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Re-thinking Work and Welfare for the Social-Ecological Transformation

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Abstract

This essay proposes a theory of post-neoliberal social citizenship, re-imagining the work-welfare nexus with a view to articulating individual freedom and social solidarity; democratic renewal and environmental sustainability. Taking an interdisciplinary perspective, the essay first interrogates the relationship between work and freedom, problematizing the neoliberal understanding of emancipation as labour market empowerment. It then suggests, drawing from the feminist literature, a conceptualization of work beyond paid employment as the "practice of taking care of the world." This conceptualization is politicized: it demands democratic deliberation for establishing its precise meaning and can provide the basis for both new solidarities and democratic renewal. The essay thus sketches a model of post-neoliberal eco-social citizenship, which reconciles individual emancipation (from and within the labour market) with democratization and environmental sustainability. In this context, participatory-deliberative democracy partially substitutes the market mechanism as a system for evaluating the value of human activities and for coordinating individuals' freedoms. This allows increasing the democratic control over the economy for directing it towards the promotion of sustainable social welfare, enhancing human flourishing opportunities for all within planetary boundaries.

Keywords: Social-ecological transformation; capability freedom; neoliberalism; social citizenship; work.

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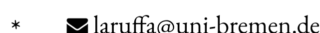
* 
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1 Introduction

The current historical phase is strongly marked by the hegemonic crisis of neoliberalism: while remaining dominant, neoliberalism has lost its popular legitimacy. Societies in the Global North increasingly face a deep democratic crisis, which opens the way not only to progressive democratic renewal but also to the emergence of right-wing populism and authoritarianism (e.g. Caruso, 2016; Fraser, 2017; Rehmann, 2016; Stahl, 2019). This paper proposes a theory of post-neoliberal social citizenship, re-articulating work and welfare and the values of individual freedom and social solidarity. Renewing the ideal of "social citizenship" may be essential for developing progressive alternatives to neoliberalism. Social citizenship reposes on the principles of non-contractual reciprocity and solidarity, and it involves the obligations of social interdependence, which have to be fulfilled as a matter of justice rather than charity (Fraser & Gordon, 1992). Hence, social citizenship defines what members of a political community owe each other, which freedoms are allowed and promoted and which freedoms are instead constrained. Neoliberalism has undermined the post-war model of social citizenship. On the one hand, the liberalization of international financial markets transformed welfare states into "competition states" that strive to attract investments and weakened social solidarity (Cerny, 1997; Jessop, 1993). In this context, the latter is promoted only to the extent that it becomes itself an asset in the global competition — i.e. when it takes the (contradictory) form of "competitive solidarity" (Streeck, 1999). On the other hand, de-industrialization, the emergence of post-Fordism and the weakening of the class compromise in the Global North challenged the basis of an employment-based society through the increase of precarious/insecure work, in-work poverty and structural unemployment (e.g. Beck, 1992; Castel, 2003; Paugam, 2000).

The point here is not to idealize the Keynesian welfare state and the post-war social-democratic compromise. As Fraser (2013) notes, New Leftists, anti-imperialist activists and feminists revealed the oppressive character of "bureaucratically organized social protections, which disempowered their beneficiaries, turning citizens into clients"; of "the national framing of first-world social protections, which were financed on the backs of postcolonial peoples whom they excluded" and of "protections premised on the 'family wage' and on androcentric views of 'work' and 'contribution,' showing that what was protected was less 'society' *per se* than male domination" (pp. 127–128). The problem is that these emancipatory struggles have now formed a 'dangerous liaison' with neoliberalism whereby the emancipatory critique of oppressive solidarity has converged with the neo-liberal critique of solidarity per se (Fraser, 2013, p. 130). Hence, instead of reforming welfare states in order to make them more inclusive and empowering institutions, emancipation has been equated with marketization: the "artistic critique" of the welfare state coming from the left and grounded in the values of autonomy and emancipation has been largely absorbed by the "new spirit of capitalism," reinforcing the legitimacy of neoliberalism (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005; see also Sennett, 2006).

Therefore, while emancipation was understood in terms of protection from the market ("de-commodification") in the context of post-war welfare states, emancipation is identified with market empowerment and re-commodification within neoliberalism. From this perspective, as Beaumont & Kelly (2018) argue, overcoming neoliberalism requires re-claiming the concept of freedom for the left, re-imagining freedom in richer ways — while making it compatible with social justice and environmental sustainability (see Magatti, 2009; Herzog, 2014). Thus, the challenge for building a "counter-hegemonic project to neoliberalism" is to consider the emancipatory critique of the welfare state — recognizing the importance of individual em-

powerment, thereby avoiding hierarchical, exclusionary and communitarian understandings of social solidarity — *without* identifying emancipation with marketization, i.e. reconciling individual freedom and social solidarity (Fraser, 2013, pp. 131–132).

