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Economic change as cultural change?

The Economy for the Common Good as a possible enabler of a culture of mutual connectedness*

Abstract: The article analyzes the development of new postcapitalist practices with their possible effects on the transformation of self-images and -conceptions using the example of the Economy for the Common Good. Accordingly, the connection between the current subject order, the present social crises and the complex entanglement of the prevailing mode of production and life is explained. A socio-ecological transformation would, therefore, also have to be linked to the emergence of an alternative subject culture which is oriented towards cooperation and community. The Association of the Economy for the Common Good Berlin-Brandenburg and common good-oriented companies are used in this research as a space to observe sociocultural practices and new forms and conventions of cooperation in their acceptance and dissemination. On the one hand, it shows that these companies, with their values based on cooperation, social and global justice, and ecological responsibility, and with their participatory organizational structures, offer opportunities for countercultural practices and make utopias tangible, so that social change and self-change are being made possible on a small scale. On the other hand, utilizing detailed examples, the inconsistencies of sociocultural practices and the hybrid mixture of subject forms become clear and comprehensible in their specific context.

Keywords: post-growth, Economy for the Common Good/common good economy, sustainability, subjectification, cultural change

Introduction

It's strange: Even though values should constitute the basic orientation and the 'guiding stars' of our lives, it is very different values that count in our current economy than in our everyday interpersonal relationships. In our friendships and relationships, we feel well when we live human values: building trust, honesty, appreciation, respect, listening, empathy, cooperation, mutual help and sharing. The 'free' market economy is based on the systemic rules of profit-seeking and competition. [...] This contradiction is not just a blemish in a complex and multivalent world, it is a cultural catastrophe; it divides us at our core – both as individuals and as a society.¹ (Felber 2012: 21).

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1 Translated from German.

This is how Christian Felber begins the presentation of his concept of the Economy for the Common Good (ECG). But how should this contradiction be resolved in his opinion, and above all – how is this proposed solution received by people? I have been ethnographically pursuing these topical questions in my research project² on the ECG between 2019 and 2021. In this text, I would like to analyze them in the context of broader debates on social and cultural theory in order to contribute to the reflections on postcapitalist economic models in a “world in/as crisis.”³

The current “multiple crisis”⁴ (Brand and Welzer 2019: 313) is described by Sighard Neckel in his research program “Die Gesellschaft der Nachhaltigkeit” (‘The Society of Sustainability’) (2018) as the depletion of fundamental resources necessary for society. He identifies the natural resources of the ecosystem, the economic resources of societal prosperity, the social resources of care, concern and solidarity, or the subjective resources of professional performance and private lifestyle (Neckel 2018: 11). The questions discussed in politics, business and the scientific community on how to solve the various problems often relate only to individual areas of the crises which are perceived as being topical.⁵ Even visions of the future of sustainable development do not always include fundamental structural changes – as is the case, for example, with the considerations around a “Green Economy.”⁶ By contrast, there are scientific discussions on a social transformation that would have to overcome the compulsion for economic growth and establish a sustainable post-growth society that is perceived as structural in order to counter the multiple crises.⁷ Activist movements and alternative projects are also rehearsing – so far, rather in a niche – alternative forms of working and living together. One of these alternatives is the ECG (Felber 2012) with its proposed path of

- 2 DFG research project: Nachhaltige Entwicklung von unten? Die Gemeinwohl-Ökonomie zwischen utopischen Visionen, zivilgesellschaftlichen Initiativen und basisdemokratischen Entscheidungen (‘Bottom-up sustainable development? The economy of the common good between utopian visions, civil society initiatives and grassroots democracy’), May 2019 – February 2022. Ever since the start of the project, I have been regularly attending the plenary sessions of the Verein der Gemeinwohl-Ökonomie Berlin-Brandenburg (‘Association of Common Good Economy Berlin-Brandenburg’) as well as in the Summer Week of the Gemeinwohl-Ökonomie from July 22–27 in Mannheim, and have conducted interviews with companies with a common good balance sheet in Berlin.
- 3 For prior research on the ECG, cf. the joint research project Gemeinwohl-Ökonomie im Vergleich unternehmerischer Nachhaltigkeitsstrategien (GIVUN) (‘The ECG in a comparison of corporate sustainability strategies’) at the universities of Flensburg and Kiel (<https://www.uni-flensburg.de/nec/forschung/givun/>, accessed June 24, 2021) as well as a selection of publications from the GIVUN joint research project: Brink et al. 2019; Kny 2020; Sommer 2018; Wiefek and Heinitz 2018.
- 4 Often also referred to as “*Vielfachkrise*,” cf. Demirović et al. 2011.
- 5 On the separate perception of the different crises, see Brand 2009: 4.
- 6 On the different imaginations of the futures of sustainability, see the DFG collaborative research group “Zukünfte der Nachhaltigkeit” (‘Futures of Sustainability’) at the University of Hamburg. Cf. Adloff and Neckel 2019: 167–93; Adloff/Neckel 2020: 7–22; Adloff et al. 2020.
- 7 As an introduction to this, cf. Dörre et al. 2019; Jackson 2013a; Kallis et al. 2015; Latouche 2015; Muraca 2014; Paech 2014; Schmelzer and Vetter 2019.

structural change towards a socially and globally just, ecologically responsible and solidary future. With the help of changed economic incentive mechanisms, the concept of the ECG envisages initiating a change of path, from the imperial way of life (Brand and Wissen 2017) of the current society of externalization (Lessenich 2019: 61 ff.) toward a society based on cooperation and participation, mutual appreciation and compassionate solidarity with each other and the environment, which can be described as a culture of mutual connectedness – of interbeing (Eisenstein 2017.)

In this paper, the cultural dimension of the socio-ecological transformation and the emergence of new postcapitalist discourses and practices will be examined using the example of the ECG. For this purpose, I begin with an explanation of the connection of the current subject order with the current social crises and the complex interconnection of the contemporary non-sustainable mode of production and life. A socio-ecological transformation would also be associated with an alternative subject culture with a changed self-image, which is, with the necessary brevity, sketched as an ideal-typical subject model.⁸ The actors of the ECG strive to initiate social and cultural change by means of alternative values and participatory organizational structures. The Association of the Economy for the Common Good and companies oriented toward the common good, therefore, offer a fitting research space to observe alternative subject forms and the possible emergence of new cultural practices and new forms and conventions of co-existence in their acceptance and distribution. Our modern growth society, described as a society of externalization,⁹ not only determines the economic conditions and the democratic institutions of the welfare state with its growth pressures, but also shapes the collective lifestyle patterns and constitutes itself through what Stephan Lessenich describes as a complex ensemble of mutually supporting social practices, forms of subjectivity and normativities (2019: 64) which continue to be taken for granted and are mostly unquestioned. In this context, the article also considers the limits of the spread of a new subject form, contradictions of sociocultural practices and what Ulrich Brand and Harald Welzer call cognitive dissonances (2019: 317) in order to highlight the difficulty of a rapid mainstreaming, i. e. a transition into changed practices recognized by society as a whole and through comprehensively accepted new cultural norms.¹⁰ Based on my empirical research on common good-balanced companies in Berlin and the As-

8 On the terms subject form, subject cultures and subject order, see Reckwitz 2006: 15 ff., 34 ff., as well as Alkemeyer et al. 2013: 18 ff.

