



“This is a bit of the good life”: Recognition of unpaid work from the perspective of degrowth

Linda Nierling*

Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT), Institute for Technology Assessment and Systems Analysis, Hermann-von-Helmholtz-Platz 1, 76344 Eggenstein-Leopoldshafen, Germany

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ABSTRACT

The decommodification of work activity is central for conceiving work from a degrowth perspective. Yet personal dependence on paid work is very high, whereas unpaid work activity, such as providing care, community service and subsistence, continues to be neglected by individuals and society. By using the analytical approach related to recognition as employed by Axel Honneth, I argue on the basis of empirical findings that unpaid work can play a significant role in one's personal well-being at the individual level. With regard to the transition process towards a society of degrowth, however, a key seems to be a change in the normative paradigm concerning work at the individual level.

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1. Introduction

Following the conceptualisation of “degrowth”¹ summarised in the “Degrowth Declaration” of 2008 (Degrowth, 2010), the idea of degrowth combines two aims which seem to be controversial at first glance: downsizing economic growth while ensuring a high quality of life. This idea is based on the concept that prosperity involves more than a steady increase in economic value; “prosperity has rather to do with our ability to flourish: physically, psychologically and socially. [...] prosperity hangs on our ability to participate meaningfully in the life of society” (Jackson, 2009: 86). In this understanding of prosperity, a global reduction in economic transactions, material wealth and consumerism is accompanied by an increase in the well-being of society that is based on non-market values. Some of these non-materially-based gains for society and individuals are the reduced dependence on economic activity and an increase in free time, unremunerated activity, conviviality, and sense of community as well as the encouragement of self-reflection, balance creativity, good citizenship, and generosity (Degrowth, 2010: 524).

Challenging in this respect is the question of how these benefits can be introduced in society and in households. A major factor seems to be the organisation and the societal conception of work. Within the normative framework of decreased production, focussing on the possibilities and challenges posed by unpaid work seems to be central in order to sketch these future visions of society (e.g. Baier and Biesecker, 2010; Hinterberger et al., 2009; Jackson, 2009; Luks, 2010; Norgard, 2010; Seidl and Zahrt, 2010; Williams and White, 2010). Provided that production and consumption patterns are downscaled, the positive potentials of unpaid work seem to be manifold for a socially rich society, although many of these work “potentials” cannot be counted and can hardly be quantified in economic terms, e.g. by measurements of GDP (Schneider et al., 2010: 513, see also van den Bergh, 2010). In contrast to paid work, which is strongly related to institutionalised and economically based work activity, very often directly contributing to economic growth, unpaid work is basically not profit oriented and is organised on an individual basis. It may include many reproductive activities like cooking, gardening, doing handicrafts and becoming involved in voluntary charity work or community service. In this respect, it allows one to pursue a sustainable life style through (modern) forms of subsistence and political participation. Subsequently a societal redefinition of work that is supported by political measures such as a reduction in working hours and decoupling of work from income² seems to be an important contribution to a “smooth transition” (Schneider et al., 2010: 514) towards a society of degrowth.

* Tel.: +49 721 608 2 2509; fax: +49 721 608 2 6715.

E-mail address: nierling@kit.edu.

¹ This paper will employ the definition of degrowth put forward by Schneider et al.: “Sustainable degrowth may be defined as an equitable downscaling of production and consumption that increases human well-being and enhances ecological conditions at the local and global levels, in the short and long terms.” (Schneider, F., Kallis, G., Martinez-Allier, J., 2010. Crisis or opportunity? Economic degrowth for social equity and ecological sustainability. Introduction to this special issue. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 511–518.).

² This could be guaranteed by basic income (ibid.).

What is often neglected in the current debates on degrowth is that the ideas and visions for reaching a broad societal understanding of work by reconceptualising the leading definition of work already have a 20 year history in Germany. In the beginning, these discussions were motivated by the high unemployment rates and the societal diagnosis that we have to face the “end of work” (Bergmann, 2004; Gorz, 2000; Rifkin, 1995). A central motivation in these debates was thus to overcome the centrality of paid work at a societal and individual level by strengthening unpaid work activity in order to find new modes of social integration and cohesion.

