



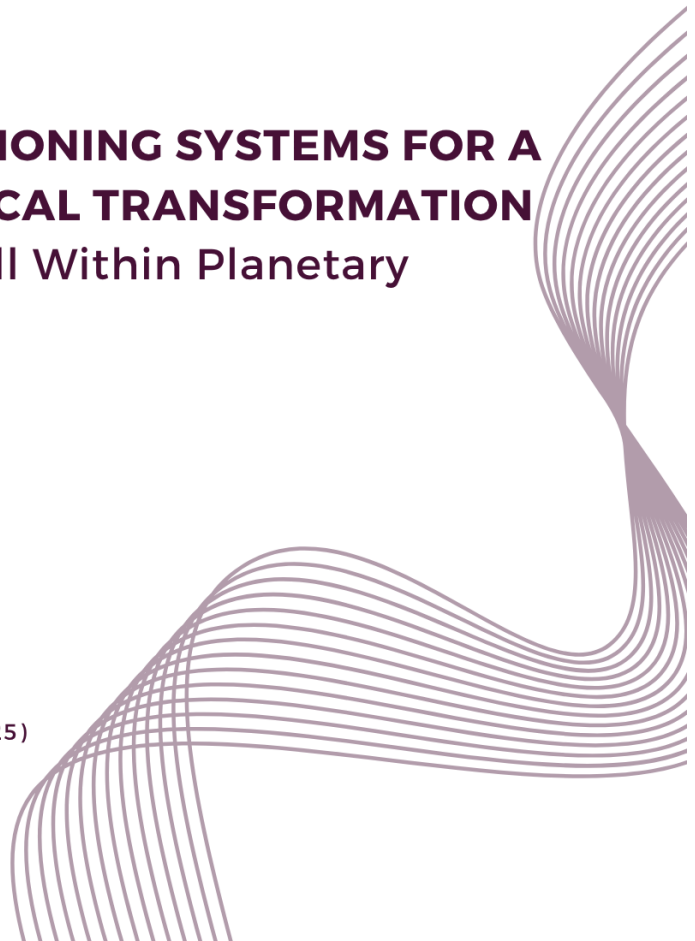
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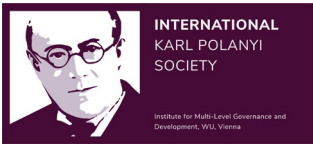


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents 2

1. Introduction..... 3

2. Towards a Caring Economy 6

3. Transition Towards a Caring Society 8

4. Decent Care for All Within Planetary Boundaries 11

5. Transformative Change and Changing Societies: Deindustrialization, Digitization, Planetary Boundaries and Care 14

6. Summary & Outlook..... 17

7. References..... 18

Shaping Provisioning Systems for Social-Ecological Transformation: Decent Care for All Within Planetary Boundaries

Fabienne Décieux¹, Corinna Dengler², Julia Fankhauser³

1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper, we examine the contested organization of care and explore the social-ecological provisioning of decent care within planetary boundaries. We bring together pioneering work and recent approaches at the intersection of critical, feminist, and ecological research that foregrounds the relevance of care in addressing the ecological crisis. By including insights from sociology, economics, and political science we have organized four webinar panels, which took place between September and November 2023, to create the basis for discussions around “Shaping Provisioning Systems for Social-Ecological Transformation: Decent Care for All Within Planetary Boundaries.” The main aim of this paper is mapping the field and synthesizing the insights gained in these discussions. To do so, we first summarize and contextualize main insights from the webinars “Towards a Caring Economy” (section 2), “Transition Towards a Caring Society” (section 3), “Decent Care for All Within Planetary Boundaries” (section 4) and “Transformative Change & Changing Societies: Deindustrialization, Digitization, Planetary Boundaries and Care” (section 5) to then provide a collective outlook in section 6. Taking lessons from the pandemic, the deepened care crisis, and the aggravating climate crisis, we argue that the social-ecological provisioning of care must be prioritized over other economic activities. These crises

¹ Fabienne Décieux is a research assistant within the FWF research project “The Social Life of XG: Digital infrastructures and the reconfiguration of sovereignty and imagined communities” at the Department of Social Theory and Social Analyses at the Institute of Sociology of the Johannes Kepler University Linz. Her main research areas are social theory, sociology of work and care, social policies, and gender studies.

² Corinna Dengler is a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Socioeconomics at WU Vienna. Her research focuses on feminist ecological economics and global political economy, and she is interested in inter- and trans-disciplinary work at the intersections of feminisms, decoloniality, and the environment more broadly.

³ Julia Fankhauser is a socioeconomist with degrees in International Business and Socio-Ecological Economics and Policy. She is working as a research assistant in the area of social-ecological transformation at the Vienna University of Economics and Business at the Institute for Spatial and Social-Ecological Transformations.

raise new questions about how decent care can be defined, who is included in a caring society, and how good care for all within planetary boundaries can actualize.

