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## Ecological basic income - a brake on acceleration <sup>1</sup>

This paper is about the idea of a basic income financed to a relevant share by taxing problematic environmental consumption, an "ecological basic income". It is a possible answer to central ecologically, socially and culturally problematic developments of contemporary growth societies. There is no doubt that it is still a social utopia, but it is a "concrete utopia" (Bloch), a possible path of development. In the paper I will show that this regulatory idea liberating from the growth compulsion does not hope for an aloof utopia, but represents an alternative development direction that builds on existing basic values of modern society.

I will first outline the ways in which an "Ecological Basic Income" (EBI) can lead out of various impasses of previous environmental policy. An EBI combines ecological taxation with redistribution of income and it can link sufficiency with the diversity of lifestyles (I). But it is by no means just a clever way of avoiding the social shortcomings of environmental policy or the ecological dangers of emancipatory social policy. Rather, a basic income has the potential to counteract both productivist production and a consumerist culture. It can act as an 'authenticity lump sum' and thereby promote a post-growth economy and society (II).

Even more - a basic income could help to slow down the "engines" that - following Hartmut Rosa's theory - are 'responsible' for the ongoing social acceleration of modern societies. It can transform the Green New Deal, the current capitalist-productivist growth project, into an economy with more authentic production and consumption that no longer needs growth. It can slow down the progress of the functional division of society through the emergence of more communicatively integrated lifeworlds. And it is suitable to give the basic goods (Skidelsky/Skidelsky) of a "good life" a hospitable environment and thus to push back the "cultural engine" of the promise of happiness by maximising events and consumption events (III).

However, the way in which a basic income is financed must not counteract this liberation from acceleration constraints. The most conducive to this goal is financing through eco-taxes (IV). Finally, I will show that an eco-tax is not only a potential brake on acceleration, but is particularly suitable for a gradual introduction of the principle of an unconditional basic income (BGE) in the first place, i.e. that a realistic path to this concrete utopia is possible (V).

### Ecological basic income as a redistributive and libertarian environmental policy

An Ecological Basic Income (EBI) is a basic income that is financed by levies on undesirable environmental consumption. The use of a few key environmental resources and media is to be taxed, where the problem is not the toxicity or

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dangerousness of an individual use, but the quantity. The central idea is that the revenue from these user charges (such as an eco-tax on raw materials, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, land consumption, etc.) is distributed evenly back to the population. Every citizen, from infants to the elderly, from rich to poor, is thus paid an "eco-bonus" or an "ecological basic income".<sup>2</sup> The tax is not levied on end products, but at the beginning and end of the life cycle of products, i.e. when resources are extracted and when substances are reintroduced into natural sinks. It is therefore the financing of an unconditional basic income via the taxation of a certain form of production and consumption - the one that, according to our social ideas, burdens the environment in the wrong way, the one that runs counter to the goal of what we define as "sustainable development".

### Ecotax with redistribution

Isn't financing by increasing the price of consumption unfair to the poor? Don't they suffer the most from an increase in prices for their daily lives, because the user charges for raw materials or emissions will flow into the final products in the shop via the value chains? It is exactly the other way round: The wealthy have higher consumption and thus usually higher environmental consumption. They therefore pay above average, while they only benefit on average from the per capita payout, i.e. they are net payers. Poorer people and those with many children, on the other hand, win.

A number of research findings speak for this connection:

- A comparison of German cities shows a clear dependence of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions on per capita income: Frankfurt, for example, with a GDP of €66,800/person emits 11.8 t per capita and year, Berlin with a GDP of €21,400/person only 5.6 t per capita.<sup>3</sup> CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are a relatively good indicator of overall resource consumption, as high material use is usually also energy-intensive.
- A study by the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW) shows that the burden placed on private households by the Ecological Tax Reform in Germany (1999-2003) increases steadily with income: The higher the income, the more consumption of electricity, fuel and heating (DIW 2009).<sup>4</sup>
- The expenditure of private households in Germany on electricity and heating rises steadily with income.<sup>5</sup>
- The Infras Institute Zurich used econometric simulations to compare the effects of different forms of eco-taxation and came to the conclusion that an eco-bonus solution (i.e. equal redistribution of revenues) is the one that would mean redistribution downwards.<sup>6</sup>

Of course, there are always counter-examples. There are poorer people who have particularly wasteful consumption practices and would be burdened more. And we

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<sup>2</sup> First of all, it is about the principle of payment to everyone. However, the amount of the basic income for children, for example, can be lower.

<sup>3</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit (2011): German Green City Index, P. 13

<sup>4</sup> DIW (2009): Wochenbericht des DIW Berlin Nr. 14/2009

<sup>5</sup> Statistisches Bundesamt 2010

<sup>6</sup> Infras (n.d.): Soziale und räumliche Wirkung von Energieabgaben. Studie im Auftrag des Bundesamtes für Energie, Z-1

know richer people who attach particular importance to frugal consumption and eco-ethical behaviour. But this is precisely part of the principle of "tax and share" that underlies the ecological basic income: For everyone, the price incentive remains to prefer goods produced with less environmental consumption and therefore cheaper. Thus, an ecological basic income leads out of the dilemma of economic instruments of environmental policy without social compensation: If the ecological tax rate is too low, it has no effect. If it is too high, it becomes antisocial. Here it is the other way round: the higher the rates, the greater the redistribution effect.

The ecological financing of a basic income thus supports one of the two components of a resource-efficient lifestyle, which is demanded everywhere in the ecological discourse, the idea of consuming differently: buying less polluting alternative products. To this end, at least extensive financing through eco-taxes is not only appropriate, but a necessary prerequisite. As is well known, one criticism from an ecological point of view against the basic income is that the greater mass purchasing power of the lower classes will then buy more environmentally harmful things. This is precisely what is avoided by the change in relative prices achieved with ecological taxes: products with a large ecological backpack become more expensive than their environmentally friendly alternatives.

