of the European network known as Friends of the Earth. It aims to protect the environment and encourage development towards a low-carbon society, guided by the principles of social justice and systemic change. They work on a local, national and global level by encouraging change through campaigns, non-violent direct actions and various other projects. They mainly demand public participation in environmental decision-making and improving the quality of life in Croatia.

FairSorgen

FairSorgen is an Austrian alliance of organisations and committed individuals dedicated to fight for better conditions for care work. The alliance demands that care work becomes the focus of societal attention and that sufficient money and resources are made available for it. Unpaid care work (e.g. care of children) should be reduced and distributed fairly. People who need special support, such as single parents, people affected by violence and unemployed workers, are the principal candidates..

FairSorgen specifically campaigns for a gender-equitable budget. The alliance calls on the Austrian government to adopt a feminist economic stimulus package of 12 billion euros to deal with the consequences of the Corona pandemic. The proposal provides for the expansion of educational institutions, care, protection against violence and therapy access points, as well as an increase in minimum security and unemployment benefits. The alliance is active at national and local levels and regularly organises various activities (workshops, demonstrations etc.).

Black Voices petition for a referendum

Black Voices is a non-party initiative in Austria. The petition aims for an equal participation of black people, people of African origin and people of colour in all areas of society. The central demand is the introduction of a National Action Plan against Racism, in which anti-racist measures are drawn up for the areas of public, police, flight and migration, health, education and the labour market. Through this way, structural and institutional racism and the barriers they create are attempted to be dismantled. At the same time, the representation and equality of BPoC (Black & People of Colour) is be ensured.

Are You Syrious?

“Are You Syrious” is a volunteer-run media and advocacy group active in different European countries, such as Greece, France, Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia. It relies on its readers to share important news from the ground. In Croatia, they have a free shop for refugees and other underprivileged people, a volunteer-run integration centre with many different workshops, daily volunteer shifts in Porin reception centre in Zagreb and many other activities.

Deutsche Wohnen & Co. enteignen (Expropriate Deutsche Wohnen)

"Deutsche Wohnen & Co enteignen (DWE for short) is a citizens' initiative in Berlin that has achieved a successful referendum on the expropriation of private housing companies in September 2021. The initiative's demand is that over 240,000 flats be socialised. Socialisation means the transfer of private property into social ownership. The triggers for the campaign were rising rent costs and the (imminent) displacement of people who can no longer afford their housing. The campaign became renowned, among other things, because of its successful, broad-based mobilisation: It established itself as a grassroots movement, in which people from different backgrounds, political attitudes and ages came together and organised themselves. Although the concrete implementation of the referendum is considered unrealistic by some lawyers, the campaign has been crucial in increasing the pressure on Berlin's policy on rent issues.

Resistance against the clearing of the primaeval Carpathian forests in Poland

The Carpathian forests in the south of Poland are among the last primaeval forests in Europe. It is still one of the wildest corners of Poland, where bears live alongside wolves, lynxes and wildcats in the shade of mighty firs and centuries-old Beech trees. Unfortunately, the Carpathian Primaeval Forest is now for some only a source of planks and hunting trophies. Wild forest is a raw material in industrial societies and the forest is increasingly and irrevocably destroyed by regular clearings. Various organisations have been trying to stop the clearing. They demand the protection of the forest and want it to be treated as common good and not as an economic resource.

After an extensive scientific inventory of the unique qualities of the Carpathian nature, talks with the responsible administrative unit and the demands made by several organisations and social movements were of no use, in 2021 the activists started to chain themselves to the trees in a manner of civil disobedience to protect them.

Experimenting with alternatives

Friendship benches

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that 300 million people worldwide suffer from depression. Particularly in the countries in Global South, there is a shortage of psychologically trained health workers. In Zimbabwe, 12 psychologists are currently catering to a country of 15 million people - in a country where many people are affected by colonial trauma. In response to this lack of formal care infrastructure, the concept of "friendship benches" was developed. Since 2006, elderly women* have been trained as primary psychological caregivers based on locally anchored ideas for strengthening the soul and spirit. The women offer counselling sessions in their communities. The impact of this programme has been scientifically confirmed various times and has been taken up and adapted by countries around the globe, including in New York, where people from marginalised groups in particular offer low-threshold counselling opportunities for members of their community.