We decided to discuss this topic as ecological crises (e.g., climate change) and social crises (e.g., the care crisis) are deepening and at the same time interlinked. The scientific community agrees that the current developments in climatic change are unprecedented in recent millennia and are primarily caused by human-caused greenhouse gas emissions (IPCC 2023: 46). However, not only the climate crisis, but a variety of interlinked ecological crises are on the rise. First introduced in 2009 by the Stockholm Resilience Centre (Rockström et al. 2009), the concept of planetary boundaries assesses environmental limits within which humanity can thrive. The most recent assessment (Richardson et al. 2023) shows that six out of nine planetary boundaries (among them climate change, biosphere integrity, and land-system change) have been transgressed. Approaching the planetary boundaries from a social science perspective, Brand et al. (2021) conceptualize “the planet as potentially abundant – as long as we limit ourselves collectively and make space for others to share the resources it has to offer in a responsible way among current living and future generations” (ibid.: 275). The meditations of care crises and environmental degradation as interwoven and rooted in the capitalism mode of production seems to be necessary and fruitful, as capitalism destroy its own conditions (Fraser 2017, 2022) and puts humanity and nature at risk. With exacerbating ecological but also interlinked social crises, humanity is living through times that require a profound social-ecological transformation toward a system that creates societal well-being within planetary boundaries (O’Neill et al. 2018).

Questions of social-ecological transformation are currently debated broadly – but rarely from a perspective of care. Following the understanding of Joan Tronto (1990), care represents a “species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible” (Fisher and Tronto 1990: 40). In this sense, care and care work encompass a broad and diverse spectrum of primarily reproductive and regenerative activities. Tronto distinguishes five phases of care: caring about, taking care of, caregiving, care-receiving (1993) and caring with (2013). Caring about requires attention as a moral element, taking care of requires responsibility, caregiving necessitates competence, and care-receiving emphasizes the role of “being cared for” and requires cooperation on the part of both the care receivers and the caregivers (Tronto 2000: 27). The idea of caring with, which was added in Tronto’s later work (2013; 2017), involves the collective dependence of a group of individuals, ranging from families to communities and entire states, on an ongoing cycle of care to fulfil their care needs. Thus, the first four phases of care focus more closely on care as a relational practice (Doucet 2023) between a caregiver and care receiver. This caring



relationship involves characteristics such as limited autonomy, vulnerability, asymmetrical power relations, emotionality, and dependency (Jochimsen 2003). The idea of caring with extends this definition and foregrounds questions of interdependence – in communities, but also with other living creatures, nature, and the planet itself, thereby complementing “domestic labour and human care with that of environmental reproduction, that is, earthcare labour” (Barca 2020: 32). While reasoning about shaping provisioning systems for social-ecological transformation can benefit from such broad definitions, it is crucial not to neglect asymmetrical care dependencies (Dengler, Völkle, and Ware 2024). Against this background, foregrounding decent care for all requires that actual care dependencies are collectively taken care of as a precondition for embracing interdependence.

It is evident that “[n]eoliberal policies around the globe have made caring [even] more difficult” (Tronto 2017: 27). Even though as children, all human beings are “born into a condition of radical dependency” (Butler 2020: 41) that accompanies them throughout their lives (sickness, old age etc.), the *structural carelessness of capitalism* (Aulenbacher and Dammayr 2014) in neoliberal times favors the *homo economicus*, whereas the notion of humans as *homo curans* is neglected (Lynch 2022; Tronto 2017). By constructing the neoliberal subject primarily as a rational, independent individual rather than caring or in need of care, the logic of the *homo economicus* forms the ideological basis of neoliberalism (Lynch 2022). This contradiction is evident in the crisis-ridden (re-)organization of care under neoliberalism. To ensure “decent care”, new demands and needs have to be reconciled with existing ones. Especially on the care-receiving side, “the absence of care [is felt] in a very embodied way” (Williams 2020: 1). However, decent care for all does not exhaust itself in good care on the receiving side of care. It also comprises questions like: Who provides care and under what conditions? In our current economic system, the question, who notices a care need, who assumes responsibility for it, and who actually gives care is highly gendered, with women taking on three-quarters of the unpaid and two-thirds of the paid care work globally (ILO 2018). The strategy of shifting unpaid care work from middle and upper class women to, for example, nannies – mostly women, often with a less privileged background with regard to intersecting categories like race and class – is an individualized solution to satisfy existing care needs based on the gender-specific division of labor as well as the given conditions in contemporary capitalism (Aulenbacher 2020; Auth, Klenner, and Leitner 2015; Dengler and Strunk 2018; Farris and Marchetti 2017; Schmidt 2020; Tronto 2017). Regardless of whether care is performed as paid or unpaid, as formal or informal work, the claim to decent care is always measured by whether and to what extent life, or the restoration and maintenance of life, is not seen as a means, but as an “end, an end in itself” (Klinger 2013: 103). For Aulenbacher and colleagues (2020: 4), *comprehensive care* includes



interaction and interpersonal relations, communicative and emotional work, the consideration of the needs associated with everyday life, and taking into account the specific biographical circumstances of care givers and care receivers. Notwithstanding that further elements may be significant, comprehensive care attending to the needs of human beings (...) can be defined as the foundation of decent care and is accompanied by the careful organization of the inevitably difficult asymmetric relationships associated with care.