9 Externalization refers to the structural mechanism of capitalist growth societies in order to permanently maintain their mode of production. The six mechanisms of externalization are the appropriation of goods and resources, their economic exploitation, their material and symbolic devaluation, the outsourcing of collateral damage and consequential costs to external economic and social spaces, the closing off of one's own economic and social space, and the blanking out of the entire context of function and practice. Cf. Lessenich 2019: 61–5.

10 For a critical view of the hope for a rapid mainstreaming of change agents and the proliferation of niche actors, cf. Brand and Welzer 2019: 314 ff.

sociation of the Economy for the Common Good Berlin-Brandenburg, the performative formation of subjectivity will, therefore, be examined in its possibilities and limitations in order to trace the genesis of possible new subject forms in praxeological terms (Alkemeyer 2015: 27).

The neoliberal subject form and possibilities for change

In current thinking on post-growth and a socio-ecological transformation, the “*Steigerungszwänge*” (‘compulsion to increase’) (Rosa 2019: 37) in order to stabilize modern society dynamically is not only seen as causal for the economic and financial crisis, the ecological crisis, the increasing social and global injustice as well as social polarization.¹¹ It also interacts with the formation of the current subject form, described by Reckwitz as the consumtury creative subject of postmodernity (2006: 500 ff.). A subject form describes a culturally and historically produced general and collectively valid form of subjecthood that serves as a normatively valid ideal at a certain historical time. Subject forms are, thus, ideal-typical specific cultural forms that, as Reckwitz writes, individuals adopt in a particular historical and social context in order to become a full, competent, exemplary being (Reckwitz 2008: 9 f.). in the three primary areas of subjectivation: labor, intimacy and technologies of the self. Through a cultural change in society in the three spheres, the subject forms also change. While the subject form of the white-collar culture (Reckwitz 2006: 336 ff.) in Germany from the 1920s to the 1970s was oriented towards the guiding principle of social conformity, emotional skepticism, and the ideal of self-discipline and the fulfilment of duty, the 1970s saw the beginning of the liberation of subjects from the everyday culture that was perceived as petit bourgeois, with the guiding maxim becoming that of self-realization and -determination. Instead of adapting to fixed functions in work and family, one’s own needs and ideas were now in the foreground of experience. At the latest by the 1990s, successful self-development became a new cultural norm of late-modern subjectivity – linked to the bourgeois concept of achievement and social status. In this way, the countercultural subject ideal of one’s own life and the authentic self became linked to one’s social position in society – from the unworldly hippies or anarchists to the cosmopolitan creatives and entrepreneurs (Reckwitz 2020: 2017).

Social recognition in late modern culture, thus, demands both successful social advancement and the singular, extraordinary and individual nature of one’s own life (Reckwitz 2020: 214 ff.). Due to the increasing economization of the social (Reckwitz 2020: 222) and the associated institutionalized pressure to compare (from impact factors and elite universities to trendy city districts and hip jobs to spectacular holiday

11 Rosa writes of a quadruple crisis: economic, ecological, political and psychological, with this formative feature of society leading into an unavoidable logic of escalation and is unsustainable, cf. 2019: 37 f.

trips), the attractiveness of one's own lifestyle must now not only correspond to the subjective experience. It is also always part of a competitive comparison with others.¹² In addition, the pattern of increase, dynamization and effectiveness is transferred from the economy to self-development – to the ideal of what Reckwitz describes as the expansive and experimental ego (2020: 229). The compulsion towards the new and the extraordinary concerns both the urge for ever more and ever new material things and for ever increasing (professional and/or private) success and ever new experiences.¹³

This collective pattern of constant competitive self-optimization often leads to experiences of disappointment and states of exhaustion.¹⁴ However, the consumerism associated with this is linked to social recognition, status and the creation of meaning: "If consumption plays such a vital role in the construction and maintenance of our social world, then asking people to give up material commodities is asking them to risk a kind of social suicide" (Jackson 2013b: 66). These consumption and growth orientations, which are deeply anchored in our modes of subjectivation, are described by Harald Welzer as mental infrastructures (2011: 30 ff.).¹⁵ Accordingly, a socio-ecological transformation would also be associated with a cultural change in the subject form.

[Degrowth is] a multi-faceted political project that aspires to mobilise support for a change of direction, at the macro-level of economic and political institutions and at the micro level of personal values and aspirations. Income and material comfort is to be reduced for many along the way, but the goal is that this is not experienced as welfare loss. (Kallis 2011: 878)

Predictions about future ways of life and possible countercultural alternative practices are only made cautiously in sociological and cultural studies considerations, since, on the one hand, one must consider the subjective stubbornness of the actors (Brand and Welzer 2019: 315) and that ecologically sustainable practices are adopted precisely when they primarily offer a different practical benefit (Brand and Welzer 2019: 318). On the other hand, subjectivations and self-understandings are formed from the close interplay of material conditions, values and ideas of society and social as well as cultural

12 Cf. also Lessenich, who writes that whether social actors operate on production or consumption markets, on labor or relationship markets, arenas of material competition and symbolic competition and spheres of social probation and interindividual comparison open up for them, always and everywhere (2019: 60).

13 In a critical stance towards a one-sided fixation of the critique of growth on the field of consumption, alternative ethics of consumption or transformative practices of renunciation of consumption which has become common, Lessenich refers to the production of needs, and writes that what one did not even know about yesterday, one may no longer renounce today (2019: 67).

14 Reckwitz names six sociocultural mechanisms of late-modern production of disappointment, cf. 2020: 221 ff.

15 Brand and Wissen also describe the subjectification of the imperial way of life, in which difference is marked through consumption to assure one's own social position, cf. 2017: 59.

practices.¹⁶ Predictions about future social developments can, therefore, not be made independently of economic and political developments. Moreover, reference is made to the inherent dynamics of social developments (Sommer and Welzer 2014: 97–109). Nevertheless, initial outlooks are ventured in reflections on a post-growth society: thus, counter-hegemonic practices in civil society organizations and companies are observed as entry projects (Brand and Welzer 2019: 325), and ecological practices of nutrition and mobility among younger people are cited. Reference is also made to the effects of the society of growth and externalization which can no longer be outsourced, leading to changed discourses and a greater awareness of what Stephan Lessenich calls the social production of internalized systemic constraints (2019: 71), which can, thus, now be problematized. In Hartmut Rosa's reflections on the world relation of subjects in modern society as the striving for independence and sovereignty, a mutually constitutive relation (2019: 45) to nature, history, political institutions, fellow human beings and as a self-relation is proposed as a solution to the current crises (and those connected to the current world relation), which is captured by the concept of "resonance." This kind of 'being related' is described by the attitude of listening and responding and the aspect of caring, which neither dominates nor obeys, but exists in a resonant relationship with each other with the willingness to be touched and transformed (Rosa 2019: 46 f.). According to Rosa, such a resonant togetherness should also prevail in the political community, so that in acting together, something common can emerge (2019: 50).