Today – taking into account the ideas which have arisen in the context of the degrowth debate – these lines of thought still seem to be highly relevant. Starting from the visions that were developed in the debates on work beginning in the 1990s, this paper will take a closer look at the current societal divisions into paid and unpaid work by shedding light on the individual potentials of unpaid work. Following Honneth’s social theory approach, “recognition” will be regarded as fundamental to understanding and explaining the evolution of societal processes and the motivation for individual action (Honneth, 1994, 2004).

On the one hand, current societal orientations seem to strengthen the strong individual and social dependence on paid work, which is further supported by the predominant structures of recognition such as the status- or income-oriented paradigms of economic growth (Fraser, 2009; Hochschild, 1997). On the other hand, unpaid work can have specific implications for individuals in terms of recognition. The guiding hypothesis in this paper is that these individual potentials of recognition are central for describing the meaning of unpaid work in a degrowth society. The aim is therefore to uncover specific aspects of recognition in the context of unpaid work at the individual level that might also facilitate developing strategies at the level of society. The rising recognition of unpaid work activity is consequently regarded as an important (social) precondition to paving the way for a transition towards a degrowth society, in line with Jackson’s ideas: “Better recognition for those engaged in child-care, care for the elderly or disabled and volunteer work would shift the balance of incentives away from status competition and towards a more cooperative, and potentially more altruistic society” (Jackson, 2009: 91).

This paper is structured as follows. First, referring to the German debates of the 1990s, the underlying normative foundations and practical designs of the possible future manifestations of work will be discussed with the aim of integrating paid and unpaid work activity (Section 2). Next (Section 3), the analytical framework of the study will be set, drawing on the term “recognition” as employed by Honneth (Honneth, 1994, 2004). Third (Section 4), on the basis of qualitative findings, Honneth’s categories of recognition are employed to analyse how people who are active in unpaid work experience recognition at an individual level. The paper concludes by providing an outlook for the individual and societal potentials of unpaid work in a degrowth society.

2. The Integration of Paid and Unpaid Work in Holistic Working Concepts

In Germany, the debates over holistic concepts of work have been on the political agenda since the 1990s. They arose from the observation that technological rationalisation, automation and increased efficiency were leading to a reduction in the overall size of the human labour force working in industry. The year 1975 marked the beginning of this development when the oil crisis and the subsequent recession ushered in the end of full employment, which was strongly believed in after the economic boom in Germany in the 1950s and early 1960s. Previously stable conditions of employment subsequently eroded more and more, and employment trends have been steadily declining until the present day (Hradil, 2005). In the 1980s the

political debates on work in Germany were strongly shaped by the diagnosis of mass unemployment, which steadily replaced the paradigm of full employment. Some ten years later, discontinuous work biographies even became prevalent for those performing highly qualified work. Standard employment relationships, which until then had provided lifelong full-time employment, became increasingly fragile in many areas of paid work. In terms of technological progress, the development of information and communication technology formed the basis for this process. In economic terms, the growing pressure of the global markets, which for many took the form of deregulation and flexibilisation strategies, caused increasing insecurity for individuals (Kocka and Offe, 2000; Schmid, 2000).

This loss of security in paid work, both in a quantitative and a qualitative respect, culminated in the widespread diagnosis that “society is running out of work” (Gorz, 2000; Rifkin, 1995). In the corresponding political debates, three main strategies were discussed as a reaction to the high rates of unemployment in the 1980s and 1990s (Senghaas-Knobloch, 2000). First, a redistribution of work was proposed. The idea was to significantly reduce the working hours of employees in order to distribute the work among more people. Second, a further deregulation of labour markets was suggested with the goal of reflating the market and increasing the volume of work by means of flexible measures based on economic growth. Third, it was suggested that the social contract of work that until then had been based on regulated full employment could no longer serve as the reference for the societal definition of work. A “crisis of the labour society” was cited, which was to be addressed constructively by integrating paid and unpaid work as central components of the societal division of labour (Kambartel, 1994).