This understanding of care stands in contrast to the current subordination of care to the demands of the market. Neoliberal and austerity policies led to an exacerbation of the exploitation, rationalization, and alienation of care, which culminated in a commodification of care in different areas (Farris and Marchetti 2017) and a neglect of care in other cases – Oksala (2018) calls this a twin movement of internalization and externalization. However, care can only be rationalized to a limited extent (Aulenbacher and Dammayr 2014) and the attempt to rationalize evermore care has deepened care crises around the world. Against this background, this working paper summarizes the ideas and insight from the interdisciplinary webinar series asking about how provisioning systems for social-ecological transformation are and could be shaped in order to provide decent care for all within planetary boundaries.

2. TOWARDS A CARING ECONOMY

The first webinar brought together researchers from the networks “Netzwerk Vorsorgendes Wirtschaften” (network caring economy) and the “Foundational Economy Collective” (FEC). While the latter focusses on foregrounding and analyzing the foundational economy (e.g., food, utilities, healthcare, education), the network caring economy follows a feminist economic tradition and engages strongly with questions of unpaid care work. The networks have extensively dealt with provisioning systems, care, and ecology – though analyzing them from different starting points and utilizing divergent concepts. The goal was to open the floor for a dialogue on the question of how a caring economy can be conceptualized and promoted by identifying commonalities and differences in the respective approaches.

The network caring economy was founded in 1992 and is the oldest network to deal with the intersection of feminist and ecological economic debates in the German-speaking countries. It comprises a plurality of conceptual approaches to feminist ecological economics (Knobloch 2019a), which were developed in three publications (Busch-Lüter et al. 1994; Biesecker et al. 2000; Netzwerk Vorsorgendes Wirtschaften 2013). It starts from the three principles “care, cooperation, and taking the essentials of a good life as a guideline” (Jochimsen 2005: 133) and aims at anchoring sustainable, gender-just, social-ecological, and caring perspectives in economics, social sciences, and environmental planning (Knobloch, Jochimsen, and Dengler 2023). The invited speakers, Ulrike Knobloch and Maren Jochimsen, are founding members and (together with Corinna Dengler) current chairwomen of the network caring



economy. Adelheid Biesecker is a longstanding member and former chairwoman, while Anna Saave is a member of the younger generation of the network that (together with Corinna Dengler and Andrea Vetter) co-organized the 31st annual network meeting in Vienna in October 2023. All four have contributed to questions of decent care for all within planetary boundaries. Jochimsen and Knobloch (1997) have developed the so-called ICE model that discusses the relations between industrial economic thought and action (I), caring activities (C), and ecological processes (E) and provides an outlook for a “caring economy”. Since then, Knobloch (2019b) has developed a feminist economic ethics of paid and unpaid work and Jochimsen (2003) has elaborated on careful economics. Biesecker and Hofmeister (2010) have coined “(re)productivity” as a mediation category between production and reproduction that tries to overcome the structural devaluation of non-monetized caring activities in an economic paradigm that focuses only on the monetized economy. In her dissertation, Anna Saave (2022) builds upon (re)productivity and explores the dialectical relation of externalization and internalization of unpaid care work and nature in the capitalist mode of production. Insights from these contributions as well as broader discussions in the network caring economy can enrich more recent debates on provisioning systems and the foundational economy.

Inspired by Braudel’s view of several existing economies (1981), the concept of the foundational economy was first defined by Bentham (2013: 7) as “that part of the economy that creates and distributes goods and services consumed by all (regardless of income or status) because they support everyday life”. Research has been conducted in the FEC first and foremost in the context of the United Kingdom (FEC 2018; FEC 2020). More recently, the topic has been taken up across Europe – with the foundation of the “Kompetenzzentrum Alltagsökonomie” (competence center foundational economy) at the Vienna University of Technology. Foundational economy scholarship distinguishes four economic zones: the core economy (e.g., unpaid care work), the foundational economy (e.g., food, utilities, healthcare, education), the overlooked economy (e.g., take away food, cinema, central heating) and the competitive economy (e.g., cars, holidays etc.), with the foundational economy as their core interest (Earle et al. 2018; FEC 2020). It focuses on (re-)establishing an economy that provides basic goods and services of everyday life collectively, and hence is closely linked to research on provisioning systems (Fanning, O’Neill, and Büchs 2020; Plank et al. 2021; Bärnthaler et al. 2022), which are defined as “a set of related elements that work together in the transformation of resources to satisfy a foreseen human need” (Fanning, O’Neill & Büchs, 2020: 3). The two webinar speakers Andreas Novy and Richard Bärnthaler are members of the FEC. They have engaged in foundational economy thinking (Bärnthaler, Novy, and Plank 2021) and scholarship on provisioning systems (e.g., both are editors of a recent special issue on “Shaping Provisioning Systems for Social-Ecological Transformation” in *Sustainability: Science, Practice*



and Policy). Their joint article “The Foundational Economy as a Cornerstone for a Social-Ecological Transformation” (2021) situates this economy within the broader theme of social-ecological transformation and also mentions that it lacks deeper engagement with questions of unpaid care work (Bärnthaler, Novy & Plank 2021).