Farmfluencers

Farmfluencers is a multi-media project that tries to reframe agricultural topics to support the ecosocial transformation and preservation of smallholder farms in South Tyrol. Their vision is sustainable agriculture in South Tyrol, Italy, Europe and the rest of the world. Farmfluencers introduce and represent small, local farmers and tell (new) stories about sustainable agriculture via podcast episodes, video clips, and social media. In this way, they aim to encourage their audience for sustainable future agriculture.

Models of collective child-rearing: Familyship.org

The traditional nuclear family setup places enormous work and responsibility on parents - especially mothers. Furthermore, the idea of the nuclear family usually excludes queer parents. What counter-models are there for raising children together? One example is familyship.org. The platform focuses on the desire to have children. Here, people who want to start a family on the basis of friendship get to know each other. Sexual orientation or marital status is of secondary importance. The platform provides information on alternative family models and is the largest active German-speaking community on the topic of co-parenting.

House of Solidarity - Casa della Solidarietà

Since 2002, the House of Solidarity "Luis Lintner" (HdS) in Brixen has been unbureaucratically offering, direct financial and social support to around 150 people every year. The HdS tries to live solidarity concretely, promote integration, experiment with sustainability and alleviate needs efficiently. It strives for balance and peaceful coexistence between different cultures, generations and religions. Volunteer work is fundamental to the project, even though some people are employed to guarantee a stable structure. Various events and activities take place in Brixen every year which cover different topics and are open to all interested people.

Future Pact for South Tyrol -Patto futuro

The initiative “Zukunftspakt für Südtirol” (Future Pact for South Tyrol) is an independent association of citizens who are fighting for a sustainability-transformation and a crisis-resistant and solidarity-based society. The goal is creating a pact for the future between citizens and political representatives. Within the framework of this pact, a sustainability plan should be created that is publicly financed and includes agenda points such as a regional circular economy, a sustainable transport system and active participation in social decision-making processes. Over 1500 people already support the Future Pact.

“Passport Does not matter”- election

More than one million people in Austria cannot vote because they do not have Austrian citizenship. To draw attention to this democratic failure, various civil society organisations launched the “Pass Egal” (passport does not matter) election for the first time in 2013. Since then, it has taken place parallelly to many political elections in the country. All people of voting age can cast their votes, including those who are excluded from the respective official election due to their non-Austrian citizenship. In a way, the official elections are complemented and completed by the “Pass Egal” elections. Even if these votes are not officially taken into account, this is an impressive way of drawing attention to this imbalance.

Democratic Supermarkets: MILA and Supercoop

MILA is an initiative in Vienna to set up a self-organised supermarket. Democratic supermarket means that the supermarket belongs to its members; they make decisions together and manage it collaboratively. MILA will be set up as a cooperative, and all interested people will be able to buy cooperative shares, regardless of their financial means. MILA will offer opening hours of a conventional supermarket. The members determine the assortment of the supermarket; values such as animal welfare, and ecological and social sustainability are to be taken into account. A similar concept in Berlin has taken hold, called “supercoop”.

Climate councils

Climate councils have been launched in various countries, such as Ireland, France, the UK and Austria, to advance climate policy from the bottom-up. These councils are non-permanent bodies of around 100-150 people. The council participants are selected by lottery and are supposed to represent the diversity of the population. With experts' support, this group of people develops policy recommendations. Studies show that such democratic instruments significantly increase the public acceptance of political decisions.

Citizen Energy Cooperatives

Citizen Energy Cooperatives are actors in the energy industry in the legal form of a cooperative, which primarily pursue the goal of decentralised, group-independent and ecological energy production. They are a form of citizen participation, predominantly at the municipal or regional level, and offer the opportunity to participate in the energy transition actively. In Europe, in addition to Germany, citizen cooperatives exist in Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, Austria, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, Spain and the United Kingdom, albeit to varying degrees. In the rest of Europe, especially in Eastern Europe, citizen cooperatives are only rudimentary or non-existent.