If the basic income is financed by levies on problematic environmental consumption, this by no means requires the maintenance of a certain amount of undesirable, polluting production, as some critics object. If the desired effect of reduced use of certain resources and sinks occurs, the tax rates can be increased or the permissible amount of removals and emissions (certificates) further reduced. In this way, the incentive for further efficiency increases is maintained and the financing of the basic income continues to be secured. Long-term planning with continuously shrinking caps on emissions and removals also makes sense, because then producers and consumers can reorient themselves in time.

### **Ecological limitation without lifestyle regulations**

As a more socially just alternative to economic instruments of environmental policy, stronger regulatory policy is demanded - often from the left - that goes beyond setting limits for production processes and individual products. Politics should simply ban environmentally harmful, unnecessary consumption. First and foremost, products with a high symbolic luxury, nonsense and harmfulness factor, such as SUVs, strawberries in winter, short trips to the Caribbean etc., are targeted. All ecologically questionable consumption, from "unnecessary" car journeys to coloured toilet paper, should be banned for everyone. This might be fair in terms of distribution, because it would affect everyone equally, and it might also be ecologically expedient, but it restricts individual freedom in an inadmissible way. We cannot prescribe in detail which vehicles may be used on which occasions and when, which furniture may be placed in which flats with how many children, which food from which countries I may eat on which occasions and in what quantity, etc. All this - and much more - would have to be defined. But from which point of view can which lifestyle be prohibited or permitted? In which even halfway democratic procedures should this be done? Rather, it follows from the acceptance of the plurality of lifestyles in modernity that rules must become more abstract. If we cannot and do not want to regulate everything in detail by law, this can only be done through the price of environmental uses. It allows individuals a freedom

of action appropriate to pluralist modernity while at the same time setting a limit to their overall environmental consumption.

An EBI preserves the acceptance of a wide variety of lifestyles that can be lived within the framework of ecological-monetary restrictions. Certain consumptions become less attractive, but can still be carried out individually or in moderation. The redistributive effect of the basic income ensures that this individual freedom is not limited to the wealthy but, on the contrary, opens up for all parts of the population.

An EBI could thus lead out of the impasse of both economic and regulatory environmental policy through its redistributive and libertarian aspect. It would promote resource-efficient production and consumption to a much greater extent than before. But what effect would a basic income have on deeper structures of contemporary growth societies, especially a productivist mode of production and a consumerist culture?

### **Basic income: An authenticity flat rate**

As a response to simultaneously tackling with the economic and ecological crises, the idea of a "Green New Deal" has become increasingly hegemonic in recent years. The core idea is to achieve a state-supported boost in innovation and investment in green technologies on a green market. This would be essentially constituted by changing relative prices by means of an eco-tax - but without using it for a basic income. The economic growth induced by this would at the same time bring about ecological progress, since the new technologies would consume and damage less of the environment. This idea was initially brought into the debate by "green" parties, "green" think tanks and NGOs. However, it is increasingly gaining majority support across the political class, even if other terms are used in the majority, such as "green economy" or "European Green Deal".

Even if this leads to progress in green technology, this idea remains within the framework of productivism. We can speak of the latter when the emergence of new labour is seen as a benefit in itself: When, for example, the introduction of new technologies such as the "smart house", which can flexibly adapt electricity consumption to the fluid regenerative supply, is promoted with the argument that this would bring new jobs for the trades and "open up future markets". Even if some of its protagonists should not intend it: The creation of as many products and services as possible, economic growth, remains the unquestioned goal of the Green New Deal. The difference to the current economy is that technical and organisational alternatives are to be produced and consumed.

### **Green New Deal without Growth: An Anti-Productivist Production**

But there are also variants of a Green New Deal or a Green Economy without growth. One version is set out in the Wuppertal Institute's study "Sustainable Germany in a Globalised World". Within the framework of a "new social contract", "citizens as entrepreneurs and consumers are called upon to cede part of their capital and comfort

power to nature and the worse off on the globe."<sup>7</sup> The people in the North, or the global consumer class, are to change their lifestyle towards frugality instead of prolonging the previous model of prosperity with new environmental technology. In contrast to the growth variant of the Green New Deal, the distribution question is posed here because the authors obviously have a different assessment of the compatibility of economic growth with sustainable development: This concept can be called a "Social Green New Deal without growth".<sup>8</sup>

An Ecological Basic Income (EBI) could be a central element of the social contract proposed for it. By taxing environmental consumption, "citizens" would give up some of their "comfort power" to "nature" (by not consuming certain things) and to the "worse off" (by paying everyone). But there is more to it than a redistribution model. With a basic income, the Green New Deal can take on a libertarian character, as the scope for shaping one's own life plan becomes greater for everyone.

Moreover, the basic income has the potential to transform the Green New Deal into a post-growth economy, because it has an anti-productivist effect. Economic activities undertaken for their own sake generally become less attractive due to the higher economic security provided by the unconditional nature of its payment. How many productions that have long been recognised as ecologically harmful, socially dubious or hindering individual development are accepted today, if not promoted, because personal existence is fundamentally linked to them in the job-focused regulation of the capitalist economy? The socio-psychological situation necessary for an acceptance of the profound changes in jobs, structures and qualifications associated with the ecological restructuring of the economy is "freedom from fear in change". While in the hegemonic conceptions of how to better deal with the ecological and economic crisis, such as the Green New Deal, people's worries are to be calmed with the prospect of new jobs, the concept of the ÖGE consists in the guarantee of social security - a social security independent of new jobs and economic growth. However, the greater freedom of choice for the individual on the labour market brought about by the basic income is not only emancipatory progress, but also an ecological plus: the compulsion to engage in economic activities with a problematic environmental impact is reduced.