The two networks made visible the similarities in thinking, especially the necessary focus on activities outside the market, which are the building blocks of the structures in which a dis-embedded (detached from its biophysical surrounding and social context) and dis-embodied (alienated from care needs and logics of dependency) conceptualization of the neoliberal market is possible. Both approaches resemble each other in regarding economics as the study of social provisioning, elaborate on the paradoxical relation between the high societal relevance and the low payment of foundational work, and call for embedded and embodied forms of collective provisioning. The central difference between the two approaches is arguably the relevance attributed to unpaid care work. While FE excels in foregrounding essential infrastructures in the monetized economy, Russel and colleagues (2022: 1073) point out that “FE literature currently has a blind spot when it comes to unwaged work, which remains overwhelmingly performed by women.” The inclusion of care work as a foundational “cross-cutting, rather than separate, zone – [, which] constitutes the foundation and infrastructure of all other economic zones” (Dengler and Plank 2024: 4), as well as an increased focus on intersectionality are some starting points for a foundational economy that fruitfully integrates the horizon of a caring economy.

3. TRANSITION TOWARDS A CARING SOCIETY

The second webinar’s question was how to move towards a caring society that acknowledges that “the foundations of the wealth and well-being of the world rest upon the sphere of social reproduction and the labor of care” (FaDA 2020). Importantly, caring societies require a multi-level perspective that addresses both potential alliances in collective care struggles and their contestation by developments like increasing right-wing populism. In order to provide such a multi-level perspective, we invited experts from different backgrounds.

Barbara Thiessen gave an input with the title “Which way to a caring society? Strategies and traps”. She started her presentation by highlighting the complexity of the current care crisis and its origins (Dowling 2021). Historically, the systematic ignorance of care needs in capitalist economies has led to unpaid care as a feminized domain, which became more demanding and fragile due to an increasing labor market participation of women. Furthermore, the neglect of care in general led to poor working



conditions within care professions, which in neoliberal capitalism are underpaid and overburdened (e.g., Aulenbacher, Décieux, and Dammayr 2015; Dowling 2021; Thiessen 2020). Thiessen suggested a care mainstreaming and the support of caring communities as responses to the care crisis, which could then lead toward a caring society (Klie 2015; Thiessen 2015). Moreover, a new time policy with more time for care was discussed as an essential precondition for decent care for all within planetary boundaries. Thiessen referred to the *Option Time Model* (Jurczyk & Mückenberger 2021) with breathing life courses, recognizing not only time for care but self-care and socially relevant activities as one potential vision for a caring society. These solutions are, however, confronted with tendencies that might even deepen the care crisis in the long term, such as a mere rhetorical re-evaluation of care, the exploitation of voluntary work (van Dyk & Haubner 2021), an ongoing feminization of care, and a lack of control over abusive, violating, or overburdening care-arrangements (e.g., Thiessen 2015; 2020). Social and gender justice are essential to minimize such risks and traps on the way toward a caring society.

The rise of right-wing populism challenges imaginaries of social and gender justice. In her intervention, Birgit Sauer shed light on the masculinist and authoritarian conjuncture (Hall 1987; Sauer 2023) in the context of right-wing populism and connected it with discourses around a caring society. There is a growing precarity due to the partial erosion of the male bread-winner-model and traditional gender roles, the precarious integration of women into the labor market, and a growing insecurity of the workplaces framed as a crisis of masculinity. Drawing upon masculinist identity politics (Sauer 2023), authoritarians promise to re-establish a certain type of strong and aggressive masculinity and supremacy, with an independent, careless male subject accompanied by a strong picture of a traditional family as the basis of the nation, the state, and care. Family is constructed as the sphere of love and care, and women as caregivers (Sauer 2023; 2024). Sauer elaborated that this antagonism of a caring society established by anger and othering is based on emotions and affects, which play an important role within the political sphere. By recognizing emotions as important within the political sphere, an affective caring democracy (Sauer 2024; Tronto 2013) is a progressive feminist counterpart to the masculinist vision of authoritarian right-wing populist of a caring society. Such a feminist, affective caring democracy is a concept that analyses liberal democracy and its problems and a normative concept. The acknowledgement of interdependency builds the foundation for a sensitivity towards affects and needs within the struggles around and within democracy. Furthermore, the development of an affective and caring democracy would need institutions that provide the infrastructure and opportunity developing and (inter)acting within it (Sauer 2024).