CSA - Community Supported Agriculture

In the CSA model, farmers join forces with consumers: The consumers pay for the products (e.g. vegetables, flour, eggs, etc.) in advance at the beginning of the year and then receive a weekly harvest share that varies depending on the harvest. The farmers thus have planning security and are no longer at the mercy of the price and growing pressure of the market.

Mietshäuser Syndikat (Tenements Syndicate)

The “Mietshäuser Syndikat” has its origins in the squatters' era of the 1980s. The basic idea is to permanently withdraw flats and houses from the real estate market and thus, from speculation, and to transfer them into collective ownership instead. In housing projects that follow this model, tenants become their own landlords and can live in their houses indefinitely, cheaply and in a self-determined way. The house purchases are financed through direct loans, i.e. small loans from private individuals, for whom this is an ethical way of investing money. There already exist over 160 of these projects in Germany.

Degrowth Movement

Degrowth or post-growth describes an economic approach that aims at the well-being of all and preserves the ecological basis of life. This requires a reduction of economic growth and the questioning of the growth paradigm (in the sense of "higher, faster, further"). An important demand of the Degrowth movement is a new understanding of work. The movement aims to reduce paid working hours in order to have time for childcare, growing vegetables or caring for the elderly.

The degrowth movement is made up of several different actors who are committed to the dissemination of post-growth ideas and strategies. Educational work is a central approach. Since 2008, the movement has organised several international degrowth conferences, most of which have taken place in Europe. The conferences often consist of artistic, activist, practical and scientific contributions to illuminate the conference topics from an interdisciplinary perspective. In Vienna, an association was also founded within the framework of the organisation of the online conference "Degrowth Vienna 2020", which subsequently launched several follow-up projects, such as a series of events, discussions and a book project.

Repair Café

What do you do with a chair that has a broken leg? With a toaster that no longer works? A woollen jumper with moth holes? Throw it away - or would it be better to repair it? Repair Cafés are voluntary meetings where participants fix their broken things alone or with others. The main goal is to counteract the mass throwing away of consumer goods and to draw attention to phenomena such as "planned obsolescence". This is the "planned breakdown" of goods because they intentionally contain low-quality parts. People with different expertise can be found in repair cafés: Tinkerers, sewing talents and bike-lovers meet there. You can always learn a lot on the spot. Moreover, repair cafés not only strengthen handicraft skills but also serve as a meeting place in the neighbourhood.

Repair voucher

In a pilot project in 2022, the Austrian government started the program "repair voucher" to make repairing objects financially more attractive by contributing 50 % of the costs (max. 100€). sUsers can redeem the voucher for repairs in selected businesses and workshops part of the repair network. The repair voucher can be used for different types of repairs, e.g. household appliances, IT products, sports equipment or bicycle, etc.

anchoring structures that support solidarity

Sumak kawsay (buen vivir) in the Ecuadorian Constitution

The indigenous Latin American concept of Buen Vivir or Sumak Kawsay, the "good life", represents a counter-proposal to the currently prevailing development model. At its core is a new understanding of the relationship between people and nature and the importance of interpersonal relationships. The concept overcomes the artificial division between nature and humans and acknowledges them as inseparably linked.

The concept found concrete application, when a new constitution was adopted in Ecuador in 2008 and in Bolivia in 2009, in which the right to a good life ("derechos del buen vivir") is enshrined. This includes the right to food, a healthy environment, water, communication, education, housing and health. "Nature has the right to regenerate", reads one article. Anyone who violates this, is therefore acting unconstitutionally.

Care income

A long-standing (and sometimes controversial) demand of feminist movements is a basic income that financially values and secures all care activities: a care income. In the Corona Pandemic, Global Women Strike's grassroots network launched a worldwide campaign and petitioned for such a care income. A universally paid care income thus introduces a financial recognition of the care work that always has to be done and has been exploited so far, without transferring it 1:1 into wage labour and thus into the logic of markets.

Solidarity-based citizens' insurance

In Germany, various proposals for a "general, uniform and solidarity-based" insurance system are being discussed under the main subject "solidarity-based citizens' insurance" (cf. Butterwege). The core idea is that instead of parallel, private and public insurances, there exists only one, common public system, that includes long-term care, health and pension insurance. A broad base of insurance receivers supports such a system, thus equal services can be applied to all types of income (wage income, interest, dividends, rental income,...); the contributions are progressively graded according to income level, and there is no maximum contribution limit at the top. If people lack the financial means, the state takes over the contribution. Compulsory insurance (according to Butterwege) covers all "resident citizens" with permanent residence status and all activity groups, from freelancers, new forms of (pseudo-) self-employed, as well as civil servants.