People will tend to (want to) only participate in those productions that make sense from their point of view - in self-fulfilling, social and ecological terms. Every production of goods and services will have to legitimise itself more in this respect. So we can say: production will become more authentic.

In addition to the technical paths of efficiency and consistency (compatibility of anthropogenic and natural material cycles, e.g. circular economies) promoted by eco-taxes, the basic income promotes the socio-cultural path of "Less". The relationship between the technical and cultural path cannot be predicted in an open society. In any case, however, basic income enables a deproductivist component, however extended, and is thus part of a post-growth economy.

The financing of a basic income is not affected by the deproductivist effect. If fewer goods are consumed and produced, the revenue for the basic income will decrease - this is initially true regardless of the type of financing. However, the share of total value

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<sup>7</sup> BUND, EED (eds.) (2008): *Zukunftsfähiges Deutschland in einer globalisierten Welt*, Frankfurt a.M., p. 607

<sup>8</sup> See detailed description of Green New Deal variants in: Schachtschneider, Ulrich (2009)

added and thus the social effect can remain constant. For example, regulations are proposed to link the amount of the payment to the development of the GDP.<sup>9</sup>

In summary, it can be said: An EBI as the core of a libertarian and anti-productivist Green New Deal would not only constitute a higher level of the welfare state, but also a higher level of the environmental state. A higher level because the structural problems of labour and the structural problems of the environment would be solved<sup>10</sup> in the sense of the "basic norm of equal real freedom" (Claus Offe). This higher level of the welfare and environmental state can also act as a brake on growth.

### More equality and less domination: An anti-consumerist culture

The necessary economic and social-cultural counterpart to productivism is consumerism. The cultural orientation towards "ever more" and "ever more diverse" is largely unbroken. The attempt to fill a limited life with a maximum of consumptive events has come under criticism in recent years. A culture of deceleration is increasingly being discussed not only for reasons of a better life. Especially in the ecological debate, a resource-efficient lifestyle has been propagated for a long time. However, this appeal, which has been pursued for 20 years by many state and civil society institutions, in part with a lot of media effort, is obviously not being received beyond small avant-garde groups.

An unconditional basic income with its basic economic security can counteract this. It offers everyone the space to try out other lifestyles, facilitates a life in voluntary communities, with more individual freedom, but less pressure to consume and earn. The basic income gives everyone the opportunity to step out of the treadmill of "gainful employment - consumption - gainful employment" on a trial basis. New lifestyles of "less", "time prosperity" and "together" would have a chance to be tried out and appreciated beyond marginalised groups.

However, a basic income also creates the socio-psychological conditions for a different consciousness, for a feeling of abundance instead of a feeling of running behind. The psychoanalyst Erich Fromm wrote: "A psychology of scarcity produces anxiety, envy, egotism (to be seen most drastically in peasant cultures all over the world). A psychology of abundance produces initiative, faith in life 'solidarity.'" (Fromm 1999)<sup>11</sup>. Only beyond these fears of not keeping up can questions of meaning not be answered with an acceleration of the consumption of objects, holidays, relationships, etc.: "Until now man has been occupied with work (or has been too tired after work) to be too seriously concerned with such problems as „What is the meaning of life?“ „What do I believe in?“ „What are my values?“ „Who am I?“ etc. If he ceases to be mainly occupied by work, he will either be free to confront these problems seriously, or he will become half mad from direct or compensated boredom." A basic income gives people basic economic and psychological security. It is precisely this that makes ecological restructuring less threatening to broader sections of society.

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<sup>9</sup> For example in: BAG Grundeinkommen in und bei der Partei DIE LINKE (2014)

<sup>10</sup> Offe, Claus (2009): Das bedingungslose Grundeinkommen als Antwort auf die Krise von Arbeitsmarkt und Sozialstaat.

<sup>11</sup> Fromm, Erich (1966): Psychological Aspects of the Question of a Guaranteed Income for All.

The feeling of abundance necessary for a less consumerist attitude is not only dependent on the existence of a basic material security. The feeling of satisfaction of the individual also depends on the position within the hierarchy of a society or on the hierarchical form of a society itself. The more unequal a society is, the less a feeling of fullness can arise, and this for people at all levels of the hierarchy.

More economic inequality makes for more status consumption. The economic historian Richard Wilkinson and the health scientist Kate Pickett compared industrial societies with different wealth distributions with regard to savings behaviour. Their result: the more unequal the societies, the lower the savings rate (Wilkinson/Pickett 2010). The authors give a plausible explanation for this. With consumption<sup>12</sup>, people can show their status. Those who are at the bottom can raise their status by demonstrative consumption, even if they cannot actually afford it. Those who see themselves as being in the middle also try to prove it by furnishing themselves in a manner befitting their status and by consuming services. In order to keep up or even to show that he is actually a bit higher, he is willing to go into debt. Wilkinson/Pickett cite a study by Solnick/Hemenway according to which half of the people would give up fifty percent of their income in exchange for being on an equal footing with others. They also found correlations between economic inequality and increases in anxiety, mental illness, depression, etc. The psychoanalyst Alfred Adler wrote: „Menschsein heißt, ein Minderwertigkeitsgefühl zu besitzen, das ständig nach seiner Überwindung drängt.“<sup>13</sup> [“To be human is to possess a feeling of inferiority which constantly presses for its overcoming.”] In a society characterised by multiple competition, such as that diagnosed by sociologist Hartmut Rosa for the "late modernity"<sup>14</sup>, this feeling is certainly intensified.