Hanna Völkle elaborated in her input that a (new) time-regime could be one of these institutions, for instance by focusing on what she calls “caring times” (Völkle 2025). Völkle distinguishes linear clock-time as the hegemonic external temporal logic in capitalist economies (the emergence of which is linked to the standardization of time in industrial workplaces in the 19th century) from a more internal dimension. The latter is “bound to rhythms, cycles, and processes” (Dengler, Völkle, and Ware 2024), is more fluid and messier, less standardized and/or standardizable. The “situatedness of time(s)” (Doucet 2022: 8) focuses on non-linear processes of care and social reproduction and acknowledges the totality of temporal dynamics, rhythms, simultaneities, and interlinkages between past, present, and future – or what Barbara Adam (1998) has called “timescapes”. Caring times express both the need to broaden the definition of work and to respond to temporal needs and structures that venture beyond linear clock-time. An example for such a model is Frigga Haug’s (2009) 4-in-1 perspective, which divides the day in eight hours of sleep and the waking 16 hours into equal parts of ideally four hours for wage labor, care work, self-care, and political or civic involvement. “Caring times” focus on how individuals perceive and utilize time, forming a connection with a subject-specific understanding of time (Völkle 2025). This dependency is intertwined with individuals, social groups, and contextual surroundings – i.e. embodied and embedded. A feminist-ecological approach to temporal needs involves an inseparable blending of time and space, emphasizing the importance of considering the *homo curans* within its societal context and the environment (Dengler, Völkle, and Ware 2024). Caring societies that establish sustainable environments recognize the profound significance of time for individuals, society, and nature. Allocating time for collaborative processes becomes a crucial element in fostering caring relationships and interdependence (caring with) and the assumption of responsibility (taking care of) (ibid.).

For a caring society, we need strategies to transform existing institutions. Merle Schulken explained that a strategy is “a thought construct that details how one or several actors intend to bring about systemic change towards a desired end state” (Schulken et al. 2022, p. 18), given the respective context they are embedded in. To create such a strategy, alliances have to be built with groups or individual actors that share one’s interest or narrative. Furthermore, strategies in general need to break out of the narratives that justify the system that is currently applied to organize labor and time. Pressure points need to be identified and material control needs to be seized. From a feminist-materialist perspective this means establishing (new) social institutions and gaining the power to control one’s own time. The control over this ‘surplus’ is currently controlled by hetero-patriarchal capitalism. Schulke stressed that strategies ought to be combined (Wright 2019) in order to achieve a transformation to a caring society. Creating alliances in order to implement reforms by making use of existing institutions

that often serve the ruling class but can lead to compromise (e.g., bargain fiscal restrictions, parental leave options) is one aspect. At the same time, the strategy of confrontation with an increase in militancy and demand change (e.g., strike of care workers) is also a key aspect in this transition process. Furthermore, creating spaces in the niches of capitalism (e.g., caring communities) are crucial as people cannot rely on existing institutions. A combination of these three types of strategies – Wright (2019) calls them symbiotic, ruptural, and interstitial – might lead towards a transition to a caring society.

The inputs by the speakers were followed by a fruitful discussion on identified commonalities for strategies of transformation towards a caring society. Dominant politics of care provision subordinate care to ‘market needs’ and this will only change if institutions, discourses, and structures of power and domination are changed or transformed. Gender justice and new time regimes set a foundation for a caring society. They are a part of a progressive answer to the precarization of society on several levels and might support the solution of multiple interwoven crises.

4. DECENT CARE FOR ALL WITHIN PLANETARY BOUNDARIES

The third webinar connected questions of a caring economy and caring societies to the concept of planetary boundaries. After reminding the audience of the concept of planetary boundaries (Rockström et al. 2009; Richardson et al. 2023) introduced in section 1, Corinna Dengler foregrounded a social science perspective on the matter and tackled the question “How can we guarantee a good life and decent care for all and within planetary boundaries, i.e. a safe and just operating place for humans and more-than-humans?”. Dengler argued that caring societies need to embrace and collectively take care of asymmetrical care dependencies in order to get closer to the provisioning of good care for all within planetary boundaries and without reproducing intersectional inequalities. She introduced Maria Mies’ (1986) idea of an iceberg economy, the aforementioned ICE model (Jochimsen and Knobloch 1997), and the boundary between production and reproduction as a deep structure of separation (Biesecker and Hofmeister 2010) to argue that the monetized economy in a capitalist growth paradigm systematically invisibilizes, devalues, and destroys its social-ecological foundations, which consist of ecological processes and caring activities (Dengler and Strunk 2018, cf. figure 1).

