

## **„Questions of good life – some reflections with regard to the Swiss society“**

In my contribution I try to raise some conceptual reflections about the ongoing debate with regard to the conditions and the possibilities of an embodiment of the “good life” in social movements (and also in social sciences research), especially with regard to the situation in Switzerland. Therefore I propose some mainly conceptual ideas, about new and alternative life forms which depend on certain lifestyles. I follow a suggestion given by the German philosopher Rahel Jaeggi. She understands life forms as “Problem-solving instances”, which I approach more closely in Part 1. Although we find – in comparison with other countries – in Switzerland a very rich und prosperous society, there are emerging alternative life forms which are no longer satisfied with the negative effects of a hegemonic cultural capitalism. For illustration, I am going to use the „Décroissance movement“ in Switzerland (concentrating on the life style elements) which I also would like to discuss in terms of life forms.

Jaeggi (2012) defines life forms as culturally shaped forms of human coexistence which are manifested in values and attitudes, as well as in the judicial system, the fashion and the way families are organized. The exciting question in the present context of Switzerland is: Why do existing life forms change and what are the causes for these changes? Following Jaeggi, we can assume that life forms exist so long, as they are not facing serious problems. However, when serious problems emerge, so the argument goes, then these life forms are forced, or more specifically, the affected individuals/communities are forced to adapt or find new ways. Life forms can be effectively criticized and certain positive characteristics developed. But why should we even criticize different ways of life? My basic intuition for this purpose is: Postmodern lifestyles are not only an issue of private choices (even the liberal culture of capitalism has shown us this); much more it depends on public services and therefore it is absolutely a moral as well as a political question. In addition, Jaeggi speaks of a re-naturalization of lifestyles and of the „Ideological character of the neutrality hypothesis” (2012: 221).<sup>1</sup> This means that generally, it is assumed that someone should not make critical statements regarding life forms and that everyone has to decide for themselves. That is exactly what the ongoing talk of neutrality means. Jaeggi's approach gives us the opportunity to look at ‘life forms as experiments’ that can alone identify themselves primarily through specific problem-solving skills in her interpretation. I quote her once again: “Life forms are most successful when they can be understood as the result of successful learning processes and if they allow themselves to further enrich learning processes” (2012: 223). From such a perspective, individuals, as well as communities must be able to respond critically to grievances and requirements in their environment. For example, by questioning ecologically or physically unsound lifestyles and their connected social, environmental and individual costs. One example can show this: The purchase of a large apartment for a single person can be understood as part of a substantive consumerist way of life that is to criticize from an ecological and economic perspective (new sharing and co-housing models in Switzerland try to react to this problem).

One can ask: Who are the actors of such a transformation? Meanwhile, there exists even in Switzerland (which is in many aspects a rather conservative society) a variety of movements and initiatives that try to overcome the economic growth before it collapses, precisely because it allows neither a good nor a righteous life, and understands a post-growth society as a utopian project (Duverger 2011, Flipo/Schneider 2008). In the recent debate décroissance is translated into English with degrowth, in German its often called “Wachstumsrücknahme”,

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1 This and all the following quotations have been translated by myself.

but mainly it is a "political charged term" as mentioned by Schmelzer/Passadakis (2011). It is – historically seen – the ongoing discussion about these terms and concepts and a response to the disintegration and also weakness of the sustainability concept (Fournier 2008). In distinction to the formless sustainability opposes the wordplay „Décroissance“ from the beginning, to a positive growth. In this respect, it is about a radical critique of the growth paradigm, for example the idea that economic growth is desirable, so that the movement would free up from the structural economic growth imperative. In the course of this, the décroissance-exponents agree that the environmental limits can only be maintained in a self-limiting economy. In this turn, it will affect the life forms. “Under the circumstances of an absolute relief of the ecosphere, it is impossible to maintain a sustained economic growth” (Paech 2012: 97). To be as clear as possible: Décroissance (in Switzerland and elsewhere) is more than an environmental movement and its protagonists see themselves as seekers responding to the current multiple crises. Décroissance is being rightly counted to the “degrowth approach” by authors such like Pennekamp (2011). He points out that so far these concepts are missing a “macro-economic superstructure”, that analyzes what is happening in a society with a shrinking economic performance on social political and institutional levels and how possible negative consequences can be prevented (2011:36 / 37). But still, there are missing adequate life forms, which now increasingly creep into the consciousness of society.

For what stands Décroissance? In Switzerland under the banner of sustainable degrowth (which is a kind of guiding principle) are gathered many movements that criticize economic growth, that is incompatible to the load capacity of the earth and the rights of supply security of future generations. The critical concern of Décroissance often leads to theoretical reflections upon the limits of capitalist production and way of (capitalistic) thinking, as well as a concrete “advice for a life without growth mania” (this is a quotation from the homepage Décroissance Germany): In terms of life form Décroissance in Switzerland aims to a radical social transformation that will be based on an entirely different economic distribution involving the following points: 1. Re-localization (strong regional exchange relationships), 2. Policies to reduce working time, 3. Limitation of advertisement, 4. Implementation of a basic income (minimum wage), 5. Reduction of living spaces and 6. Regaining time sovereignty. As total effect, the importance of the economy should be reduced.

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