Makikuna

In the indigenous groups of the Andean and Amazonian regions, many examples of everyday solidarity can be found. One of these is the practice of "makikuna". Makikuna refers to a type of support that involves the entire community, i.e. the extended family, friends and the neighbourhood. It involves spiritual support when it is most needed, especially in unforeseen situations and emergencies.

Neighbourhood Support Buurtzorg

The Dutch non-profit company Buurtzorg tries to embed professional, mobile care work in local relationships. For example, caregivers put patients in touch with neighbours or make an appointment with a local hairdressing salon for them. Care, therefore, goes beyond purely medical care. Patients are cared for by one or two permanent carers. Relationships between care giver and care receiver develop that help to identify problems at an early stage. By working in small, self-organised teams, the nurses can organise their working hours flexibly and adapt them to their personal circumstances and needs, such as looking after their own children. This is one of the reasons why Buurtzorg has been voted frequently the most attractive employer by its employees. Buurtzorg's alternative care practice understands caring as an activity to help people build a network of supporters and strengthen surrounding contacts. It also makes people less dependent on the services of professional care. In the Buurtzorg case, for example, visiting times with doctors decreased by 40%.

Feminismo Comunitario

"Feminismo Comunitario" is a feminist movement originating in Bolivia pioneered by indigenous women ("Mujeres Creando Comunidad", i.e. "Women who create the community") and has also been taken up in Guatemala. In Feminismo Comunitario, women's* rights are seen as a cross-gender demand and are especially emphasised from a community perspective - the oppression of one person is seen as damage to the whole community. As long as women are not free and independent within the community, there can be no autonomy for indigenous communities. The representatives travel through different countries to exchange views with other indigenous women* about the oppressions experienced by them and to share their political proposals with other people.

Remunicipalization of urban energy supply

After the expected benefits (cost reductions, better quality) of privatising public utility systems failed to materialise at the end of the 1990s, a phase of remunicipalization began in Germany. Remunicipalisation means that public resources such as energy and water supply, housing and transport are returned to public ownership. One advantage of this is that ecological and social criteria can be bindingly incorporated into the design of these supply systems. An example of such a process of remunicipalisation can be found in Berlin. In 1997, the state of Berlin sold its shares in the municipal electricity supply company “Bewag” to an industrial association. In 2011, 50 organisations, including BUND and Attac, formed the Berlin Energy Table to shape an ecological, social and democratic electricity supply for Berlin. To this end, the alliance organised a referendum, which was successful after facing several hurdles. After many years of negotiations with the private operator about a resale of the energy networks, Berlin bought back Stromnetz Berlin GmbH in 2021. The state of Berlin now also wants to remunicipalize district heating and gas. Other remunicipalisation processes are taking place in Hamburg, for example.

Mondragón Corporación Cooperativa

Mondragón Corporación Cooperativa (MCC) is the largest cooperative and the seventh largest company in Spain. More than 100 companies from different sectors belong to the MCC, e.g. mechanical engineering and the automotive industry. This makes it the largest productive cooperative in the world.

The employees of the MCC participate in the share capital of the cooperative business association. They are involved in the decisions of the management staff. The Basque MCC cooperatives have a people-oriented character, intended to put work and not capital in the foreground. This quality contributes to a positive work environment that increases motivation and productivity in the enterprises. Job creation still has priority over capital interests. Thus, in contrast to other industrial companies, no job cuts have been made since the cooperative was founded.

Libraries

Public libraries are an essential part of the social infrastructure of a city or town. They offer access to knowledge and entertainment, largely independent of age, gender, origin, educational background and economic resources. Libraries promote exchange instead of ownership and do not usually function according to classic market rules, as the public heavily subsidises them. Libraries provide freely accessible spaces without a compulsion to consume and enable both retreat and encounter. Some cities have also started experimenting with “libraries of things” to extend this sharing logic on other devices of our daily lives.