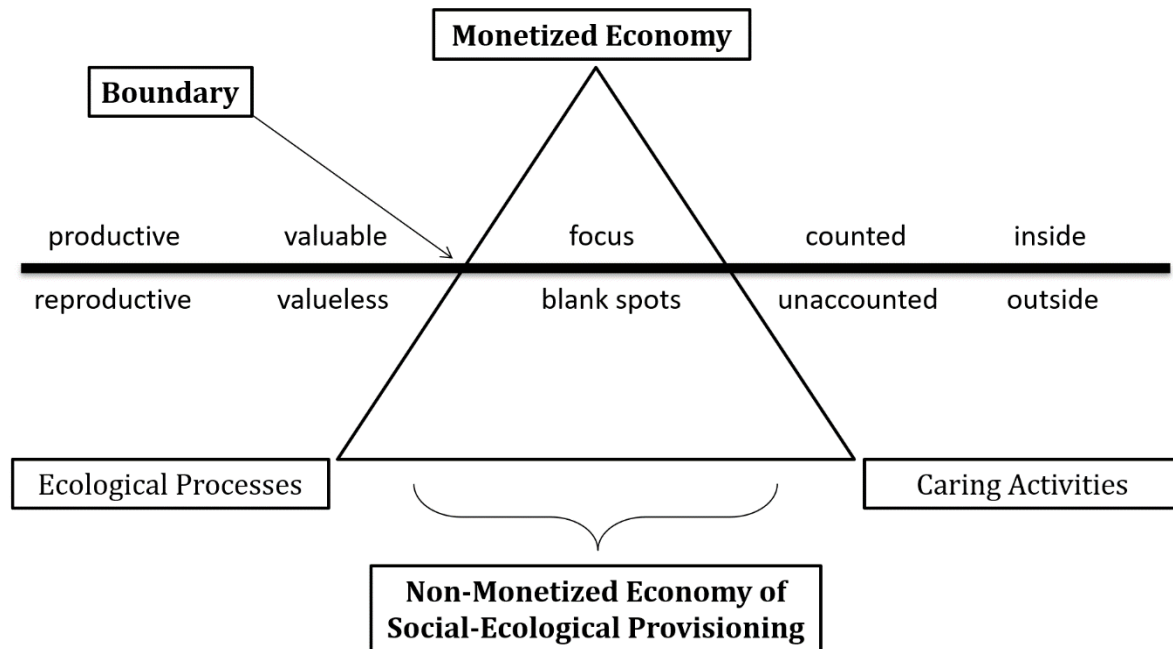


Figure 1. Boundary between the Monetized Economy and the Non-Monetized Economy of Social-Ecological Provisioning, based on Dengler and Strunk (2018) and Dengler and Lang (2022).

Dengler and Lang (2022) elaborate on different strategies to deal with unpaid care work (avoidance, transformation by means of technological innovation, shifting, and redistribution) and argue that the shifting strategy is most prevalent in a capitalist growth paradigm. Shifting unpaid care work, however, often reproduces intersectional inequalities along the race-class-gender nexus (e.g., Hochschild and Ehrenreich 2004) and does not fundamentally tackle the devaluation of unpaid care work (as well as the interlinked underpayment of paid care work). A strategy of redistributing unpaid care work among all members of society, thereby acknowledging its foundational role for societal flourishing, potentially helps to overcome the boundary between the monetized economy and the non-monetized economy of social-ecological provisioning (Dengler and Lang 2022), thereby contributing good care for all within planetary boundaries.

Attila Meleg (2023) analyzed the current historic conjuncture by identifying a marketization trap, which leads to severe societal contradictions. He emphasized that a historic analysis is indispensable in order to understand the current situation. The capitalist aim to increase shareholder value and revenues in the past led to the erosion of caregiving capabilities and infrastructures (e.g., company

kindergartens were closed in Hungary in the 1990s). The deconstruction of care infrastructure and capabilities in favor of the capitalist market economy changes the ability to secure livelihoods. In neoliberal times, the state is losing impact and in combination with demographic aging this leads to severe challenges for care provisioning systems in eastern and central European countries. In the course of marketization, care has turned into an expensive commodity, which Melegh also interpreted as a push-factor for migration. People not only move as caregivers to other countries but also are required to do so to afford the provision of care for their children and relatives in their countries of origin. From a historically informed Polanyian perspective, a mixed-economies approach (Hann 2019; Melegh 2019; Szelényi & Mihályi 2021; Novy 2024;), which combines different economic logics, might be a pathway towards decent care for all within planetary boundaries and end the marketization trap. Discussing questions of ownership is essential in this context. Different ownership and economic logics might provide the basis for thinking differently about care, for instance by integrating care into the workplace and not the other way around. The Polanyi expert Melegh stressed that taking control over the work process and place is the basis for decent care. Melegh calls for a fundamental transformation of the unproductive and unjust structures of capitalism today in order to tackle the current crises of social and environmental destruction. It is crucial to draw lessons from past successes and mistakes in socialism, fostering a collaborative effort to amplify and extend the exploration of novel models and mechanisms.

Fabienne Décieux picked up the discussion from a sociological perspective focusing on struggles around decent care. In neoliberalism, care is individualized and subjectivized although the question of care is a societal question and every human being has been and will be in need for care or providing care over the life course at one point (Aulenbacher 2020; Décieux & Deindl 2023, Klinger 2013). A change of welfare systems around the world can be observed in recent years, on a transnational level commonly shared political instruments and perspectives can be identified as neoliberalism is becoming a global system. But still, the transnational and global politics, forms of governance and instruments develop differently on a national level based on existing institutions and culture (Riegraf 2007; Pfau-Effinger 1998). These changes challenge the provision of decent care further, as the subordination of care under the 'needs' of the market is further exaggerated in forms of *commodification* and *corporatization* but also *(re)familialization* (Aulenbacher et al. 2018; Farris and Marchetti 2017). This led to a further alienation of care, as *comprehensive care* (Aulenbacher et al. 2020) is impossible under the condition of *structurally careless capitalism* (Aulenbacher et al. 2015), when care is not provided as an end in itself (Klinger 2013). Décieux foregrounded how important it is to not only recognize the situation of the care receivers and the quality of the provided care, but also the situation of the caregivers