Appreciation of cooperation and social justice, community spirit and the common good would presumably increase in the ideal-typical subject culture of a sustainable post-growth society, and social recognition would be associated with solidarity, a sense of connection, frugality and the assumption of responsibility for the community instead of being associated with individuality, consumption, material prosperity and social advancement based on competition.¹⁷ However, this would mean abandoning the current imperial way of life (Brand and Wissen 2017) in Western societies and dissolving the, as Ulrich Brand terms them, accompanying forms of superordination and subordination of social groups as well as gender and ethnicized relations (2015: 16). By contrast, social mobility and gender justice as a current political response to social injustice are based, as Michael Sandel points out, on the promise of a possibility for escape, which does little to nurture the social bonds and civic connectedness that a democracy requires (2020: 356).¹⁸

16 Cf. the practice-theoretical considerations by Beck (1997: 339 ff.), Knecht (2005: 223 ff.) and Reckwitz (2017) and in terms of the analysis of the world relation as the root of social formation, cf. Rosa 2019: 40.

17 Cf. also Bender 2012: 213 f.; Dierksmeier 2016: 277–346; Eisenstein 2017.

18 Instead, according to Sandel, in a sustainable society, there should be the possibility of feeling like members of the communal project and having a dignified life – even without social advancement. The humility before all people and with nature that this would entail would lead society back from the brutal ethics of success that drive us apart and point beyond the tyranny of achievement to a less

Manifold tendencies in the direction of a change in values, self-understandings and social practices are evident not only in the expansion of alternative solidarity-based forms of economy, such as solidarity-based agriculture, cooperative house and housing projects and eco-villages, or new forms of commons, such as urban gardening, open-source hardware and software or repair cafés.¹⁹ Fissures in the current ideal-typical subject form are also becoming more and more apparent. In addition to burnout and states of exhaustion, inner resignation or a joyless work to rule are increasingly spreading in professional life, which is being countered with motivational measures, proposals of staff development and the presentation of leadership qualities in management consultations.²⁰ In addition – or as a result of this – Tibetan temples with mindfulness and meditation courses are very popular in the big cities, as are introductory courses in nonviolent communication, resilience, deep ecology or in sociocratic organizational models for learning new techniques of the self, of dealing with each other and with nature, which can be understood as indicators of what Sighard Neckel calls a subjective sustainability (2018: 18f.). However, cultural essentialist tendencies and fundamentalist currents that refer to a (backward-looking) collective identity of a community are also on the rise (Reckwitz 2020: 42 ff.).

These are only a few short examples that can show that different subject forms are currently emerging or gaining strength again as a counter-model to neoliberal hyper-individualism. According to Andreas Reckwitz, the outlined subject form of what he calls the consumerist creative subject(s) of postmodernism is only one order, albeit an increasingly dominant one since the 1990s. Subjects do not exist in the singular, however, but in changing and field-specific subject forms that unfold in a performative manner in practical accomplishment (Reckwitz 2006: 34–50). Following Thomas Alkemeyer and colleagues, subjectivity and practices are to be thought of as a co-constitutive context of reference (2015: 26). Economic-political structures and sociocultural practices, subjectivities, self-images and self-understandings are negotiated, (re)produced

rancorous, more generous public life (Sandel 2020: 362). Regarding a post-growth society, Friederike Habermann also calls for reciprocal, equal relationships and structural communality that promotes cooperation instead of competition and opens up other possibilities for people to develop (2014: 43). Cf. also the reflections on basic pillars of a post-growth society in Muraca (2014: 77–90), the various proposed paths to a growth-independent society in Adler and Schachtschneider (2017), as well as further reflections on structural and cultural changes in Akademie solidarische Ökonomie (2012); Brand and Wissen (2017: 165–185); Dallmer (2020: 140–143); Göpel (2020); Schneidewind (2018); Schneidewind and Zahrnt (2013); Sommer and Welzer (2014); WBGU (2011); and Weizsäcker and Wijkman et al. (2017).

19 Cf. for example Andreas 2015; Baier et al. 2016; Grewe 2017; Mohr et al. 2012; Müller 2012; Poehls et al. 2017; Scholze-Irrlitz 2019; Tauschek and Grewe 2015; Vetter 2021.

20 Cf. Sarah Jankowski: Die “innere Kündigung” vermeiden – Führungsaufgabe Motivation. Zentrum für Management- und Personalberatung (<https://www.zfm-bonn.de/blog/die-innere-kuendigung-vermeiden-fuehrungsaufgabe-motivation/>, accessed June 24, 2021).

or transformed in the specific interactions of sociopolitical discourses.²¹ Subjectivity can, therefore, be newly formed or changed in different practices and with different participants. In this article, the ECG, with its alternative values, will be considered as a discursive framework and the common good companies, with their changed models of organization and recognition, will be examined as alternative economic structures in order to study the sociocultural practices taking place in them and the emerging forms of subjectivity in their contradictory nature. In the following analysis, the normative cultural guidelines of the ECG are considered in their subjectivizing dimension. For this purpose, the discourses and practices explicitly addressing the subjects in companies with a common good balance sheet and in the ECG association Berlin-Brandenburg will be examined. The concept of the ECG will be briefly described as an introduction.

Cooperation and connectedness as the basis of the Economy for the Common Good

The alternative economic model developed by Christian Felber strives for the increase of the common good instead of the increase of capital (2012: 35). The aim is to dissolve the incentive mechanisms that force competing companies in the current capitalist market economy to maximize profits at the expense of the environment and people, and transform economic structures in such a way that cooperative interaction is made possible in the pursuit of the greatest possible common good. The common good is understood to encompass the values of human dignity, solidarity and justice, ecological sustainability, as well as transparency and co-decision.

To implement the concept, companies are encouraged to draw up a common good balance sheet based on socio-ecological and ethical criteria. The common good matrix includes comprehensive social, ecological, democratic and cooperative aspects and evaluates not only the product or the service of the company, but also the company itself, such as the payment of or the participation opportunities for the employees, the ecological responsibility of the employees in the company, the socio-ecological standards of the supplier companies and the financial service provider, or the benefit of the company for future generations. The assessment of the different areas is normatively defined. Cooperative, participative and socio-ecologically responsible interaction with each other and the environment is valued more highly than hierarchical organizational and competitive forms of business. In the future, a change in taxation is intended to serve as an incentive for the changed commitment for the common good, so that a value-oriented corporate focus can develop. This change in tax law is to take place in a grassroots democratic process.²² More than 2,000 companies have supported the model

21 Cf. Beck 1997: 339 ff.; Knecht 2005: 223 ff.; for an introduction to subject analysis, see Reckwitz 2008.

22 For more detail on this, see Giselbrecht and Ristig-Bresser 2017; Kühn 2019.

so far, of which around 500 are members of the ECG or have already prepared a common good balance sheet.²³

The common good-balanced companies in Berlin which I studied in my research²⁴ had often already had a socio-ecological orientation before the balance sheet was drawn up, despite their different areas of activity. The concept of the ECG and the associated balance sheet for the common good were, nevertheless, seen by them as a long-desired means to map the meaning of their entrepreneurial actions and the associated guiding values of the company and be able to engage as cocreators of a new economic ethic and social change.²⁵ In addition, the common good balance sheet was used to continue to develop in a processual and mutual exchange towards a common good.²⁶ Even if the balance sheet results do not yet provide a financial or tax advantage, they still represent a symbolic value and distinguish the company for not only the entrepreneurs themselves, but also for customers, employees and other companies as one that is value-oriented, sustainable, climate-friendly and future-oriented.²⁷

In their attempt to advance the path of a socio-ecological transformation and develop new forms and social practices of cooperative and ecological economic activity, both internally in the company and also in its external impact, the efforts of the companies often go far beyond the preparation of the common good balance sheet. On the one hand, they are available as discussion partners at information events on the ECG at environmental festivals, church or political events, at the *Wandelwoche* (an initiative for the presentation of companies and projects with an alternative economy) and the *Heldenmarkt* (a fair featuring ecological and social products and services) in order to report on their experiences and, thus, strengthen the discourse on the possibility of an alternative form of economy. On the other hand, new forms of communication and exchange are developed in the respective companies in order to achieve the desired increase in the common good in cooperation with other companies. *Märkisches Landbrot*,

23 Cf. <https://web.ecogood.org/de/die-bewegung/>, accessed February 3, 2021.

24 The companies I studied range from a dental practice and smaller consultancies for water management or sustainable tourism to a medium-sized organic bakery and a wholesaler of organic frozen food to a public health insurance company and a large building cleaning company.