It is the third approach – the end and future of work (Rifkin, 1996) – that forms the point of departure in this paper. Two assumptions can be regarded as constitutive for this approach. First is that the total opportunities for paid work in the labour market were insufficient, which led to a permanent shortage of employment. Second is the observation that a lot of work was performed in society – especially by women – which in legal and economic terms was not considered to be work and could be used to compensate for the lack of paid work (Kambartel, 1994: 123). Subsequently, the intention was to revalue and reassess the forms of work activity that have traditionally been counted as “informal” work, such as family work, voluntary work, or do-it-yourself work (DIY), and previously had not been recognised to be work. For this purpose, the narrow definition of work as “paid” work that had prevailed until then was broadened for the first time. The relevance of unpaid work activity for the well-being and development of the whole society was subsequently taken into account (Voß, 2010). The understanding of work was broadened towards a societal definition of work. Work “in a societal sense” was not taken to include work activity whose outcomes contributed to the superordinate, commonly shared aims of the society (Heinze and Offe, 1990).

The integration of paid and unpaid work into a comprehensive understanding of work had previously been discussed in feminist research. This research had highlighted the structural disregard of uncommodified *reproductive* work activity in the private sphere in contrast to the structural recognition of *productive* work in the public sphere (Becker-Schmidt and Knapp, 1995; Peinl, 2003).³ As early as in the 1970s, feminist research showed that reproductive work had to be actively conceptualised as being *work* in order to make it visible and an object of public negotiation (Bock and Duden, 1977; Kontos and Walser, 1978). Although the adjacent debates over holistic concepts of work have a strong conceptual grounding in the feminist critique, subsequent references to the feminist debates were often insufficient (Veil, 2000). Yet feminist thinkers have also contributed

³ In the feministic debate this dichotomy is criticised as “separation” of one part of work (reproductive work) from the other part of work (productive work).

to the debates over holistic working concepts (e.g. Biesecker, 2000; Fraser, 1994).

All in all, many models and concepts were created in the context of the debate over holistic views of work in the 1990s (e.g. Beck, 1999; Bergmann, 2004; Biesecker, 2000; Gorz, 2000; Mutz, 1998; Schaffer and Stahmer, 2005). A goal common to all of the models was a long-term cultural shift in the societal definition of work, supported by a change in institutional settings. The ideas for implementing a holistic concept of work ranged from a radical reorganisation of the current employment system, supported by the introduction of basic income, to using the existing possibilities within the labour market offered by innovative scheduling of working time. The normative foundations for such a broad understanding of work can be traced back to different lines of thought such as critiques of capitalism (Bergmann, 2004; Gorz, 2000), feminist theory (Fraser, 1994) and sustainability research (Bierter and v. Winterfeld, 1998; Biesecker, 2000; Brandl and Hildebrandt, 2002; Giarini and Liedtke, 1998; Schäfer and Schön, 2000).

All the approaches agreed on the fact that economic security should be decoupled from paid work and that the allocation of time should provide more opportunities for unpaid work. Thus the societal reorganisation of “money” and “time” was identified as central items for achieving adjustments. Furthermore, a post-market understanding should replace the steady growth paradigm and consumption pattern of industrial society in terms of the quality of work and life. In the process, “non-market” factors, such as the potential of subsistent production structures and vivid contributions to an active civil society, were strengthened as compensation for economic values. In this sense, unpaid work can for example contribute to social cohesion because it may provide social integration for unemployed persons. It may contribute to forming a new social contract for work that can stabilise interpersonal relations by means of mutual care or mutual learning between generations. Furthermore, the individual organisation of unpaid work permits the individual to work in a self-determined way, thus inhibiting the negative implications of alienated work and allowing one to explore their creative potentials. In this respect, again in parallel to the current degrowth debate, the normative re-evaluation of unpaid work at both the individual and societal levels was regarded as crucial since only a change in awareness towards unpaid work activity would allow a reconfiguration of work activity on a daily or biographical basis.