in paid and unpaid work. She discussed the contradictions caregivers experience due to the neoliberal developments which simultaneously shifted gender roles and left them untouched. By referring to empirical findings, she elaborated the challenging situations mothers face with regard to demands around “good mothering” (Schmidt et al. 2023) but also the poor working conditions of female migrant care workers (Anderson & Shutes 2014; Aulenbacher et al. 2021; Décieux 2017). The necessity to take a look at both sides of caring relations in order to identify the needs and options for decent care within planetary boundaries was highlighted yet again.

The role of institutions and politics in the regulation of care was stressed. Although different approaches were presented – classical welfare policies or non-capitalist mixed-economies – the discussants agreed on the importance to talk about the questions of decent care on a societal and a collective level and to not only discuss national but also global responsibilities. This global responsibility is of great importance as the current care regimes under the pressure of neoliberalism show not only how intersectional inequalities within nation states are deepened to provide care but how they draw on global inequalities, ignoring the social and ecological consequences.

5. TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE AND CHANGING SOCIETIES: DEINDUSTRIALIZATION, DIGITIZATION, PLANETARY BOUNDARIES AND CARE

The fourth webinar dealt with simultaneous and sometimes contradictory changes in societies. Questions of how the welfare state addresses care needs were discussed and a Polanyian double movement (Polanyi 2001) was identified with progressive countermovements against the structural carelessness of capitalism (Aulenbacher and Dammayr 2014) as well as regressive tendencies (e.g., right-wing populism).

Roland Atzmüller opened the webinar with critical thought on multiple shifts and transformations in EU crisis management, social policies, and government projects in past decades. After the financial crisis, neoliberal ideology has intensified austerity policies and transformed social policy: increased punitive measures in workforce activation, economization of social investment via the human capital concept (e.g., social investment in early childhood care and education) as well as individualized adaptation pressures. In the early 2010s, however, crisis management and related policies pursued on a transnational EU level started to appropriate the concept of resilience from the natural sciences and systems theory, ecological economics, and psychology (Joseph, 2016; Stollenwerk, Börzel, and Risse 2021). Resilience is characterized by the ability to overcome crises by adapting to shocks but by actually using the crises as a way to improve and transform something. While pre-pandemic understandings of

resilience led to an emphasis on economic resilience, pandemic-informed politics rely on institutional and social resilience more strongly. Additionally, crises are interpreted as a new normal, as both unavoidable and unpreventable (Atzmüller 2019). The debates on social policy during the pandemic were quite optimistic. Several commentators noted that the lockdowns were “assertively bridged by a bonanza of furlough schemes, wage subsidies and fiscal stimulus measures” (Hemerijck and Huguenot-Noël 2022: 121), arguing that this bigger role of social policy will persist, which counters market-centered resilience approaches. Atzmüller identified the transformation of social policies by authoritarian and right-wing governments within current social political reforms (Atzmüller and Knecht 2023). He identified a narrative constructed since the 1990s including endangered traditional gender roles and family perspectives, othering, assumptions about idleness, and a dichotomy of deserving/undeserving, which results in pro-natalist policies and nationalistic-punitive welfare activities.

Right-wing movements are also on the rise in the region of Lusatia (Lausitz) in Eastern Germany, which is deeply affected by deindustrialization and at the center of social-ecological transformation-conflict (Dörre et al. 2020). Virginia Kimey Pflücke examined the gender-specific aspects of this structural and industrial transformation and the impacts of the post-socialist transformation on women in the labor market with a pending post-fossil transformation. Historically, Lusatia was an energy region, rich in brown coal, where the lignite industry employed many female workers in the German Democratic Regime (GDR). After the reunification, the region has already experienced transformative forces by the reduction of brown coal industry jobs by 90% (Jacobsen, Knuth, and Pflücke 2023). Female workers were affected more severely by unemployment compared to their male counterparts (Pflücke and Jacobsen 2023). Yet in Lusatia, women were still in a better economic situation, as for example the gender pay gap is smaller than the German average. However, debates on the development of Lusatia take into account ‘productive’ employment options also., whereas care, social aspects, and basic services were forgotten in the structural plans of transforming Lusatia. To this day, strong industrialism persists and the gender-specific dimension of the coal phase-out is threatened to be forgotten yet again, despite it not being unique to the case of Lusatia but a worldwide phenomenon. Pflücke also illustrated how insecurity and a disregard of gender injustice in politics lead to the rise of right-wing movements within the studied area with some scientists using the phrase ‘angry white men in Eastern Germany’.