25 See, for example, the introductions to the common good reports of Ökofrost & SinnBIOse 2019 (https://oekofrost.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/WEB_Oekofrost_GWOE_Bericht.pdf, accessed July 8, 2020) and BTE Tourismus- und Regionalberatung 2018 (<https://www.bte-tourismus.de/2020/06/08/zweiter-gemeinwohlbericht/>, accessed July 8, 2020).

26 See, for example, the common good report by the dental practice Zahnarztpraxis am Kreuzberg 2018, p. 9 (<https://issuu.com/zahnarztpraxisamkreuzberg/docs/gemeinwohl-bericht-2018>, accessed July 8, 2020).

27 Customers and employees of Sparda Bank Munich, for example, which has a common good balance sheet, chose this bank explicitly because it is an ECG enterprise. Cf. the interviews with common good-oriented companies in Scheffler and Lieber (2018: 103). This distinguishing feature was also used by some Berlin companies to acquire new customers, even if it was more of a side effect and not the main motivation for the companies' common good balance.

for example, a medium-sized organic bakery with a common good balance sheet, has set up an annual round table with its customers and suppliers at which transparent reports are given on the value chain and long-term supply contracts and fixed price commitments are negotiated. According to the company, this kind of transparent presentation of the supply chain and the negotiation of prices creates trust among customers, on the one hand, and gives grain suppliers the security of being able to operate independently of the daily market price, on the other hand.²⁸

A partnership-based supplier relationship and fair pricing are also at the forefront of other common good-oriented companies, such as *Ökofrost*, a specialized wholesaler for organic frozen foods.²⁹ According to the company, the fact that the top priority is not profit but dealing with business partners in a spirit of cooperation as a “win-win situation” sometimes leads to irritations in the economic environment.³⁰ In order to ensure socio-ecological responsibility in the supply chains, some companies have to terminate their cooperation with existing suppliers if they are not willing to make the necessary changes.³¹

A similar cooperative approach is also sought within the companies, for example, at the dental practice *Zahnarztpraxis am Kreuzberg*. The manager of the dental practice had offered his employee the chance to participate in the business decisions as co-owners. However, the staff preferred to remain employed and not share in the business risk for the continued existence of the practice. In order to still be able to hear the staff’s opinion on important decisions and promote their own initiative, the manager introduced a weekly breakfast as a team meeting in the practice at which he informs them about upcoming decisions and asks for the staff’s wishes and concerns.³² A similar format was also introduced by the managing director of the company F&P Stock Solution in the form of an interdepartmental monthly meeting at which the situation and

28 Interview with Christof Deinert, the CEO of Märkisches Landbrot GmbH, June 6, 2020. See also Aktionsgemeinschaft fair & regional Bio Berlin-Brandenburg (<https://fair-regional.de/>, accessed July 08, 2020) as well as Scheffler and Lieber (2018: 112f.). The Demeter-certified organic bakery Märkisches Landbrot was ranked fifth among small and medium-sized companies in the ranking of the sustainability reports by the Institut für ökologische Wirtschaftsforschung and Future 2018.

29 Cf. the 2019 common good report of Ökofrost GmbH, p. 9 (https://oekofrost.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/WEB_Oekofrost_GWOE_Bericht.pdf, accessed July 8, 2020).

30 Interview with Katharina Gerull, assistant to the management board of Ökofrost GmbH, May 26, 2020.

31 Cf. Antje von Drewitz, managing director of the mountain sports outfitter Vaude, at the DBU online salon 30 years of DBU: “Nachhaltig in die Zukunft” – Nachhaltig Wirtschaften on February 1, 2021.

32 Interview with Matthias Eigenbrodt, managing director of Zahnarztpraxis am Kreuzberg, January 30, 2020. See also the common good report from Zahnarztpraxis am Kreuzberg, pp. 39–41 (<https://issuu.com/zahnarztpraxisamkreuzberg/docs/gemeinwohl-bericht-2018>, accessed July 8, 2020), as well as Matthias Eigenbrodt at the press conference of the Association of the Economy for the Common Good Berlin-Brandenburg on May 14, 2020. Martin Strele, managing director of Kairos gGmbH, also explains a similar experience in an interview, cf. Scheffler and Lieber 2018: 105.

concerns of the employees are discussed and possibilities for improvement can be discussed and developed.³³

Other companies, such as *confideon*, a consultancy for water supply and wastewater disposal, work according to a sociocratic model with even flatter hierarchies. Although there are two managing directors of the company, a project manager is responsible for the individual consulting projects, even if the company's managing directors are involved in the individual project.³⁴ Cooperative and community-oriented approaches are being implemented even more strongly in newly founded young companies, for example, the Berlin-based beverage bottle manufacturer *soulbottles*³⁵ or the independent beer brand *Quartiermeister*.³⁶ Thus, *soulbottles* also works with a sociocratic organizational structure and, in addition, transferred the company to responsible ownership in June 2018. This means that *soulbottles* is no longer owned by the founders, but that *soulproducts GmbH* now belongs to the employees and can, therefore, be neither sold nor inherited.³⁷ The *Quartiermeister* company also operates with consensus decisions in the team and supports social projects in the neighborhood through its profits, with the selection of projects being controlled by a voluntary association in which everyone can participate.³⁸ *Quartiermeister* is also in the process of converting the company into a corporate purpose company and, thus, being owned by itself, so that it is safely and permanently removed from the free market and a sale of the company is rendered impossible. While the founders and directors of *Quartiermeister* will continue to hold voting rights, they will not have profit rights. Profits will be either reinvested or donated.³⁹ The two founders of the now well-established beer brand, thus, forgo profit in favor of a sustainable and sensible economy that benefits everyone in keeping with their motto "*Quartiermeister – Zum Wohle aller*" ('Quartiermeister – For the benefit of all').⁴⁰

Structural challenges and cultural limits of cooperative and socio-ecological practices

However, the value-based and cooperative orientation of common good companies and the postcapitalist practices of their founders and employees are currently also coming

33 Julius Göllner, managing director at F&P Stock Solution, at the press conference of the Gemeinwohl-Ökonomie Berlin-Brandenburg, May 14, 2019.

34 Interview with Dirk Jakubczick, consultant and project leader at *confideon Unternehmensberatung GmbH*, February 3, 2020. See also <https://www.confideon.de/start.html>, accessed January 14, 2021.