In this paper, the concept of “mixed work” will be guiding (Brandl and Hildebrandt, 2002). The normative concept of mixed work was developed within sustainability research. In this context, work can be regarded as an essential factor for socially sustainable development because it contributes to the satisfaction of human needs. This satisfaction takes place if a meaningful activity can be carried out that is directed both towards oneself and towards others, provided that it allows participation in society and is economically secured by the fact that basic needs are provided for (Grunwald and Kopfmüller, 2006; Hildebrandt, 2003). The concept of mixed work is closely oriented on the current conditions in the labour market. In its practical implementation, paid work is regarded as a central part of a holistic concept of work, which should be complemented by other types of work activity. Paid work should be flexibly combined here with unmodified activities of an individual's choice, such as do-it-yourself work, voluntary work and family work. In combination, these forms of work activity seem suitable to provide a high quality of life and to support social as well as ecological aims (Brandl and Hildebrandt, 2002). With regard to its practical implementation, it has been proposed that individual changes in attitudes should be supported by organisational and institutional measures. The aim of the mixed work approach is to be able to lead a “good life,” including time for leisure, while at the same time opening up time frames, opportunities, and room for an individual to discover how unpaid work can constitute a rewarding complement to paid

work. Thus, the revaluation of unpaid work in society is again regarded as a central precondition, because a change in individual attitudes and therefore in individual action could form the basis for institutionally enshrining beneficial policies in working time and social security.

3. Research Framework

3.1. Theory of Recognition as an Analytical Framework

The debates over unpaid work seem to be immediately convincing at a theoretical level since such a shift makes it possible to strengthen sustainable consumption patterns and to increase the time and opportunity for political participation. Yet there has not yet been a practical implementation of these concepts.

This orientation guides the following analysis, which uses Axel Honneth's theoretical approach on “recognition” to shed light on the question of how an individual experiences the recognition (and disregard) of unpaid work. The scientific debate over recognition is strongly influenced by Honneth's approach, especially his conceptualisation and systematisation of recognition in “the struggle for recognition” (Honneth, 1995).⁴ Honneth's approach is used here because of its strong focus on subjective experience and intersubjective exchange, which makes it possible to analyse recognition in unpaid working contexts with a special focus on an individual's experiences and motives.⁵

In his theoretical approach, Honneth builds on the theoretical assumptions of Hegel and Mead⁶ regarding recognition and systematises recognition along three different dimensions: love, solidarity (social esteem) and equal treatment with regard to law (cf. Honneth, 1994, 2004; Iser, 2008).

The sphere of law can be characterised as the mutual recognition of individual rights by all members of society, which provides the subject with self-respect. At the level of law, recognition is institutionalised either for all human beings (i.e. human rights) or takes the form of specific laws for different social groups (i.e. workers in employment). Disregard takes place when the lack of legal recognition leads to social abuses and hinders social integration.

Solidarity refers to the recognition that arises from individual performance and individual achievements that contribute to achieving social aims, giving the individuals self-esteem. This enables individuals to assess their competence and their performance by developing a positive reference to their own skills, competence, and capabilities. At a societal level, this is expressed by rights and the distribution of resources – in the traditional sense, money – and at a personal level

⁴ The theory of recognition has been the topic of intensive scientific dispute, especially in the critique expressed by Nancy Fraser. Both hold a different view of the relation of redistribution to recognition. Whereas Honneth conceives recognition as one fundamental category, encompassing redistribution, Fraser understands both categories as mutually incompatible (Honneth, A., Fraser, N., 2003. *Redistribution or recognition? A political-philosophical exchange*. Verso, London.).

⁵ For the analysis of unpaid work, Honneth's concept of recognition had to be theoretically complemented by those of other authors in order to uncover the particularities of unpaid work, e.g. Dahm & Scherhorn Dahm, D., Scherhorn, G., 2008. *Urbane Subsistenz. Die zweite Quelle des Wohlstands*. oekom, München.; Keupp, H., Ahbe, T., Gmür, W., Höfer, R., Mitzscherlich, B., Kraus, W., Straus, F., 2006. *Identitätskonstruktionen. Das Patchwork der Identitäten in der Spätmoderne*, 3. Aufl. ed. Rowohlt, Reinbek bei Hamburg.; Sennett, R., 2008. *Handwerk*. Berlin Verlag, Berlin.; Young, M.I., 2005. *Anerkennung von Liebesmühe*. Zu Axel Honneths Feminismus. *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 53, 415–433.

