

Module „Mental infrastructures and degrowth transformation“ Leipzig, 8-11th 2014

This is a more detailed description of what is going to happen in the most central „content“ parts of the MODULE on mental infrastructures. Of course, there will also be an introduction to the course, chances to meet and get to know each other, feedback mechanisms and so on...

A) Introduction

Monday afternoon // with Susanne Brehm

More knowledge about the ecological and social problems we are facing will not necessarily help with the transition to a degrowth or postcarbon society. As psychological and sociological studies show, even a high consciousness for the social and ecological problems we are facing correlates very weakly with „appropriate“ behaviour in the daily lives of most people. Why is this so?

In this course, we will get to know and discuss the concept of „Mental infrastructures“ by the German social psychologist Harald Welzer, which has been widely received within the German degrowth debate. Welzer assumes that our usually growth-oriented thinking and acting is based on a number of cultural concepts he considers central and constitutive to the modern society. These concepts are part of our mental infrastructures, which means that they are so strongly internalized that we are hardly able to reflect them any more: future, individualization and biography, (indefinite) progress and self-improvement...

But we are not only shaped by these cultural concepts, we are also surrounded by "things" and structures that surround us NOW at present and shape our behaviour – by the way things are „usually“ done, by the way products are designed, sold, used and thrown away. By the habit to express personal growth in consumer acts or adventurous trips. By cities designed for increasing mobility...

Welzer proposes strategies how to deal with these infrastructures in order to be able to radically change our society. We will discuss the concept as well as the proposals for a change: Does the transformation to a degrowth society require a radical break with many or at least some of our mental and social infrastructures? What might be (positive and negative!) consequences? What strategies do we want to adopt as a movement? What does this mean for a political education for degrowth?

B) Performance-Workshop

Tuesday // with Thomas Blum

„Your potential, our passion“

Microsoft

Ideas of self-optimization and competition are essential mental infrastructures in a growth society and interrelate with each other. We want to develop ourselves, have a plan for our professional future and don't like mistakes. In a system based on competition, self-optimizing is an important strategy towards others regarding current and future developments. This correlates with an increasing role of economy in all fields of life. On the one hand imperatives of self-optimizing are brought to us for example by guidebooks such as self-management-guides or yoga-manuals. On the other hand we internalized the necessity of self-optimizing already in our childhood and - for instance in school - have also learned how to perform it. With this in mind we can find performative strategies of

self-optimizing not only in theatre but also in our everyday life.

As experts for self-optimizing strategies in the Performance-Workshop we will deal playfully with internalized self-optimizing imperatives and with those we are confronted with in our daily lives. Based on body- and experience-orientated theatre methods we will try to create little irritations in these self-optimizing strategies.

C) Self-reflective Workshop on growth and increase in speed

Wednesday morning // with Kristina Utz

Growth and progress are concepts not only relevant in economic contexts; they shape our thoughts, feelings and actions. Personal progress and self-actualization are said to be necessary for a fulfilled and successful life. But how are these ideas linked to the capitalist economy we live in? And how does the paradigm of growth influence our biographies? And why is it so difficult to think outside the box of progress and growth?

Harald Welzer and Hartmut Rosa provide the theoretical background to link the concepts of growth and acceleration to our daily lives. Rosa's theory claims self-made acceleration of social structures is the main engine of economic growth. This phenomenon triggers acceleration in other areas, such as technology, and therefore provides the basis for economic growth. Welzer introduces us to the concept of mental infrastructures.

The workshop aims to connect Rosa's and Welzer's theory with our own biographies. How has acceleration and growth influenced our lives? What do our mental infrastructures look like? What are barriers that hinder us from thinking, feeling and acting differently? Could concepts like mindfulness-based training or solidarity help us change?

The workshop will combine theoretical input and practical exercises, most of which is based on self-reflective elements.

D) Practical Workshop: Experiencing (In-)Efficiency

Wednesday afternoon // with Susanne Brehm

Let's do this quick!

Especially within work structures we tend to have a big desire towards efficient structures and processes. A big part of scientific research is dedicated to find and test more efficient technology for the production and consumption of goods. But not only work, also the reproductive sphere as well as our free and leisure time are very much affected by our need or the desire to be more time and resource efficient – be it induced by our „own“ wishes or by the circumstances and the desires of others we are confronted with. But at the same time the tendency towards ever more efficient technology and work processes is one of the main drivers of the growth society and economy. The more efficient we are the more stuff we can produce, and the more stuff we can (and need to?) buy and consume. And it contributes to the acceleration of our lifestyles – producing stress.

Efficiency therefore is - at least – ambivalent. In this workshop we want to experience efficient and inefficient, slow and fast forms of doing things – of preparing food, of constructing a chair, of repairing clothes... And we want to reflect coming from these experiences to a more general level: How does it feel to work this way? Is there a

difference in resource input? How do I relate to the result of the process? What would be a good balance between the two extremes...?

About the trainers:

Susanne Brehm is part of the Konzeptwerk Neue Ökonomie, a thinktank for the social-ecological transformation based in Leipzig. She usually works as a trainer on degrowth and social-ecological transformation with youth groups and groups of young adults. She gives workshops and presentations, develops tools and methodologies for trainers and is at the moment involved in the organization of the IV. International Degrowth Conference.

Thomas Blum lives and works in Leipzig. As a theatre educator he dedicates himself to create performances with different groups of so called unprofessional actors. He is participating in several communities such as a community-supported-agriculture project where he loves to work in the fields. At the moment Thomas Blum is writing his doctoral thesis about political dimensions of theatre and education.

Kristina Utz is part of the Netzwerk Wachstumswende, a German degrowth and socio-ecological transition network. She designs and realizes educational projects around the topic with different groups and organizational backgrounds. As a psychologist, she is especially interested in the link with societal and individual transformation processes. How are capitalistic structures represented in our minds, and how is it possible to change these mental infrastructures? At the moment she is obtaining her Master's degree in Berlin and besides degrowth, is interested in post-colonialism and migration, community and conflict transformation.

Literature:

Harald Welzer (2011): Mental infrastructures. How growth entered the world and our souls; <http://www.boell.de/en/2013/12/09/mental-infrastructures-how-growth-entered-world-and-our-souls>

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Hartmut Rosa (2013): Social Acceleration – A New Theory of Modernity

Hartmut Rosa (2010): Alienation and Acceleration: Towards a Critical Theory of Late-Modern Temporality

Christine Ax (2009): Die Könnensgesellschaft. Mit guter Arbeit aus der Krise.