35 <https://www.soulbottles.de/>, accessed January 12, 2021.

36 <https://quartiermeister.org/de/>, accessed January 12, 2021.

37 See <https://www.soulbottles.de/soulblog/impact/purpose-economy-soulbottles-gehoert-sich-selbst>, accessed January 12, 2021.

38 See <https://quartiermeister.org/de/quartiermeister/>, accessed January 12, 2021.

39 See <https://www.lebensmittelzeitung.net/handel/Purpose-Unternehmen-Aufbruch-in-eine-neue-Wirtschaft-141594>, accessed January 14, 2021.

40 See <https://quartiermeister.org/de/quartiermeister/#unser-manifest>, accessed January 14, 2021.

up against structural and cultural limits.⁴¹ Consequently, the aim here is to examine how social recognition is achieved in common good-oriented companies and the movement of the ECG, and to what extent subjectivities can be newly formed or changed in the process. The contradictions and ambivalences which arise in practice out of the coexistence of different economic logics and different understandings of the world and the self will be particularly filtered out.

One project manager from the water management consultancy *confideon*, for example, laments the difficulty of steering customers “towards the common good” so that they take on more “responsibility for our society.”⁴² His company was able to provide highly competent advice on water cleanliness, but their knowledge about the possible reduction of energy consumption in the water companies was not being asked for, which made him, as an environmental engineer, doubt the meaningfulness of the consultancy work:

For example, I would be really keen to motivate the companies in the water supply and wastewater disposal sector to contribute more to the energy transition – either through a common good report or through recognizing it. They are not doing that so far. They don’t see it as their job. It’s not in the statutes. [...] But the challenge that I now see for us as a society is that it all has to be much more interconnected. You can’t see all the systems individually. For example, in the past, the sewage treatment plant in a municipality was the biggest energy consumer in the municipality overall. Because [...] this whole system with the pumps, etc. consumes an infinite amount of energy. And [...] there is already a development in the industry towards energy-autonomous sewage treatment plants. But we can’t offer that to our client companies. They’ll chase us off the farm, so to speak.⁴³

He names other possibilities for saving energy at the wastewater treatment plants, such as by not throwing cleaning wipes, which do not dissolve in the water, into the wastewater, or, even better, to not even produce them in the first place as they clump together in the wastewater and clog the pumps, which also causes a major energy burden.⁴⁴ In his view, a cooperative and participatory structure of cooperation between the different companies as well as a fundamental interest of all companies in the collective improvement of (in this case) ecological criteria in the sense of an improvement of the common good would be necessary to overcome the challenge of the ecological crisis mentioned above. He believes that state or communal regulatory frameworks would be necessary for this purpose, and companies like his could help to shape them. In conclusion, he expresses his hope for the future:

41 On the structural limits due to the efficiency requirement in public service companies as well as in public procurement, see Kühn 2020: 49.

42 Interview with Dirk Jakubczick, consultant and project leader at *confideon Unternehmensberatung GmbH*, February 3, 2020. Direct quotations from interviews have been translated from German.

43 *Ibid.*

44 *Ibid.*

The realization of these connections would perhaps be more effective if we were to go into this process via the ECG approach, if [the waterworks] were to go into this process [of a common good balance sheet]. Now that would give a very positive image of the future. I also believe that young people, [...] when they realize that they are only administering long-established grievances – albeit at a high technical level and with well committed companies. But when they realize that they cannot develop anything for the better, they will not accept that. [...] There is already a showcase report – that is the Stadtentwässerung Stuttgart [‘Stuttgart wastewater disposal’]. And for me, they are really a pioneer here, where I think: Yes, it is possible! [...] And then Stadtentwässerung Stuttgart, their city-owned company, agreed: Yes, we’ll do it! So it’s not as though the Stadtentwässerung Stuttgart is an eco-pioneer company. But you can see that they have given it a lot of thought at a very deep level.⁴⁵

In addition to such structural difficulties as the lack of networking and incentive mechanisms for joint (ecological) corporate accountability, contradictions in the transfer of changed socio-economic practices and new cultural norms in common good contexts also become apparent. In a similar way to now, the companies had mostly already had an ecological, social and participative orientation before their balancing, many of the employees are also ecologically reflective in their behavior, critical of consumption and more interested in employment that they perceive as meaningful than in high earnings.⁴⁶ Several companies also report that employees and interns had explicitly applied to them because of their value-based orientation and participatory organizational structure.⁴⁷ Many companies also emphasize the satisfaction of the employees due to the respectful atmosphere in the team, the meaningfulness of the work and the possibility for working in a self-responsible manner.⁴⁸ Some customers also switch to the respective company because of the common good balance.⁴⁹ However, these decisions are made

45 Ibid.

46 One employee of a common good-oriented consulting company on water management said in the interview that he refrained from moving to another company in the aircraft industry, where he could have earned twice as much, as he did not want to work in aircraft development. Cf. interview with Dirk Jakubczick, consultant and project leader at confideon Unternehmensberatung GmbH, February 3, 2020.

47 For example, the sustainable tourism company BTE Tourismus. Interview with the managing director Hartmut Rein, July 7, 2020.

48 However, there are also counter-examples where a change to a participatory organizational structure would meet with resistance from the previous “long-standing” department heads, where an interest in codetermination is limited among the employees overall, or the desired self-responsibility at work without external control does not take place in some cases. Cf. interview with a common good-balanced company, May 13, 2020. The information has been anonymized to protect the employees.

49 Matthias Eigenbrodt, for example, managing director of the dental practice Zahnarztpraxis am Kreuzberg, reports that about 20 % of patients have come to them because of the ECG balance sheet. Public health insurance company BKK ProVita, which has a common good balance sheet, has also seen an increase in customers in the Berlin-Brandenburg sales region because the sales manager has explicitly advertised the ECG at events such as the Heldenmarkt. The increase was significantly lower in

primarily by academics and young university graduates who combine their ecological behavior with their lifestyle and can, thus, also position themselves socially. Apprentices, for example, at the organic bakery *Märkisches Landbrot*,⁵⁰ have so far been less interested in the ECG, similar to some employees in large companies with more than 100 employees. This applies especially to companies that have existed for a long time and in which the managers have only become enthusiastic about the idea of the ECG in recent years. Although these companies were already socially oriented and appreciative towards their employees and customers, the ecological and participatory aspects have only been addressed more strongly in recent years and also through the common good balance sheet.

In order to also achieve a change in lifestyle among these employees, the managing directors create, as far as possible, the structural framework for such a socio-ecological and participatory transformation. Fresh organic fruit and fair trade coffee, for example, are usually available on the company's premises. Employees have the option of part-time work or a 30-hour work week. Meditation rooms to practice mindfulness exercises exist or the opportunity to participate in meditation sessions are offered in some companies. The companies often offer free training, workshops and lectures on vegan nutrition and healthy food, the company's guiding values or self-organization and holocratic forms of organization and explain them in the company newsletter. One important aspect of the common good and a climate-friendly and grandchild-friendly society is the issue of CO₂ emissions through meat consumption and mobility, which is also included in the balance sheet.⁵¹ Companies, therefore, try and provide CO₂-reduced mobility to and at the workplace for employees and encourage them to change their driving and eating habits. Accordingly, they offer company bicycles, organize carpools and hold cooking events. The managing directors often lead by example. However, they do not bring out a "moral club" – as some managing directors emphasize.⁵²

other sales regions (interview with Stephan Lampel, sales manager Berlin of BKK ProVita, May 20, 2020). However, a common good balance sheet is also an exclusion criterion for other customers. Martin Strele, one of the two managing directors of the Austrian Kairos Institute for Impact Research and Development, reports: "The classic economic actors in Vorarlberg are growth-oriented. For the state government and the chamber of commerce, the common good balance sheet is, therefore, a general indictment or threat to their economic model. We have also felt this, until today. Nevertheless, we have, of course, communicated the ECG balance, put it on the website" (Scheffler and Lieber 2018: 105).