⁶ Hegel calls recognition the permanent inner struggle of the subjects, between self-assertion and socialisation. Mead's work on identity is based on the relationship between internal and external assessments for the formation of identity. In his view, the process of identity formation is understood as the integration of different identities which are on the one hand socially generated and on the other hand individually developed (cf. Holtgrewe, U., Voswinkel, S., Wagner, G., 2000. *Anerkennung und Arbeit*. UVK, Konstanz.; Sitzer, P., Wiezorek, C., 2005. *Anerkennung*, in: Heitmeyer, W., Imbusch, P. (Eds.), *Integrationspotenziale einer modernen Gesellschaft*. VS Verlag, Wiesbaden, pp. 101–132.).

by the recognition of individual skills and competence by personal relationships. Disregard or the lack of recognition takes place if a positive valuation of one's own skills and competence is lacking within the societal system of values as well as within personal relationships.

Recognition in the dimension of love can be found in the private sphere in personal relationships with family, friends and colleagues, where individuals are encouraged in their feelings and personal needs. It provides a mutual affirmation of personal needs and gives the individual self-confidence. Disregard can arise out of forms of negative personal interaction such as a dispute, deception, withdrawal of affection or ignoring each other.

In summary, Honneth's approach classifies recognition by identifying institutionalised (law), performance-related (solidarity) and personal (love) patterns of recognition. The ensuing analysis of the qualitative data on work, both paid and unpaid, will take place at three analytical levels and address three research questions: In what way is the working activity approved in formal-legal structures? In what way are workers' personal attainments, skills and capabilities recognised? How do workers feel acknowledged personally if the work is unpaid?

3.2. Research Methods

In terms of research methods, the case study approach (Yin, 2003) is used.⁷ Qualitative, problem-centred interviews with people performing unpaid work constitute the basis of the empirical material (Witzel, 2000). In total, ten interviews were conducted at the "Centre for Creativity",⁸ a non-profit organisation in a large German town that has existed for 20 years. The project analysed – the Centre for Creativity – offers people an infrastructure and setting to work without pay and to create products for their own use by doing handicrafts. This represents voluntary do-it-yourself-work. By offering the infrastructure and room, it gives people the opportunity to do handicrafts in workshops for wood, textiles, metal, pottery, or jewellery. For a fee, the centre provides tools and equipment and conveys know-how about these different types of handicrafts. Furthermore, cultural events are organised, and opportunities for volunteer work in the centre are offered. It is the explicit intention of the Centre for Creativity to strengthen modern forms of subsistence and to decrease the dependence on material goods by means of reuse and recycling, thereby increasing an individual's capacity for creativity. Individual projects undertaken in the Centre range from the construction of kitchen furniture to metal-welded artistic garden sculptures. Some people come with the intention to give free rein to their creativity. Others come target-oriented, to use the machinery in order to finish a product which they started at home.

The interviews took place in June 2008 and lasted between one and three hours. The interviews were analysed using qualitative content analysis (Kohlbacher, 2006; Kuckartz, 2007; Mayring, 2007).

The following description uses the subjective work experience of people working in the Centre for Creativity to show how they receive recognition at an individual level.

4. Subjective Experience of Recognition in Do-It-Yourself Work: Empirical Results

Empirical findings show that the timely production process of the handicrafts is an important precondition for the subjective experience of recognition. During this process, people begin to develop a

⁷ The case discussed is one part of a multiple case analysis which encompasses in total three cases on holistic working concepts in Germany. The cases were chosen by a theoretical sampling strategy aimed at projecting a diverse picture of paid and unpaid working relations. The two other cases represent a project intending to offer various starting points for sustainable development through education as well as an anthroposophic company, which offers a comprehensive work-life balance programme aiming to combine paid work with unpaid work activity.

⁸ Both the name of the project and the names of the interviewees are being kept anonymous.

special relationship to the objects they create. This leads in turn to a positive assessment of the products that they highly value because they are proud and satisfied with the results.