Inequality as a driver of consumption is by no means to be understood only in economic terms. People who feel oppressed in their social relationships, at work, in politics, etc. are more likely to try to compensate for this through consumption ("now I'll treat myself"). People who feel valued and appreciated in their contexts are less in need of this. It is not only the modern culture of the promise of maximum fulfilment of life<sup>15</sup> that makes people strive for maximum consumption of goods and experiences, but also the inequality and domination of a society.

It follows from this: If the anti-consumerist "less" is not to be attractive only to marginalised groups, society as a whole must become less domineering. A more frugal lifestyle, an "elegance of simplicity" can only develop on the basis of a liberal everyday life. Those who are at the bottom or feel oppressed in whatever way, who constantly feel a sense of scarcity, who perceive their work as alienated, will not be persuaded to a new modesty. Rather, to compensate, they need demonstrative status consumption, compensatory worlds of experience, they lead chases to catch up etc.

Conditions that are less dominated lead to a reduction of consumption by those parts that can be attributed to purely compensatory motives. What remains is more authentic consumption: consumption that is more in line with "real" needs. Through more social security and more equality, a basic income also leads to more authentic production (see above). The economy is thus less determined by insecure and hierarchical

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<sup>12</sup> Wilkinson/Pickett (2009): The Spirit Level. Why More Equal Societies Almost Do Better.

<sup>13</sup> Adler, Alfred 1973 (1933): Der Sinn des Lebens, Frankfurt/M. p. 55.

<sup>14</sup> cf. Rosa (2013)

<sup>15</sup> as Hartmut Rosa (2013) explains

relationships from its both sides consumption and production. We can therefore also call the basic income an "authenticity lump sum".<sup>16</sup>

In place of production and consumption characterised by fears and competition, values that can be summarised with the term "good life" will then emerge. In order to lead a "good life" beyond growth, politics must create a "hospitable environment", according to growth critics Robert and Edward Skidelsky. They criticise the pure doctrine of political liberalism, which wants to keep the state out of questions of the good life (Skidelsky/Skidelsky 2013).<sup>17</sup> As basic goods of a "good life" they name, among others, "security" (relative calculability of the future), "respect" (mutual recognition), "leisure" (free space for non-goal-oriented activities), "personality" (option to develop one's own life plan), "friendship" (not instrumental or imposed relationships)<sup>18</sup>. Since these basic goods are valued by a large majority across cultures, but cannot be realised individually, Skidelsky and Skidelsky rightly plead for a "social policy for basic goods", which they also include a basic income.

### III A contribution against social acceleration

A basic income would reduce interwoven acceleration dynamics, as sociologist Hartmut Rosa has convincingly argued in his theory of social acceleration (Rosa 2013). According to this, modernity is exposed to a three-dimensional, autodynamic circular process of technical acceleration (e.g. traffic, communication), a resulting acceleration of social change (e.g. professional, family, socio-cultural patterns of relationships) and a resulting increase in the pace of individual life (adaptation processes are time-consuming, constantly running behind, etc.). The shortage of individual time resources in turn drives technical acceleration, etc. (Fig. 1)<sup>19</sup> According to Rosa, this basic "circle of acceleration" is additionally driven by "external motors", one economic, one cultural and one social-structural. A basic income - according to my concluding thesis - has the potential to slow down all three motors of social acceleration in modern society identified by Rosa or to switch them off, possibly even to turn them into 'brakes'.

#### An anti-productivist Green New Deal: Brakes on the Economic Engine

Rosa identifies the capitalist economy as the "economic motor" of social acceleration. Like no other economic system, it drives the acceleration process with its principle "time is money". Whoever produces a given product faster usually also produces it cheaper and gains decisive economic advantages. Those who invent a new product faster and market it faster can survive even if they are not successful in an existing market or if it is saturated. The faster the invested capital reproduces itself, the greater

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<sup>16</sup> A more detailed argumentation on this can be found in Schachtschneider, Ulrich (2014)

<sup>17</sup> Skidelsky Robert, Skidelsky Edward (2012): How much is enough? The Love of Money, and the Case for the Good Life

<sup>18</sup> The authors have not invented the basic goods of the good life, but have derived them from empirical studies on what is considered important for a successful life in various cultures.

<sup>19</sup> The entire theoretical approach can only be presented here in an extremely simplified form. For more details, see Rosa (2013).

the chance in the competition for investors. A necessary correlate of the increase in the production rate is the increase in consumption. The basic problem of capitalist economy is - according to Rosa - not the question of distribution, but the maintenance of constantly accelerating circulation of capital. For this, the political regulation of the economy must be productivist and growth-promoting: The more that is produced, the better.

A basic income, on the other hand, with its anti-productivist and anti-consumerist potential, can act as a brake on the acceleration engine of the capitalist economy. This can be done without completely abolishing the capital and market mechanism. The market, which makes innovation, economic complexity and individual freedom possible, and the principle of capital accumulation itself, which makes larger projects possible in the first place, remain in principle intact even with basic income - at a slowed-down level.

### **More lifeworld: brake for the socio-structural engine**

The second drive for social acceleration diagnosed by Rosa is the dynamic of functional differentiation, i.e. the division of social functions into specialised subsystems (of the economy, politics, the family, etc.). This initially enables a higher processing speed for tasks at hand, since there is no longer any need to take into account aspects that are alien to the function. In the economy, for example, it is no longer necessary to ask how a decision will affect the family or politics - and vice versa. This makes faster processing possible in the economy, politics and the family, which would save time. However, since more complex tasks can be processed in this way in society as a whole, and options and alternatives for action increase, specialised systems nevertheless come under pressure to accelerate: the environment relevant to their decisions changes ever faster, and the processing times for decisions within the subsystems shorten (Rosa 2013:185ff.).