Andrea Vetter connected the question of transformative change to the specific example of the cultural transformation hub “Haus des Wandels e.V.” in Brandenburg, Germany. The collectively organized space allows experimenting with collective self-organization and diverse living concepts, provides



space for all kinds of activities supporting social-ecological transformation and conviviality, and thereby connects the intersecting dimensions of ecological sustainability, social justice, self-determination, and interdependency. In 2018, a small group established the association "Haus des Wandels e.V." and purchased the former vocational school in Heinersdorf from the state of Brandenburg as well as the neighboring property of the former distillery. Both purchases were financed through direct loans by individuals that supported the project. The project "Haus des Wandels" is conceived as a commons (Bollier and Helfrich 2014; Habermann 2016; Federici 2019), something that collectively belongs to the people who care for it – a strategy that provides space for a care-full social-ecological transformation towards a degrowth society (Schmelzer, Vetter, and Vansintjan 2022). Against this background, the project could be characterized as a “concrete utopia” in terms of Ernst Bloch (1986), where wishful and abstract thinking about social-ecological transformation is transformed into will-full and concrete action (ibid.; Levitas 1991). It can be regarded as a countermovement to dominant political discourse, which is – as Virginia Kimey Plücke explained – neither ecologically sustainable nor socially just. The project challenges these discourses and narratives from below through their convivial experimentation with different practices, for instance on the question of energy and convivial technology (Vetter 2018).

Christa Wichterich (2023) calls for a recognition of social and ecological boundaries, as well as the structures of power and domination around the globe and added insightful perspectives from the Global South. She stated that one cannot talk about ecology without recognizing the effect of our economy and our mode of living on others – i.e. without critically reflecting on the “imperial mode of living” (Brand and Wissen 2018) practiced by many people in the Global North. She holds that a caring economy would aim at ending this imperial mode of living, while at the same time, she noted that:

a ‘caring state’ does not mean asking for a revival of the European welfare state that created prosperity through the neocolonial exploitation of untapped human and natural resources in the South and by appropriation of women’s unpaid care work within the male breadwinner model (Wichterich 2015: 94).

Her perspective further broadened the discussion with insights from social movements for a social-ecological transformation in the Global South (e.g., Menon-Sen and Wichterich 2018), thereby shedding light on agency and resistance by women at the frontlines of ecological destruction. The 1973 Indian Chipko movement, which is famously referenced in ecofeminist literature, is a vivid example of how women resisted deforestation in India by means of civil disobedience in form of tree-hugging (Shiva 1988). They recognized the trees as the basis for future livelihood as well as nature. Indigenous perspectives and knowledge from the Global South define care broadly and encompass earthcare (e.g., Singh 2013; Cielo, Coba, and Vallejo 2016), offering a valuable countermovement to Western

perspectives that are based on the hierarchical separation of human/nature (Merchant 1980). Moreover, Wichterich (2020) explored ‘care extractivism’ and care struggles in the majority world, which broadened the perspective on the care crisis, care migration, and intersectional inequalities. Acknowledging the historical and contemporary relevance of environmental and care struggles in the Global South offers a fresh horizon for discussion connecting care and social-ecological transformation (see also: Federici 2019).

6. SUMMARY & OUTLOOK

Overall, the project “Shaping Provisioning Systems for Social-Ecological Transformation: Decent Care for All Within Planetary Boundaries” has successfully opened many of the dense and interwoven aspects related to decent care in provisioning systems that are in line with climate goals, climate-friendly living, and a social-ecological transformation. The questions of how decent care can be defined, who is included in a caring society, and how good care for all within planetary boundaries can actualize were discussed and answered on different levels of abstraction. Thus, the broad perspectives on care and the interdisciplinarity of the webinar series enabled us to approach the questions of social-ecological transformation and decent care within planetary boundaries. Despite myriad research avenues, concepts, and political struggles in the field of care – the provisioning of care is still underrepresented in debates about planetary boundaries and socio-ecological transformation.

Combining the social-ecological provisioning of care with concepts developed by Karl Polanyi offers a fruitful perspective, as Polanyi’s idea of fictitious commodities can be applied to care and nature to show the simultaneities in the destructive character of commodification and market provisioning in both cases. But also, Polanyi’s idea of double-movements seems insightful to analyze the attacks of the free market and the countermovements in different shapes that put themselves into the service of care and ecological questions. Especially in light of the success of right-wing populism operating at the interface of social and ecological topics for their own agenda (e.g., mobilizing voters), an agenda-setting by the Left is of great importance. The Left has structurally left the development of a fitting narrative lying idle until recent years, despite being theoretically and practically able to provide solutions and points of entry for the very same existential needs that right-wing ideologies are tendering to. The complex contradictory neoliberal developments cause struggles that are felt in realities of lives across the political spectrum and thus present entry points for transformative action that is socially just (including: gender just) and climate friendly. Finally, we argue that it is crucial to academically, politically, and socially highlight how care provision systems can offer solutions for these struggles. Ways and

strategies towards a transformation have been outlined and have to be further developed. For future research, it will be important to address the concept of decent care for all within planetary boundaries on a global scale, an endeavor we are committed to in our respective research.

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