...doing it yourself is simply the best, I mean this piano stool, I've been looking on it every day for two or three weeks and, my, it's really come out beautiful.... (Isabella, 42⁹)

They experience that their hand-made products have a "personal added value". This value goes beyond money as a reference criterion. Their products instead increase in non-material value because of the individual production process:

...but you then really appreciate the work, that means too, umm, that you really appreciate the result, and we, I think we know how to admire the kitchen more than if someone else had fitted it for 1000 euros.... (Tobias, 124)

The custom-made products very often have a direct connection to one's personal spheres. They are produced as presents for friends and family, e.g. a metal coat rack with animals that a grandfather created especially for his granddaughter. Such a product is personalised and meant to be special for a loved one. It is an expression of the producer's sympathy and affection for someone else. But the recognition created by such a product also works in the other direction. Producers themselves perceive positive feedback and admiration for the objects they have created. They see the products as a positive assessment of their subjective creative potential, their own ability and their competence.

Voluntary handicraft work frequently contains an intrinsic meaning for people. They experience this as an intensive process in which they have the possibility to explore their own needs. The work with materials like wood or metal and the manual learning process provide them with inner satisfaction, self-fulfilment and self-discovery. One interviewee explains that the Centre for Creativity offers her something that is "good" for her, another reports a "joy of being creative", another one a "contentment for yourself". Cornelia, for example, endows her life existentially with meaning in the process of doing pottery.

Pottery appeals to a completely different part of my personality. It has nothing to do with..., it has simply to do with myself and the centrifugal forces (chuckles). Yes, that's it—it's kind of meditative. (Cornelia, 120–122)

Doing pottery is a "really deep and artistic activity" (Cornelia, 234) for her. Thus she feels "urged" (234) to do it and feels personally strongly affiliated with that type of working activity.

Another observation shows that the decision to begin working in the Centre is made when people have reached a phase in their life which implies a stage of transition. Transitions in life, either for private or professional reasons, often go hand in hand with perceived insecurity at the personal level. A retired person explains that working in handicrafts provides him with new courage to face life in his retirement.

Well I have to say, it's a bit of quality of life [...] gives me the courage to face life or whatever, ummm, you feel self-confident, you really can do something. There's no doubt about it, this is a bit of the good life.... (Edgar, 228)

Similar experiences are reported by other interviewees. The development of personal skills and competence such as those they can experience with craftwork supports people in coping with personal

⁹ The (anonymous) names and numbers refer to the transcription of the interviews.

crises and provides them with a new purpose in life during biographical stages in which reorientation is necessary. People experience this as compensation for the disrespect they may experience in other spheres of life, such as in the family or paid work.

Furthermore, in terms of community building, the interviewees experience a sense of mutuality and personal connection as a result of their common interest in handicraft work. Their shared activity gives them a feeling of being connected to each other.

People who enjoy the same, I mean doing things and like doing things more than...lying on the beach. (Isabella, 115)

People find manifold topics to talk about, such as their new projects, overcoming difficulties, and experiencing success when a difficult piece is finally finished. Although these personal encounters often do not imply any obligation and instead have a fleeting character, people nevertheless feel close to each other and experience friendly, family-like personal feelings of cooperation:

Everyone's done some tinkering around on Saturday afternoons—somehow it's familiar and nice. (Charlotte, 154)

People with experience like to support others by offering their knowledge during work on personal products. A former civil engineer for example helps others with statistical calculations. He feels that his personal abilities are recognised when others regard him as an expert. Such confirmation of one's personal competence also occurs at other occasions in the Centre for Creativity, such as informal exchange relationships. An individually arranged "trade" provides the basis for the participants to develop alternative "currencies" for the mutual exchange of goods and services. It is not money which is then used as the "currency of exchange" but other forms of reciprocity: "a cake or something else" (Edgar, 38) or simply the communication with others and the feeling that one is still needed by other people. This form of mutual exchange is seen as central for people to experience the recognition of their own skills and competence.

The Centre for Creativity provides a place for social communication and interpersonal encounters. It provides the opportunity for people to satisfy their individual needs for personal affirmation and to experience collectivity and human closeness.

I have the feeling of being liked when I come into the door and ...that really feels good. (Cornelia, 152)

In the following discussion these findings are reflected in the categories of Honneth's theory of recognition.