50 Interview with Christof Deinert, the managing director of Märkisches Landbrot GmbH, June 12, 2020.

51 Point C3 of the common good matrix contains the "promotion of the ecological behavior of the employees."

52 "We talk about it, draw attention to things. But we don't give them a moral bashing. That's not the way to do it!" Interview with Hartmut Rein, managing director of BTE Tourismus, July 7, 2020. Cf. also the common good report by Quartiermeister, https://quartiermeister.org/media/filer_public/49/fd/49fd1ee6-f8da-49b0-910d-631d101c75f5/2015_-_quartiermeister_-_gemeinwohlbericht.pdf, p. 17, accessed January 15, 2021.

In some interviews, however, the challenge of “bringing the employees on board” is mentioned.⁵³ This also becomes evident in various misunderstandings. The employees of a company, for example, were irritated that their boss – as the owner of a prosperous company – used public transport to travel to the company premises. His intention was to use his behavior to influence the employees to use the train themselves. However, the employees’ reaction was different. They were horrified: “You can’t do that! Especially as management! That’s just not right!”⁵⁴ Here, the social patterns of social recognition through consumption and status objects, known as mental infrastructures, become apparent.⁵⁵ His promotion of CO₂-free mobility, nevertheless, led to a change. An employee of the company came to his boss on his own initiative with the request for a bicycle as a company vehicle. As a caretaker, he now covers 10–15 km a day in all weathers on his company bicycle, a decision that – according to the company newsletter – is also well received by the customers.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, so far, the caretaker has not been willing to give up his company car altogether, even though he was offered 200 € additional earnings per month for it.⁵⁷

The employees of another company with a common good balance sheet also reacted rather reservedly to the offer of using public transport or company bicycles similar to their employer. However, when municipal parking management was introduced in the area and the employees would have had to pay parking fees for their private cars, interest in a company bike changed and the willingness to change their mode of transport increased significantly from then on. Five new company bicycles were purchased for the dental practice *Zahnarztpraxis am Kreuzberg*.⁵⁸ However, the managing director was unable to answer in the interview to what extent the use of a bicycle during the employ-

53 For example, the interview with Matthias Eigenbrodt, managing director of the dental practice *Zahnarztpraxis am Kreuzberg*, January 30, 2020.

54 Mario Wodara, managing director of the Gebäudeservice Wodara, at his impulse talk on February 20, 2020, at the conference “Klimapositiv! Konferenz für Unternehmen der Gemeinwohl-Ökonomie in Berlin-Brandenburg” (‘Climate positive! Conference for companies in the Economy for the Common Good Berlin-Brandenburg’), Berlin, February 19/20, 2020. As a compromise, the managing director has now purchased a hybrid car, however, he continues to frequently ride his bicycle or take public transport, cf. Interview with Sebastian Hemme, sustainability officer at Gebäudeservice Wodara GmbH, May 13, 2020.

55 Cf. Brand and Wissen who write that subjectivation also has a physical dimension through which governance becomes ‘natural’ and that it reproduces in the endeavor to mark difference through consumption, to reassure oneself of one’s own social position and realize their inner selves. Mediated by consumption, it becomes a driver of the imperial lifestyle (2017: 59).

56 *Der mit dem Fahrrad kommt* (‘Arrives by bike’). Article in the company newsletter *Qualitrauen. Informationen für Interessierte*, no. 13/2020: 4.

57 Interview with Sebastian Hemme, sustainability officer of Gebäudeservice Wodara GmbH, May 13, 2020.

58 Interview with Matthias Eigenbrodt, managing director of the dental practice *Zahnarztpraxis am Kreuzberg*, January 30, 2020. Cf. also Matthias Eigenbrodt at the press conference of the Association of the Economy for the Common Good Berlin-Brandenburg, May 14, 2019.

ees' free time has increased as a result. The example shows that sustainable practices, such as cycling or the use of public transport, are adopted when it becomes a cheaper mobility alternative.⁵⁹ This makes it possible to experience countercultural alternatives, which can also be incorporated into everyday life as routinized practices.

Similarly, converting to a meat-reduced diet is almost a matter of course in many young companies that are oriented at the ECG. Other, especially larger, companies also attempt to make this change "palatable" to their employees and to value it as a step toward an ecological future. In a company with a common good balance sheet with 255 employees which explicitly refers to a vegan diet in its mission statement, the common good report also shows that 79% of the employees choose vegetarian or vegan meals for lunch (51% vegetarian, 28% vegan, 19% meat, 2% fish).⁶⁰ This above-average choice of vegetarian and vegan food can certainly be explained by the appreciation of and a social obligation toward the company's mission statement. However, a complete change of eating habits has not yet taken place, as the Berlin sales manager of the company reports somewhat resignedly:

So this whole ECG story and the fact that we are the way we are, that we propagate a vegan diet and stand behind it, as I personally do, we have only been doing this since 2014. The employees, of course, should be taken along on this journey, and that is very, very difficult. [...] For example, when we have a company party, we have a company meeting twice a year, there's also something to eat. There's a vegan buffet and a non-vegan buffet. And ten percent of the people go to the vegan buffet and when I stand there with people and say: Hey, you're vegan too? [They say:] No, no, I'm just going to get some appetizers here. So you can't push that on people. [...] We keep trying to address this in our internal communication. We have an intranet where you can read about it. People are always kept up to date there. Then we have our members' newsletter, which, of course, the employees also read. And the topics of diet, ECG, sustainability – they always play a role [...] Well, we are just a normal cross-section of society, both among the employees as well as the insured. And I can't say that people in our company are now voluntarily trying to do things better. I don't feel that's the case. No. No, no, not at all. [...] For example, I am the only one in sales who eats vegan food, except for the head of internal sales. [...] And, I have to say this critically: the sales colleagues, when we go out to eat somewhere, they don't even manage to go without meat on this one evening a year. [...] Then they always say: Yes, I only eat very little. But even on that evening they can't do it. So that what [we] actually want to model has not reached everyone by a long shot. So we preach all day – we preach in lectures, at fairs and so on – what we want.