This has an impact on the actors working in them and the speed of social change. The subsystems are becoming increasingly "greedy" towards their actors, making "total claims on their time" (Rosa 2005: 191ff.): The urge to close idle time is increasing, systemic processes tend to run around the clock. Products can be further developed on the internet at any time, church services would be offered throughout the week, family matters would be constantly settled in between, etc. The non-stop society pushes for the disappearance of collective time patterns and thus accelerates the dissolution of firmly established social practices, relationship patterns and association structures. In their place are "fluid" cultural, financial and meaning-giving flows around the globe that are in permanent motion and change and can be combined at will (Rosa 2005:109). This constant social change also requires constant adaptations on the part of the subjects, which leads to an enormous acceleration of the perceived pace of life, thus further driving the acceleration circle.

A basic income can also counteract this "socio-structural motor" of functional differentiation. With its securities and free spaces, it favours the emergence of communal, communicatively structured living environments, such as projects of shared living and working, neighbourhood help, urban gardening, etc. They join the functionally differentiated subsystems in the economy, politics, science, etc. in a new way. These are new additions to the functionally differentiated subsystems in the economy, politics, science, etc. that continue to operate. This can lead to a more integrated, de-differentiated sphere. In this sphere, things move more slowly because

the most diverse demands (for example, on culture, economy, norms) have to be made communicatively compatible. Initially, this takes up a lot of time and could even intensify the acceleration of the pace of life. The acceleration pressure of the functional subsystems, on the other hand, which causes constant social change and adaptation, will be less effective there. The "motor" of functional differentiation would thus be slowed down. Whether this ultimately leads to a reduction in the pace of life then depends on the goals and demands within the communicatively integrated spheres. For example, the new temporal free space could be eaten up again by too much communication time due to too many participatory demands.

In any case, the price (or the gain) for a greater share of "social integration" instead of "system integration" (Habermas) in society would be a slower economy, slower social change.

### More equality and less domination: the brake on the cultural engine

Rosa describes the modern "promise of acceleration" as the third driver of social acceleration. This "cultural motor" encompasses two aspects of the modern ethos that additionally reinforce the process of accelerating the pace of life that is already underway due to accelerated social change:

On the one hand, an updated protestant ethic is still effective after the secularisation process that has taken place in the last two centuries. During the genesis of capitalism, puritan protestants (as workers or as entrepreneurs) were driven by the fear of missing their salvation through too little work effort in earthly life and thus provided the "perfectly fitting cultural counterpart for the capitalist economics of time" (Rosa 2013: 176). In the modernisation process of pushing back religiously based ethics of life, fear and promise now - according to Rosa - merely changed their form: "...the "screens on which they are projected become relocated from the realm of an extrasocial transcendence (eternal salvation vs. damnation) into a system-immanent realm of social competition" (178). The new promise is success, the new basic fear is failure in competition - and Rosa does not just mean the economy. In all spheres of life, such as family, intimate relationships, friendships, work (with demands beyond economic motives), culture, social commitment, work on one's own body, etc., individuals are under constant pressure to perform well. This is made all the more difficult by the fact that the framework conditions in these areas are changing constantly and at an accelerated pace. There is always the danger of losing recognition, of being left behind as a failure. Rosa thus explains the widespread feeling of being on "slipping slopes" in all areas of existence.

Secondly, most people try to compensate for the inevitable drama of the finiteness of life by savouring as many "world options" as possible. They try to pack as many events, episodes and life demands as possible into the limited life span: "She who lives twice as fast can realize twice as many world possibilities" (183). Rosa summarises this "secularised conception of happiness and time" following Gerhard Schulze ("Erlebnisgesellschaft"): "The more means of experience (TV programs, clothes, vacations, partners, etc.) we appropriate (multiplication), and the more we concentrate them in time (compression), the richer our interior will be – an increase in being through an increase in having" (Schulze 1997, quoted in Rosa 2005: 183).

This "cultural motor" can also be defused by a basic income. On the one hand, with its basic economic security, it makes it easier to try out alternative lifestyles with richer social relations and thus counteracts the consumerist promise of life fulfilment through

maximising consumption and experiences. On the other hand, a basic income means less economic and social inequality and thus, as shown above, creates the socio-psychological conditions for a feeling of satisfaction and abundance to reduce the pressure of having to run after things. It gives people economically and psychologically the feeling of at least basic recognition, which reduces the fear of slipping. The culture of maximisation and competition is pushed back by a culture of recognition (of oneself and others).

#### IV Financing through eco-taxes: Option for deceleration

The current proposals for financing the basic income largely envisage a higher taxation of gainful employment, for example through a higher income tax. However, as will be shown below, this has problematic acceleration effects that could counteract the deceleration effects possible through the payment of the basic income. Financing via eco-taxes, on the other hand, lowers the relative weight of the costs of gainful employment and thus the acceleration pressure from all three "motors".

a) The technical acceleration of goal-oriented processes is - according to Rosa - decisively reinforced by the "motor" of capitalist economy, which brings the maxim *time is money* to bear to a particular extent. Firstly, whoever has the faster technology can react more quickly to flexible customer wishes and therefore usually makes the qualitatively more attractive offer. Secondly, given that the development and investment costs of the faster technology are amortised within a time that is acceptable for capital, there is a cost advantage in competition. This advantage increases with the relative costs of labour. The larger its share in total production costs, the greater the pressure to increase labour productivity, the quantity of products/services produced per unit of time. The higher the labour costs, the more worthwhile technical accelerations in the workflow. An increase in resource costs through eco-taxes, on the other hand, leads to a decreasing weight of labour costs and thus reduces the incentive for technical acceleration of all purposeful processes in the capitalist economy, be it the planning and production of products or their transport to the customer. The slower development processes, production methods and product alternatives that previously required too much labour time are now more able to compete on price. The rapid, raw-material-intensive construction of a building, for example, will no longer be cheaper than a resource-saving design with sophisticated planning and craftsmanship and the help of an energy consultant. A flight to the Canary Islands will no longer be cheaper than a ride on the regional express or two hours of music lessons. The now economically more competitive resource-saving products are usually also products of slower cultures.