The dimension of *law* reflects the institutionalised patterns of recognition that people can experience within societal structures and organisations. In the Centre for Creativity, people perform do-it-yourself work that is not formally regulated. Furthermore, people are not formally affiliated with the organisation. Hence they do not receive recognition in a formal legal sense (e.g. a labour contract or social security credits), which have a high meaning within society. The Centre for Creativity shows that alternative – informal – rules can be developed instead of formal recognition structures, and that the absence of formal regulations makes it possible for people in the Centre to start to feel responsible for certain duties on a regular basis where they bring in their own ideas. This also shows that informal forms of recognition can matter, too, as informal rules and agreements provide a source of "recognition" in the sense of law within this organisation.

Recognition in terms of *solidarity* can be received if people feel that their personal attainments, skills and capabilities are acknowledged. In this respect, the Centre for Creativity provides many opportunities. People have the possibility to acquire new skills or discover hidden talents at the workshops.

On the one hand recognition of these personal achievements takes place "in public", as the organisation provides a forum to show pieces of work, e.g. regular art exhibitions or the so-called "stage" where unfinished pieces of work are displayed for everybody and where the working process can be assessed. On the other hand, the Centre for Creativity is a platform for affirmative exchange on a personal level. People working in the Centre feel like-minded and communicate with each other about their achievements and the outcomes of their work. They reciprocally act as peers to assess the accuracy and precision of the pieces and admire the functionality and aesthetics. Recognition is not only perceived through the handcrafted pieces of work; social skills and competence are also recognised, such as passing on expert knowledge or offering mutual support. As pointed out with respect to recognition in the sphere of law, few "formal" aspects are decisive for recognition in the Centre. Instead, recognition takes place within processes of communication and interaction with others—in the Centre as well as with family and friends in private spheres. Time, resources and mutual attention thus serve as "currency" for assessing the value of work instead of money. Intersubjective exchange forms an "equivalent value" for work.

Furthermore, people experience this process of doing very intensively. Within this process, a personal value for this type of work and the products evolves, providing intrinsic satisfaction and self-fulfilment, which provides compensation especially at times of transition in people's lives.

Recognition in the field of *love* is provided if people feel confirmed in their personality. The pieces manufactured in the Centre for Creativity very often have a direct personal connection with relatives or friends. It seems to be an essential motivation that the work reflects the needs of others. The products are often manufactured with the aim to show one's sympathy and thus maintain personal relationships within private spheres. The material concreteness of the pieces serves to carry mutual feelings. In addition, with regard to interpersonal relationships, the communication and interaction with other workers are important sources of personal recognition. Shared interests and the common act of doing initiate a loosely coupled community of active persons where positive mutual feelings of belonging and security arise. Mutual support and shared joy in individual progress lead to affirmative personal confirmation in the sense of love.

5. Conclusion: Individual Pathways Towards a Degrowth Society

The empirical analysis shows that the Centre for Creativity represents a place providing opportunities for a holistic concept of work to flourish as it offers the infrastructure for creative handicraft—as an expression of modern forms of subsistence.¹⁰ Alternatives to the conventional patterns of consumption are realised in practice. Furthermore, the Centre can provide people with alternative orientations because it permits the ideas and provides the space for new fields of action. With regard to transition processes towards a degrowth society, the organisation serves as a nucleus where alternative modes of mutual exchange and an alternative valuation of non-market products are already taking place. This goes beyond the market economy¹¹ (see also Cattaneo and Gavalda, 2010; Lietaert, 2010).

¹⁰ Subsistence refers to a sustainable production model traditionally arising from farming which is directed towards self-sufficiency and which covers one's own needs (cf. Dahm, D., Scherhorn, G., 2008. Urbane Subsistenz. Die zweite Quelle des Wohlstands. oekom, München., v. Werlhof, C., Bennholdt-Thomson, V., Faraclas, N., 2003. Subsistenz und Widerstand. Alternativen zur Globalisierung Promedia, Wien.).