59 Cf. Brand and Welzer 2019: 318.

60 Common good balance 2018/19: 45. Details have been anonymized to protect the employees of the company.

But as soon as the workday ends, people don't continue with it. That's the experience I've had.⁶¹

A vegan or vegetarian diet is also exemplified in another company. Twice a week, a communal lunch takes place on the company premises – once with meat, the second day is vegetarian. The company's administrative officer in charge of sustainability and the ECG says: "Every now and then there's a smile from individual people for this. But it is a tiny step in the right direction – well in what I believe is the right direction. This would be proof that meat consumption is not the be-all and end-all."⁶²

These examples show that the habits and diets of the employees which are taken for granted are being challenged by changed discourses and appeals in the company as well as by the lived practice of some employees. The different ecological practices in the company, on the one hand, and in the private environment, on the other, point to the different self-understandings in the various social fields. The following anecdote, told by the managing director of the *Gebäudeservice Wodara GmbH* about his company, shows that the common good balancing does play a role in this: "I have a good example: We have residual chemicals and they had to go. Then one employee said: 'We can pour it down the toilet.' Then another one said: 'Have you thought about this? We are ECG balanced, so we can't just pour it down the toilet!'"⁶³

The desire to achieve a "rethinking" among the employees through the ECG orientation with the changed values and constructions of meaning and, thus, to bring about a stronger consideration of their own social and cultural practices or sensitize them to make a conscious decision is also expressed by other entrepreneurs.⁶⁴ In this way, alternatives are made conceivable and achievable, and new offers of subjectivation are made.

In addition to the socio-ecological criteria, the concept of the ECG also emphasizes nonviolent communication, empathic, mindful and appreciative interaction with each other and with different needs, as well as democratic codetermination and code-sign in all areas, and these are normatively defined and balanced in the common good matrix (Felber 2012: 114–118). Therefore, the ambivalences between previously familiar

61 Interview with the sales manager of a company with a common good balance sheet, May 20, 2020. The details have been anonymized to protect the employees of the company. The statements from the interview refer explicitly to the evening event and the employees' free time.

62 Interview with Sebastian Hemme, sustainability officer at *Gebäudeservice Wodara GmbH*, May 13, 2020.

63 Mario Wodara, managing director of *Gebäudeservice Wodara GmbH*, at the press conference of the *Gemeinwohl-Ökonomie Berlin-Brandenburg*, May 14, 2019. The majority of the cleaning chemicals used in the company have so far been replaced by more environmentally friendly and ecological cleaning agents. Cf. interview with Sebastian Hemme, sustainability officer of *Gebäudeservice Wodara GmbH*, May 13, 2020.

64 Cf. interview with Hartmut Rein, managing director of *BTE Tourismus*, July 7, 2020, as well as a written interview with Maximilian Begovic, sustainability officer at *BKK ProVita*, May 11, 2020.

and internalized mental structures of effectiveness, work ethics and hegemonic ideas of power, and the desired social and gender-just, (grassroots) democratic and appreciative interaction in the movement of the ECG will be exemplified here. This is because the contradictions are not only evident among the employees and staff of the common good companies. The transformation of hierarchically organized enterprises into a participatory organizational structure, the acceptance of the necessary duration of grassroots democratic decision-making processes or the introduction of gender-appropriate language and nonviolent communication are also met with incomprehension by some activists in the ECG movement, lead to misunderstandings in the cooperation between the common good-oriented companies or have been difficult to transform so far due to existing social hegemonic power structures.

Various examples of the conflicting value standards for dealing with time and effectiveness as well as the continued unquestioned use of habitual linguistic and patriarchal patterns were revealed at the Summer Week of the ECG from July 22 to 27, 2019, in Mannheim. More than 100 activists from Germany, Austria and Switzerland met there for five days to discuss strategies for advancing the common good movement, solve problems, share ideas, and draw courage and strength from each other. During the day, workshops and meetings of the various actor groups that had been founded in the ECG took place. Stakeholder groups included the working group of speakers, which offers lectures on the ECG, the working group on education, which develops free educational materials and workshops for schools, the working group on communication, which takes care of communication structures, such as a joint IT structure and newsletters, and the working group on matrix development, which further develops the ECG matrix for companies and regions based on prior experience in the preparation of the balance sheet.⁶⁵ This work is mostly done on a voluntary basis. During the Summer Week, the working group on advisory services also met, in which the certified advisors for the preparation of the ECG balance sheet exchange information and receive further training. In contrast to the other working groups, the advisors are obliged to take part in two further training courses per year and are paid for their advisory work. They also often work for the ECG movement on a voluntary basis and support the idea of a value-based economy. Nevertheless, there were differences between the participants of the ECG Summer Week from the other working groups and the consultants, as the following example will illustrate.

The joint days in Mannheim started with a large plenary session where, after a morning impulse, the workshops of the day were presented and the rooms were assigned. The advisors also took part in the plenary, although they were all obliged to take part in the working group on consultancy for the entire rest of the day. One of the consultants felt that his participation in the morning plenary was quite a “waste of time”

65 On the different actor circles, see <https://web.ecogood.org/de/die-bewegung/akteurinnen-kreise/>, accessed February 2, 2021.

as he could not attend the other workshops. The idea of a mutual interest in the topics of the different workshops was apparently not particularly plausible for him, especially since time and effectiveness criteria play a major role in his “other” world as a freelance communication and HR consultant.⁶⁶ This discrepancy between the working group on consultancy and the other Summer Week participants was also noticed by the organizing team, and a temporal separation was made between the professional development of the working group on consultancy and the Summer Week for the following ECG event.

Gender-sensitive language was also demanded at times during the Summer Week, sometimes ironically, sometimes provocatively, for example, when the workshops were only offered for “*Teilnehmer*” (‘participants’), “*Interessenten*” (‘interested parties’) or “*Mitarbeiter*” (‘employees’) – all of them generic masculine terms.⁶⁷ How difficult it is to introduce gender justice in language is also evident at ECG events in Berlin. The reaction to criticism varies. Some of the common good-balanced entrepreneurs apologize in advance if they slip into the masculine language in which they were socialized.⁶⁸ Other ECG activists are relatively ignorant of the desires for gender justice in language.⁶⁹ Other patriarchal structures also seem to be strongly internalized and are continued without question. At a workshop during the Summer Week, for example, I was critical of the draft for a common good balance sheet for private individuals that was put up for discussion in which the use of a private car is assessed with minus points.⁷⁰ Instead of this assessment, which I perceived as one-sided and moralizing, my suggestion was to additionally ask in the balance sheet for the necessary infrastructure change for possible alternative ecological practices – in this case, for example, the need for bicycle paths and train connections for weekend excursions with children into the surrounding countryside – in order to, thus, have the option of dealing constructively with infrastructural shortcomings. Perhaps my criticism was too sweeping or I did not make clear enough the conflict between the ambition of the common good balance for private individuals to change individual consumer behavior through the self-test and the structural change I favored to encourage alternative ecological practices. After the workshop, an older man approached me and told me he was a mental coach and had sensed an inner blockage in me. He gave me his business card in case I was interested in working on it.⁷¹ This offer of the mental coach, undoubtedly meant in a caring and benevolent way for

66 Field notes, July 24, 2019.

67 Thus, the rap song and video “Being visible” were shown during a morning impulse – as a prompt for thought and a statement and without extensive critical or moralizing discussion. See: Pinkstinks Germany: Sichtbar sein, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e4KQLwtgycM>, accessed February 2, 2021.

68 Cf. Mario Wodara, managing director of Gebäudeservice Wodara, at his impulse talk, February 2, 2020 at the conference “Klimapositiv! Konferenz für Unternehmen der Gemeinwohl-Ökonomie in Berlin-Brandenburg,” Berlin, February 19/20, 2020.