This applies until an increase in resource efficiency makes the fast variants cheaper again. This means that part of the pressure to accelerate is maintained through innovation competition: In an economy with clear resource taxation, the winner is not who can sell any short-lived products the fastest, but who develops and markets "green" innovations faster. However, the possibility of increasing resource productivity is limited. Not everything is technically feasible, and increases in efficiency become increasingly difficult to continue with increasing success: a *permanent* decoupling of environmental consumption and economic growth is not possible<sup>20</sup>. In addition to

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<sup>20</sup> See for example: Paech (2005), Santarius (2015)

technological change, eco-taxation therefore also triggers cultural change - both the consumption of resource-saving alternative products and services and the zero-option of omission.

b) Rosa marks the process of functional differentiation, the progressive division of society into specialised subsystems, as an additional "motor" for the social change that is already taking place - the change of social practices, relationship patterns and association structures takes place at ever shorter intervals. A basic income can, as shown above, create new free spaces for more de-differentiated spheres integrated through time-intensive communication ("lifeworld"). However, this increased demand for time must not lead to economic disadvantages. For this reason, too, the relative reduction of labour costs is called for when we think about the financing of the basic income. A cooperative, for example, can realise its lifeworld advantages and its claims to participatory discussion if the working hours required for this are not too expensive. Otherwise, it has disadvantages in competition or - if the members produce for themselves as "prosumers" and costs do not play a major role - they have less time for the completion of other tasks from other systems. Now it can be argued that precisely for this reason a time-consuming life-world organisation of the economy is not problem-solving, but rather that financing through taxes on labour income would make the labour cost share more expensive and thus ensure time-efficient production. This is quite plausible. However, if the minimisation of the time required for economic activity is set as the sole primary goal, the claim for more lifeworld integration as an alternative to further functional differentiation would have to be abandoned.

c) The acceleration of the pace of life is - following Rosa - additionally driven by the "motor" of a culture of maximising consumer events. It becomes possible because many products and their rapid change are also readily offered within the framework of an accelerated time-is-money economy. With an increased share of resource taxes in production costs, the pressure to change products quickly would be reduced and slower but more intensive offers (e.g. a long trip or intensive learning support) would become more competitive (see a). The cultural orientation towards event and consumption maximisation would thus be economically hampered, but by no means abolished. However, a world of gainful employment under even more time pressure due to additional costs on labour would not only increase the "objective" economic compulsion to accelerate, but also further increase the "subjectively" perceived pace of life there. There is much to suggest that such a fast pattern will be transferred to the non-employment sphere. Or the other way round: if slowness is allowed in gainful employment due to decreasing relative weight of labour costs, it is also more likely in culture. Those who experience less panic at work also get it less in their leisure time.

### **Ecological basic income: A brake pedal that can be used**

To sum up: while increasing the costs of gainful employment could further drive problematic acceleration tendencies, financing the basic income through eco-taxes can support a deceleration of the three "motors" of capitalist economy, functional differentiation and culture of maximisation. However, this deceleration would by no means be mandatory - rather, it is a matter of newly emerging options.

In the economy, for example, decelerating transport or production by shifting the economic weights of time and resource costs is economically more favourable. But it is also possible to maintain the pace or to further accelerate technical processes, if this is desired. Anyone who wants to get somewhere quickly or faster can continue to do so. However, it must be so important to him that he is prepared to pay more for it (as it is now with rail passengers who pay more out of conviction, even though they usually get there more slowly than by car or plane). Those who want to produce with faster machines or processes, even though it is more expensive, because perhaps a customer wants this speed, can continue to do so - with higher costs. Moreover, the slower variants are by no means always cheaper, even with eco-taxes. If they are perceived as more inconvenient by producers (such as harvesting by hand instead of using a machine made more expensive by resource taxes), these labour variants will rise in price. Basic income, with its power to say "no" if necessary, makes it possible to demand higher wages in return. However, if someone finds the slower variant more authentic, they will be willing to do it for less money - and it will also find buyers because of the lower costs.

The same applies to the 'exit' from functional differentiation: those who care about earning money quickly and effectively with little time can continue to do so in a company that is exclusively oriented towards high labour productivity and possibly highly hierarchically organised. No one is forced to spend their time discursively in spheres integrated into the "lifeworld". The continuation of a consumerist culture would also be possible: those who want to continue to accelerate their lives with many products and events can continue to do so - on the economic basis of time-efficient money-making.

Whether productions, social change or cultures accelerate more or less depends on how authentic the producers, group members and consumers themselves judge them to be under the free choice possibilities of basic income. This is time prosperity: the disposal of more or less acceleration. Basic income is a brake pedal that *can be used*.