¹¹ The proposed qualitative case study represents one type of unpaid work which is analysed in depth. Further research, which should be detailed in both qualitative and quantitative studies, should focus on other fields of unpaid work such as involvement in social or political activities and reproductive work, in order to obtain broader insights into the role and conditions of unpaid work in a degrowth society. Further research could serve both to achieve a wider statistical representation and to provide insights into further motives and personal values of unpaid work.

At the individual level, do-it-yourself work has a positive impact on the personal experience of recognition. Thus, it can be regarded as a contribution to individual well-being that is explicitly decoupled from a growth paradigm. People feel stimulated and acknowledged by personal achievements in an individually defined set of forms of work activity which are decoupled from and go beyond conventional economic principles.

The further potential of do-it-yourself work can be summarised as follows. First, it points at the stimulation of a convivial community. In line with these types of unpaid activities goes an increased interaction with other people. People enter “through” the production process of material products into personal relations with others. As a result, collectivisation is taking place at the local level. Existing interpersonal relations can also be mutually strengthened. Second, people use opportunities to explore their own skills and abilities autonomously without the pressure to perform successfully or be measured by the economic outcome. They follow their intrinsic needs for creative expression and explore new and hidden skills and competence. It seems that these creative processes can start an inner journey which is triggered by these self-determined processes of handicraft work. These journeys can help one find his or her own meanings of life and promote emancipatory potential. This might lead an individual to decide in favour of a satisfying conduct of life by means of a decommodification of work and beyond the prevalent societal values based on economic growth. In this sense, unpaid work can provide an essential contribution to “the things that really matter: family, identity, friendship, community, and purpose in life” (Jackson, 2009: 86), which would also contribute to promoting a degrowth society with a high level of personal well-being.

The aim of this paper has been to show that the potential of decommodified work activity at the individual level, such as unpaid work, can comprise manifold sources of recognition for the individuals involved. The subjective satisfaction which accompanies the willingness to work on a voluntary basis reflects subjective needs for one to attain recognition of his or her own specific working potential. In this sense, unpaid work can enrich, release or compensate experiences of recognition or disregard. Unpaid work can thus be of great subjective importance with regard to emancipatory potential, community building and last but not least promoting individual choices not only for sustainable consumption but also for living a better life that contributes to the paradigms of a degrowth society.

Taking a step back from these optimistic views on the manifold *individual* potentials of unpaid work from a *societal* perspective show that not all members of society have an equal opportunity to freely decide to pursue unpaid work and enjoy its contribution to personal recognition. At the moment, an important precondition to working voluntarily is to enjoy economic security, which traditionally comes from paid work. In order to prevent the concept of holistic work from only being available to those who are able to “afford” to work without pay, in the transition towards a degrowth society it will be important to find strategies to give anyone, especially persons who are not economically wealthy, the possibility to perform work on a voluntarily basis. On the one hand, working voluntarily can be a way to live with less money, because monetary-based transactions are replaced by other forms of exchanging goods and voluntary “services”. On the other hand, persons with a low level of income cannot simply quit the market economy completely and only work without pay. Measures to guarantee that the basic needs of the unemployed or of those working under precarious working conditions are covered, i.e. through social welfare or basic income, are of special importance in this connection. It will be important to establish societal structures which ensure the subsistence of marginalised persons in order to allow them to explore the features of unpaid work, at both personal and societal levels.¹²

The final shift towards a future degrowth society will depend both on a change in social structures so that they provide the institutional framework that can shape orientation and attitudes and on (equal) opportunities and individual agency relying on autonomous choices and personal action (Hamilton, 2010). Whereas in terms of “structure” it seems necessary that there is a change in working time and that basic economic needs are provided for, with respect to “agency” it will be up to individuals to accept responsibility for themselves and to use the opportunities for change. Even in a degrowth society, paid work will continue to be a central mode of economic and social exchange for individuals and for society. The challenge will be however to shape paid working conditions in favour of the employees in order to also let them enjoy the freedom of deciding to work without pay, forgoing favourable working times and job security. A shift towards degrowth can make it the starting point at the individual level. Positive subjective experience in unpaid work, such as personal fulfilment, well-being, community building, and the rise of values beyond growth, should be regarded as a key towards a future degrowth society.

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