# Growl in Vienna: Work in a degrowth society

The GROWL course in Vienna deconstructed the traditional model of work and labour in capitalistic societies and presented ideas and initiatives for reconstructing the concept under a degrowth perspective.

We share some impressions, impulses and lessons learned as participants of this course.

WORK

The traditional model in capitalistic societies is characterized by the antagonism between capital and labour as analyzed in Marxist theory and by the neglecting of other aspects in life necessary for societies to survive, e.g. care as analyzed by feminist theories.

From the point of view of personal experience, in our current society we face the neoliberal organization of work and its impact on our personal lives.

In neoliberal business, simplified you have two options: up or out. Career, also may be called race for rats. This running wheel looks from inside like a job ladder. Middle managers are forced to fire people or to get fired, and confidence artists sell finance instruments to those who want more money or are afraid that they have none when they are retired as social security systems may not provide them their used living standard. Burn out is quite common as people are stressed when they have too much work and pressure, as well as depressions when they lose their jobs. With their jobs they lose their identity. In our society many people define themselves with their paid jobs: postman, farmer, lawyer, and often also their self-worth. No paid job, no value, no sense.

We put the focus on those following modules that we liked most:

MODULES

1. Degrowth walk in Vienna:

In the beginning of the use, the participants we made a tour through Vienna with different stops where we got some inputs for degrowth examples in Vienna. Starting at the WUK, a former factory and an alternative center for workshops, gatherings, concerts and activism of any kind, a clown and actor was telling about his experience to set up a theatre project. In the Votivpark we were reflecting how Vienna is dealing with refugees and how we use technologies without reflecting them. At the next stop at the Donaukanal we met a representative of grassroot movements that fight against commercialization of public space. After that we had a discussion next to the waste incinerator plant Spittelau to demonstrate how waste is transformed to energy for heating. Last not least we had a philosophic and economic talk at the former university of business administration and economics.

Get out of your box to see what is already existing!

1. Movie “Frohes Schaffen” (enjoy your work)

One of the highlights was the public viewing of the movie “Frohes Schaffen” by Konstantin Faigle and the discussion afterwards with the director, Franz Schandl and Claudia Paiha.

Two topics presented in the movie had a strong impact on our discussions and reflections.

The first one was the extension of the terminus work. In particular in German language the terminus “work” was used for paid activities. Now this word is transferred into many aspects of daily life and used for all kinds of activites, e.g. relationship work, sadness work, etc…) and often connotated with pain and the need to achieve something, to have a productive outcome, getting things done. The movie presented work as the religion of our times implying that personal value is associated to paid labour. In money we trust.

The second highlight were some lections on “idleness” showing how to do “nothing productive” (watch the stars or your veggies growing, get inspired when playing Ukulele…) but become self empowered to have a good life.

A good life is not related to wage labour but to be happy with yourself and in your community. Let life and creativity flow instead of obeying nonsense rules to achieve more and more shareholder value. The movie showed alternatives and self-empowerment in order to change yourself and the socio-economical system around you.

Enjoy working!

1. Nicole: Prospecting the future / Utopia of work in a solidary degrowth society

This workshop presented 5 utopic visions of our future and concrete approaches:

Transition handbook / Rob Hopkins (Transition towns), Open high tech subsistence like commonly shared knowledge (e.g. 3D printing, open knowledge, metalab) and commons. The discussion about the Cradle 2 cradle approach showed that arguments crating moods. So it is the change of mood if you push yourself and others in an upward or downward spiral. Finally the Give what you can, get what you need attempt includes the discussion of basic income and the value of money.

This approach is about self-empowerment. The collectivistic approach deals with social maintenance: When you do what has to be done and you take care of what we use the constructed difference between consumer and producer vanishes. The social construction includes different perceptions like time, activity, nature and the discussion how intellectual and manual work are valued. Relationships need to be taken into account as well as fun and also spirituality to get the whole picture.

Share your visions to develop global ones!

1. Juliana: Feminist political economy

We had a session on feminist political economy that was very inspiring.

Starting from a Marxist analysis of political economy, the feminist critique noted that the time needed for the reproduction of the workforce, i.e. the time for cooking food, etc. was not taken into account in the Marxist analysis. Feminists therefore started demanding paid housework. This would eventually bring capitalism to a limit, because it is built on unpaid reproduction work.

However, these approaches focus mainly on production and reproduction. At this point, an approach developed by Frigga Haug extended the discussion to the question of what is necessary for life in a society. In the workshop this was called the 4 in 1 game. Four areas should be dealt with collectively to allow for a just and liberated life: production, care, decision-making and culture. All four areas are equally important for society, should be equally shared between genders and time should be equally distributed between the four areas. This means that people should have time and develop the competences to do productive work, to take care for reproduction, to involve in politics and to have cultural activities.

Welcome new ideas but don’t stick to them!

1. TTT Module

Styles: practical, academical, interactive, poetical/artistical, activist/political

Presentation:

Poetical/artistical:

theater performance, show different aspects of life by performance, e.g. child care, factory, work… everything is work

<https://co-munity.net/work-degrowth-society-0/materials/ttt-performance-meaning-work-theatrical-group>

Short description: A short perfrormance that takes place on the 1st of May at the place where people are gathering to march or any other day and at any other place. The target is to induce people into thinking about the different things that constitute work apart from formalised work which is what we usually refer to when we use the term. After the performance there can be a talk with the participants and the passengers about work in general or more specifically (how we would like it to be, on which parts and notions of work we would like to put more emphasis on etc).

Mehthod: Pop-up in the public place and just do the performance! It can be repeated after some hours because it is supposed to take place in an open space where different people are passing by along the day.

Part 1-formal work: The actors are forming a production line. Someone of them says "work" and the first one is starting to do a "mechanised" and "standartised" move which is his/her part in the production line. After a while the second one makes his/her own move etc...(optional: whistling the song "money" from Pink Floyd :)).

p.s. Everybody in the line has to pop-in and make his-her move. After while and when all performers are participating to the production...

Part 2-reproduction work: Someone yells "work" and the scene changes into a house where a family is taking care of its needs...Some are caring for the baby, some are preparing the meal etc...

Part 3-participation/politics (??): Again someone says "work" and the scene changes. We are now in an assembly. In our case it was an assembly of the residents of a building trying to decide which colour to use to paint the front of the building.

Part 4-entertainment: "Work" again and now we dance to different rhythms each time and try to produce some kind of music with our bodies in a way that you will see on the video...

Part 5-One of the performers says "the dance of work" and the performers do a dance that consists of repeating one movement typical from each of the four categories of work.

Part 6-By the end of the former we take the observers to dance with us and then we repeat the dance of work once again alltogether. (The word "work" is used to indicate when the movement changes)

Activism:

Walking barefoot in Vienna in group, take a rest in the park an do nothing, watch your senses

Thursday:

gift economy, relationships, nature: resource or life, spirituality, different types of time, fun

status hierarchies, mix manual and intellectual work (who is worth more?)