Given this openness of societal development, financing at least a relevant share through eco-taxes would give us another important advantage: If, contrary to assumptions, a basic income does not lead to degrowth, increasing environmental levies will at least transform production and consumption in a more resource-efficient direction. In this case, we would achieve one of our central goals - less problematic environmental impact - even with constant or growing GDP. Most likely, however, we will have a mixture of alternative consumption and less consumption with the Ecological Basic Income.

## V Entry to deceleration is possible

Rosa emphasises that the individual can hardly escape from the dynamics of social acceleration, even if the desire for deceleration is increasingly heard. What matters is to influence the structures of social acceleration at the level of society as a whole or at the political level. A basic income - as I have tried to show - is precisely a contribution to this. All three motors of social acceleration can at least be slowed down, if not "switched off", with a basic income. Most supportive of this goal is (extensive) financing through eco-taxes. The environmental and socio-political principle of (eco-)tax and

share is most likely to enable an anti-productivist regulation of the (capitalist) <sup>21</sup> economy.

Of course, there is currently no majority in favour of introducing a basic income. We cannot rely on a "system hopping" of the welfare state, in which at some point in the future (starting Monday morning ...) the living-secure unconditional basic income will apply and all other social security systems will be switched off. The effect of such an abrupt large-scale socio-economic experiment on the living body of society is too unpredictable - after all, the entire economic structure, prices, the labour market, demand and production are suddenly exposed to completely new conditions. The fear of politicians and citizens of such a crash is justifiably present and would be insurmountable. At best, such an abrupt new beginning is conceivable in an existentially threatening crisis situation or a post-disaster situation (e.g. after a war). We should not hope for that.

New paradigms can usually only be established through prototypes and small-scale introductory projects. A basic income financed by eco-taxes is ideally suited to such a gradual introduction. It can be started small in order to initially anchor the underlying principle - participation in the yields of first and second nature as a human right - as such. An ecological partial basic income can be slowly built up parallel to the existing framework of social security. The fragile existing structure of social contributions and transfers will not be touched. This is how security in change can develop. The gradual introduction of the system also allows sufficient time for adjustment processes to changing price relations. The principle of "Eco-Tax and Share" could be started at different levels and with different environmental media:

- The revenues to which Germany is entitled from a revitalised EU emissions trading (shortage of certificates, as demanded by many environmental associations) are estimated at about 20 billion €/year. If they are distributed per capita, a family of four would receive €1000/year "eco-bonus" or ecological basic income. Something similar is also possible at EU level.
- If the "eco-tax" in Germany were increased in such a way that the final prices for electricity and fuel rose by 10%, this family could be paid an additional €1,000 a year.
- A tax on building materials, metals, rare earths (= rare metals) etc. could be introduced. This would not only be another source of basic income, but would also give a boost to the circular economy. At the external borders of the EU economic area, imports (especially of metals and metal products) could also be taxed ecologically at the same rate with "border adjustments".
- As is the practice in Sweden and Denmark, a levy on mineral fertilisers can also be imposed in Germany to reduce the input of nitrogen and phosphorus to an acceptable level (it is too high in Germany by a factor of about two) and thus combat the acidification and eutrophication of water bodies and the nitrate content in groundwater. This could also be started in individual regions

All this does not yet add up to a full basic income. But they are steps in the right direction. Even small reforms can shift the balance. The acceleration motors would perhaps only slow down a little at first. However, a critical threshold, i.e. a basic income

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<sup>21</sup> Whether one can then still speak of capitalism should not and cannot be discussed further here. At least the effectiveness of capital interests would be pushed back.

or ecological taxation at a certain level, probably has to be exceeded in order to have any effect at all, because this is essentially based on greater basic security, more equality, less domination and more experimental freedom for all. These qualities do not unfold from the beginning, but can occur well before a fully living basic income of, for example, 800 euros/person is reached. It is impossible to quantify the level at which a basic income opens up the opportunity to slow down the economic, cultural or socio-structural motor of acceleration or even to turn it into a brake. In principle, however - as I have tried to show - there are a number of reasons why the principle of an Ecological Basic Income or Eco-Tax and Share is suitable not only for creating selective oases of deceleration, but also for supporting the exit from structural acceleration pressures.

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Hartmut Rosa:

