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Social Sustainability - Introduction Working Group 3

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When on September 25, 2015, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the resolution "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," I was grateful. I felt that my preoccupation with the "eco-social question"¹, which had led me into political consulting and later into academia in the early 1980s, at the end of my studies in education and cultural studies, did not remain in the ivory tower and exotic. For the first time, social and ecological issues were thought together in a politically weighty document, the 150-year-old capitalist program of externalization, of shifting burdens to the socially weaker and to nature, was fundamentally questioned.² I felt that my journey from the education, cultural and social sciences I studied in Tübingen and Zürich, my commitment to social reform, innovative community building and utopias, to social ecology and social sustainability was worthwhile. I was a member of the Green Party since 1979, advising the first Green parliamentary group in the Bundestag from 1983 on social policy, and in 1985 I was one of the co-founders of the Basic Income European Network BIEN³, which now operates as Earth Network. In 2019, with my ISÖ - Institute for Social Ecology, I was generously commissioned by the Jamaica coalition in Schleswig-Holstein to lead the Future Lab, which would investigate basic income as part of a sustainable social policy.⁴ Finally arrived, thought part of me.

But the old spirit fighting social sustainability did not admit defeat. The Jamaica coalition, with the support of the Greens, cancelled the Future Lab just before we began micro-simulations on the future of social policy with our partner, the German Institute for Economic Research.⁵ A few months later, in the summer of 2020, the Green Party leadership wanted no reference to basic income in the party's new manifesto, and none for nationwide referendums. By the skin of their teeth, grassroots initiatives managed to get at least the main idea of basic income into the program.⁶ I could tell other stories of failure, such as our effort to get the government in Thuringia to commit to an active Social European Union.⁷ I have been a professor of social policy at the Ernst Abbe University in Jena since 2000, trying to bring together social policy and sustainability goals. However, not only the liberal and conservative elites in the North, but also the left-wing and social democratic elites in the East only pay lip service to social sustainability, but have no deeds. The Greens are passive everywhere. So far, a green chancellor or chancelloress does not inspire hope in those of us who are committed to social sustainability.

Why is that? That's what we want to discuss in Working Group 3. On the one hand, the world knows that sustainability has no bright future without social innovation, without a shift away from social and environmental externalization. Hence the SDGs. On the other hand, internalization, the opposite

¹ Michael Opielka (Hrsg.), *Die öko-soziale Frage. Alternativen zum Sozialstaat*. Frankfurt: Fischer 1985

² Michael Opielka, *Soziale Nachhaltigkeit. Auf dem Weg zur Internalisierungsgesellschaft*. München: oekom 2017

³ www.bien.org, for the German Basic Income Network:

<https://www.grundeinkommen.de/11/07/2019/michael-opielka-das-glas-ist-mindestens-halbvoll.html>

⁴ Michael Opielka (Hrsg.), *Zukunftslabor Schleswig-Holstein. Demographie und Digitalisierung #ZLabSH*. ISÖ-Text 2019-1. Norderstedt: BoD 2019, see, too: www.zlabsh.de

⁵ <https://www.isoe.org/aktuelles/news/erst-einmal-keine-zukunft-fuer-das-zukunftslabor-zlabsh/>

⁶ <https://gruenes-grundeinkommen.de/>, a more sociological view of this current discussion can be found here: <https://www.isoe.org/projekte/vortraege/zukunftslabor-soziale-sicherung-auf-dem-soziologiekongress-2020-15-9-2020/>

⁷ Michael Opielka (Hrsg.), *Soziales Europa 2030/2045. Zukunftsszenarien für die EU-Sozialpolitik*. ISÖ-Text 2019-2. Norderstedt: BoD 2019, <https://www.isoe.org/projekte/abgeschlossene-projekte/soziales-europa-2030-2045-zukunftsszenarien-fuer-die-eu-sozialpolitik/>

of internalization, requires huge changes. In the social sphere, this was and is the development of the welfare state, the next step of which is the introduction of basic income. In the ecological sphere, internalization means a clever combination of degrowth, green growth and postgrowth politics.

The concept of social sustainability examines the social conditions and consequences of a sustainable society as well as possible transitions to it. It can be viewed from various perspectives, such as urban sociology, human and social ecology, social epidemiology, moral and ethical analysis, and the discussion of a basic income, new forms of participation, such as the promotion of old and new forms of community (communitarianism debate). The working group will reconstruct these diverse scientific traditions against the background of the current sustainability discussion between Green Growth and Degrowth, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), the EU's Green Deal, and examine whether the Corona pandemic complicates or perhaps even promotes the social dimension of sustainability. As a project, the members of the working group will prepare reviews on the current state of research, which will be compiled in a publication and summarized and published in a joint essay. The project will be tracked over the summer and completed at our second block event in Lisbon - in the late summer sun, we hope!