69 Observations during my fieldwork at the ECG association Berlin-Brandenburg.

70 See <https://web.ecogood.org/de/unsere-arbeit/privatpersonen/>, accessed February 3, 2021.

71 Field note, July 23, 2021.

my personal development, corresponds to patriarchal power structures, so that seemed rather uninviting and hierarchical to me.

Such contradictions can also be traced in the work of the ECG association Berlin-Brandenburg. Some decisions, for example, on the institutionalization of the ECG movement or participation in the requested events urgently had to be made or were considered particularly relevant by some activists and took place without any prior grassroots vote.⁷² The offer of an ECG activist to conduct a mindfulness meditation half an hour before the plenary session was also accepted very gladly and with great applause. However, the volunteers often did not have the time to arrive half an hour beforehand or were initially absorbed in conversation so that the offer “lay dormant.” Additionally, while the 30-hour work week favored in the ECG matrix is introduced in some companies,⁷³ most committed activists do not adhere to it – not even the initiator Christian Felber himself. In this context, the need for public engagement in economic and political change collides with the time allocated in post-growth theories for housework, gardening and care work. However, even in ECG contexts, social recognition is more likely to be awarded for dedicated volunteer work than for leisure, gardening or claiming time wealth.

A culture of mutual connectedness as a new subject culture in the Economy for the Common Good ?

The concept of the ECG and its application in the form of the common good balance sheet creates the structural framework for the stronger incorporation of ecological, social, participatory and democratic guiding principles as alternative value standards in business enterprises and to favor value-oriented social (everyday) practices described as “post-capitalist” (Neckel 2018: 20). The group of common good-balanced companies, thus, generates a space in which alternative logics of action are affirmed and value-oriented patterns of belief are reinforced. On the one hand, this makes sociocratic and holocratic organizational models in companies plausible, up to and including the transfer of ownership rights to a foundation and the transfer of the company to responsible ownership, allowing them to spread more widely. On the other hand, alternative value concepts such as “meaning instead of profit,” the appreciation of cooperative, solidary and ecological interaction, and empathetic togetherness can stabilize countercultural practices and change understandings of the self and the world. In this way, a subject model that is oriented towards alternative value standards and logics of action becomes

72 The plenary of the ECG association Berlin-Brandenburg only convenes once a month in a limited time frame so that grassroots democratic decision-making processes on all topics and events requested are difficult in terms of time.

73 Matthias Eigenbrodt, managing director of the dental practice Zahnarztpraxis am Kreuzberg, has decided for himself to limit his work time to 30 h/week and is very content with this decision despite the lower income. Cf. Interview with Matthias Eigenbrodt, January 30, 2020.

possible as a normative-ideal pattern of successful subjecthood and can be experienced as a new form of subject.

The examples presented here show the (partly also productive) contradictory nature of practices. Many of the companies that want to foster alternative forms of economy also use the common good balance sheet to become more visible as a group. The ECG serves as a cultural code for potential customers or employees,⁷⁴ which – thought of in terms of capitalist market logic – also promises a competitive edge. The use of company bicycles after the introduction of parking regulations also proves to be an economic advantage, which is why this transformation of everyday practices took place. However, the alternative values and cooperative behaviors in the ECG also lead to irritations of familiar patterns of habitus and lifestyle which can break open mental structures and facilitate alternative practices – as shown by the vegetarian food in the company canteen or the introduction of gender-equitable language at the ECG Summer Week.

It becomes clear how much social practices change depending on the social field, the participants and the corresponding role requirements, a phenomenon referred to in subjectivation theory as hybridity (Reckwitz 2006: 19). Nevertheless, the question arises as to which subject culture emerges as dominant and collectively shared at a certain time and in a specific place, and, thus, effectively “inscribes” itself in the body. So far, the Western unsustainable lifestyle reproduces itself because, as Brand and Welzer put it, the relations of domination and the imperial way of life are so deeply embedded in it and are hardly noticed (2019: 317). In order to initiate a change of path, positive examples are proposed in post-growth considerations and activist movements as entry projects (Brand and Welzer 2019: 326) and peninsulas against the tide (Habermann 2009), which can demonstrate a counterculture and question cultural hegemony so that a utopia appears as a sensible possibility. In it, Brand and Wissen write, different political rules, social self-evident truths and guiding principles are to apply in order to facilitate a way of life based on solidarity (2017: 169). By making these alternatives experienceable, they can make social change and self-transformation possible at a microlevel and, thus, contribute to the constitution of new subject forms.

The common good companies I have studied, with their values based on cooperation, social and global justice as well as ecological responsibility, and their participatory organizational structures, represent such entry projects. Despite the reference to a joint concept and the balancing on the base of a shared common good matrix, there are also criticisms of various kinds within the ECG, and these are certainly desirable for internal further development.⁷⁵ It is noted, for example, that trust work is also necessary in the

74 Cf. Scheffler and Lieber 2018: 103 as well as the interview with Christof Deinert, managing director of Märkisches Landbrot GmbH, June 12, 2020, and the interview with Stephan Lampel, head of sales of BKK ProVita, May 20, 2020.

75 In order not to be detrimental to the movement and the concept, when criticism is voiced, it usually starts with a reference to the large followership with the ECG balance sheet; cf. Gerull 2014: 8.

ECG, one should approach people instead of lecturing them, and there should be an interest in finding out “how they are doing or what they need.”⁷⁶ It is also reported from the experience of various companies that not everyone in the company wants to take on responsibility,⁷⁷ participation can be difficult and does not always lead to the desired result,⁷⁸ and making salaries transparent can also be associated with difficulties. With a view to the Spiral Dynamics value development model (Beck and Cowan 1996), the ECG balance sheet is also criticized for the normatively prescribed values and the development path that is fixed as a result, which would allow little room for individual paths and an individual context. The clear specification in the ECG matrix of “right” or “wrong,” thus, feels more like, as Gerull puts it, an ecological corset (2014: 9). The examples show that there is also a space for discussion within the ECG to initiate a development process that is taken up by the matrix development team or the active members of the ECG association.⁷⁹

The ambivalences both within the ECG and in its contact with non-sustainable mental structures and value standards reveal the dynamics of negotiation for social recognition and appreciation of alternative values and self-understandings and, thus, for alternative subject forms. It remains to be seen to what extent an empathic subject connected to nature and people can assert itself as a cultural subject model of a future sustainable society or whether it will remain as a niche in developed market capitalism.

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76 Davide Brocchi, Initiative Tag des guten Lebens, panel discussion at the online conference on the topic of “Nachhaltige Transformation – Gute Arbeit – Neue Wirtschaftsdemokratie: Wie geht das zusammen?,” January 15, 20201.

77 Nikolaus Förster, managing director of the Impulse Medien GmbH, at the ECG salon “Mitarbeiten – Mitentscheiden? – Gelebte Transparenz und Teilhabe in Organisationen,” January 28, 2021. Cf. also the interview with Katharina Gerull, assistant to the management of the Ökofrost GmbH, May 26, 2020.

78 There is a report, for example, from one company in which the sofa to be purchased for the hallway and its color were discussed for three months and, in the end, a four-colored couch was chosen that no one really liked. Cf. Ole Langbein, managing director of the inoio GmbH, at the ECG salon, January 28, 20201.

79 On the work of the working group on matrix development, see <https://web.ecogood.org/de/die-bewegung/akteurinnen-kreise/entwicklung-der-matrix/>, accessed February 5, 2021.

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