## Acceleration motors

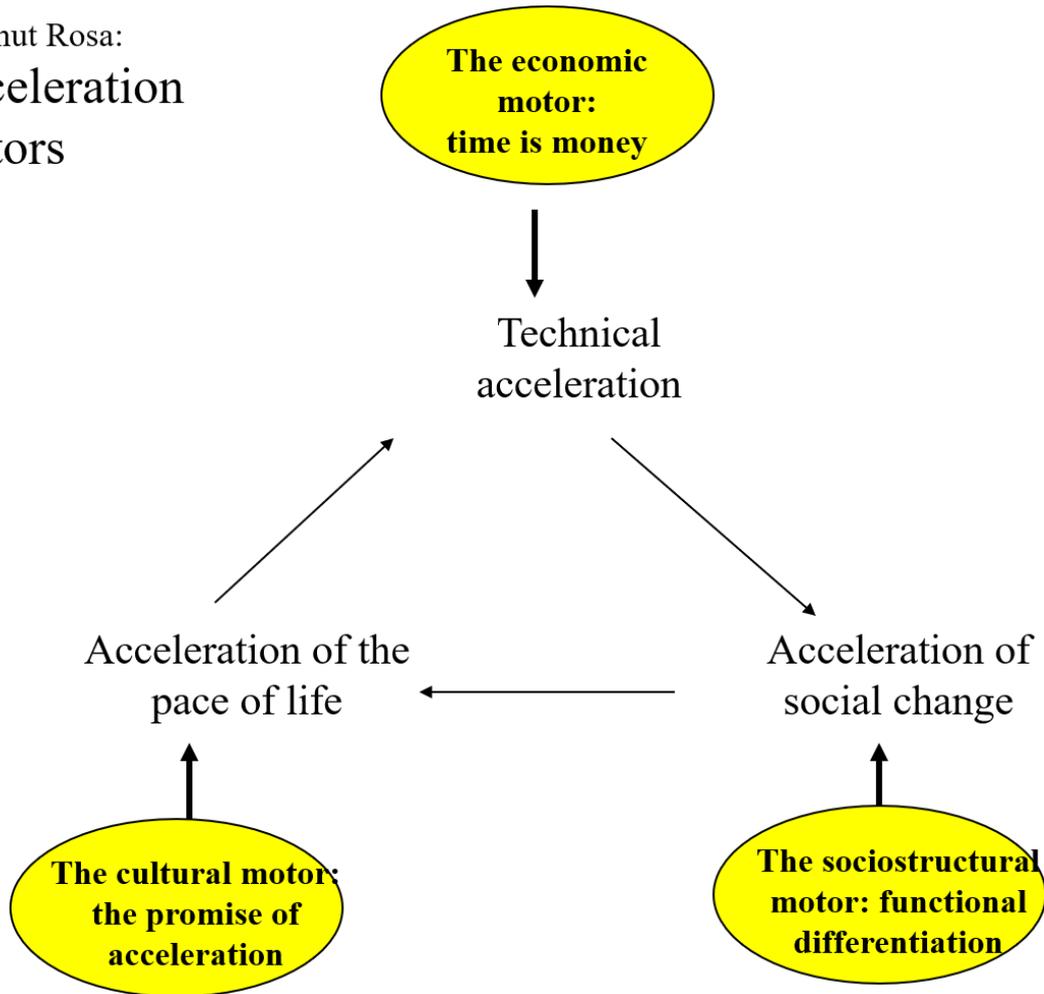


Fig. 1: Acceleration motors according to Rosa

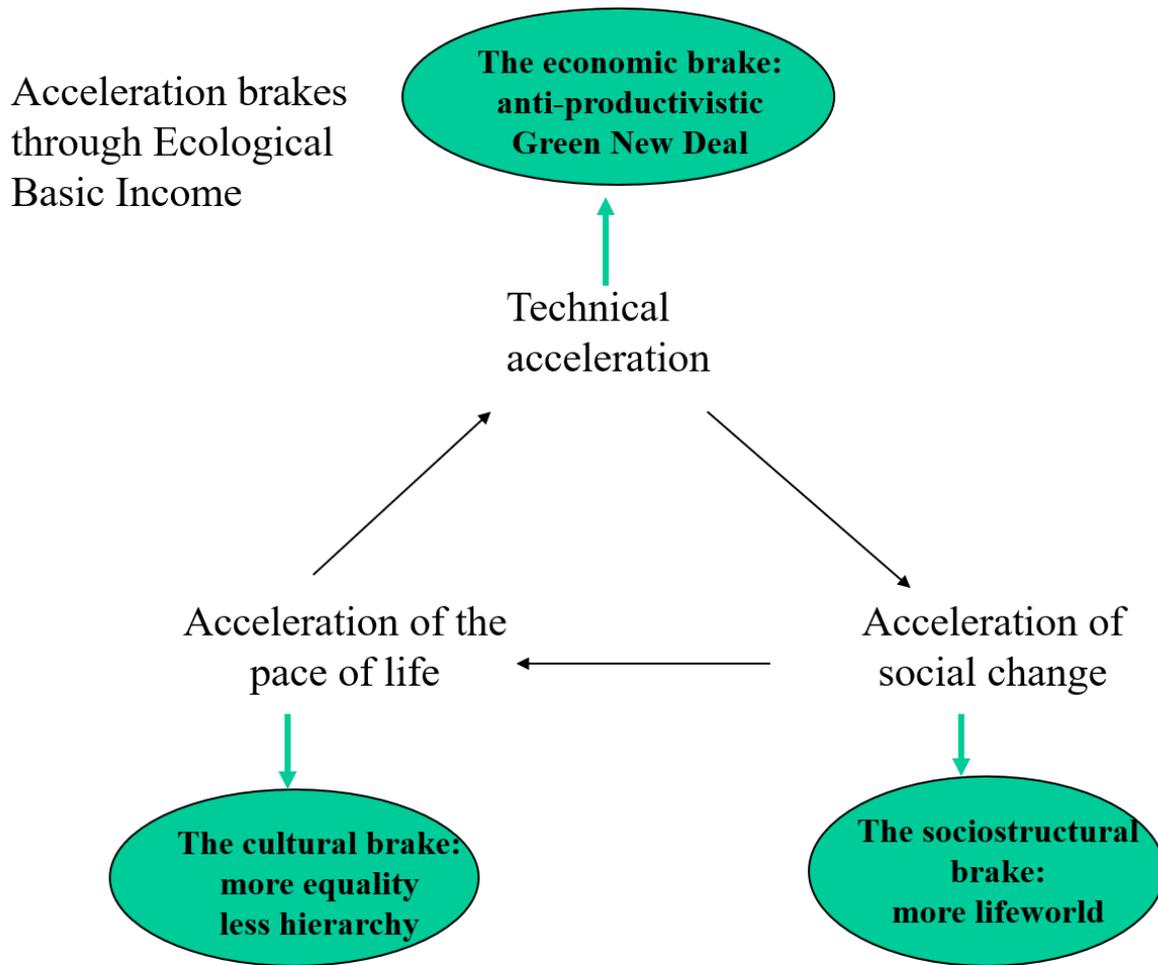


Fig.2: Acceleration brakes through an Ecological Basic Income

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