Crucially, both the Keynesian principle of de-commodification and the neoliberal principle of re-commodification repose on the same understanding of work, which is identified with paid employment in the labour market. In this paper, I argue that challenging this narrow conceptualization of work may be a key for framing emancipation beyond marketization, thereby reconciling individual freedom and social solidarity. Following Levitas (2001), in this paper I thus take a "utopian" approach to welfare reform, whereby rather than extrapolating the future from the present, the goal is to "think first about where we want to be, and then about how we might get there" (p. 450; on the importance of utopian thinking in social policy see also Kubon-Gilke & Maier-Rigaud, 2020).

In this effort to imagine more emancipatory futures, two aspects seem especially relevant. The first relates to the increasingly urgent challenge of articulating social justice and environmental sustainability. Given the insufficiency for addressing the environmental crisis of today's dominant strategy that is focused on "green growth" and aims at de-coupling economic growth from emissions through technological and efficiency improvements, it is necessary to adopt a more radical approach — a "social-ecological transformation" that is based on conceptions of social wellbeing that reject productivism, consumerism and economic growth (e.g. Asara et al., 2015; Brand et al., 2020; Chertkovskaya et al. 2019; D'Alisa et al., 2014; Fitzpatrick, 2004; Gough, 2017; Hirvilammi, 2020; Hickel, 2021; Hickel & Kallis, 2020; Koch, 2013; Koch & Buch-Hansen, 2021; Büchs & Koch, 2019; Latouche, 2010; Mastini et al., 2021; Parrique, 2021; Rosa & Henning 2018; Sommer & Welzer 2014; Soper, 2020; Velicu & Barca, 2020). This requires — among others — to overcome the predominance of the economic discourse on the future, of its vocabulary and its paradigm centred on goods (de Leonardis, 2011, p. XV).

The second aspect is that of avoiding the technocratic trap of formulating welfare reform proposals and theorizing policy "solutions" to socio-economic and environmental "challenges" in a top-down and de-politicized way, building exclusively on "scientific evidence" and experts' opinions. On the contrary, since neoliberalism involves the marginalization of democratic politics, a post-neoliberal social citizenship should put democratization at its core. In this context, the aim should be to build a "deliberative welfare," which institutionalizes "discourse about well-being and the good life" (Fitzpatrick, 2002, p. 167). In this way social policy can fulfil its role, which is not only that of addressing social needs through the distribution of goods and the provision of services but also that of improving the "practice of citizenship" working as a "multiplier of democracy," which nourishes a "public discourse on needs and rights," i.e. a discussion on the kind of society we want to build (de Leonardis, 1999, pp. 33–34).

A central problem linked to democratization is that of finding a suitable collective-political subject able to promote the post-neoliberal social citizenship. The working class played a crucial role in both the development of the welfare state and the democratization of politics — with labour parties and trade unions giving a political voice to ordinary people. Symmetrically, the decline of working-class is associated with a decline of the welfare state and the emergence of "post-democracy," whereby economic and political inequalities return to levels similar to pre-democratic times (Crouch, 2004). From this perspective, the decline of the working-class opens the "dilemma of seeking an alternative social base" for reinvigorating the welfare state and democracy (Crouch, 2004, p. 65).

The incapacity to mobilize new social identities for progressive forces seems to be also responsible for the re-emergence of xenophobic nationalism and authoritarianism. Indeed, many

of those belonging to the working classes, including active members of trade unions, are now supporting far-right parties and movements (Dörre, 2018). In this context, the far right cannot be countered by solely fighting racism nor by trying to do politics without political identities, reducing politics to a technical matter beyond ideologies (Crouch, 2004, p. 119). Rather, it is necessary to offer alternative forms of representation for popular discontent with the status quo. In particular, it is urgent to build a progressive coalition with universalistic aspirations, re-vitalising the original internationalist hopes of the labour movement.

Another fundamental problem is that labour-driven democratization was heavily dependent on industrialization and economic growth — and thus on fossil energy — thereby making democratic politics as a whole dependent on carbon and oil (Mitchell, 2009). This makes it extremely difficult to reconcile democracy and sustainability (see also Blühdorn, 2020; Goetz et al., 2020).

For all these reasons, as Burawoy (2015) argues, neoliberalism can be overcome only by a *global civil society* committed to both human rights and environmental justice. Thus, the basis for this new "countermovement" should be broad, going beyond the political representation of workers in a narrow sense. This is especially relevant with respect to the feminist movement — which fights for recognizing the value of unpaid care work as an essential contribution to society — and the environmentalist movement — which points to the unsustainability of the contemporary economic model based on the cycle of ever-increasing work and consumption. Thus, it is important to define a new political identity that articulates concerns and interests of various social groups, including feminist and ecological movements, thereby also rethinking the role of trade unions as representing "general and widespread social concerns" (Crouch, 2004, pp. 114–118).

One step in this direction would be that of re-conceptualizing "work" in a broader way than paid employment, including all activities that are indispensable for reproducing the social and environmental world. This is one of the core arguments of this paper. Thus, sections two to four discuss, from an interdisciplinary perspective, the relationship between freedom and work, highlighting the main problems of neoliberal understandings of freedom centred on labour market participation. The fifth section proposes a politicized conceptualization of work beyond employment, which could allow for forming new solidarities for renewing democracy and building a post-neoliberal and environmentally sustainable welfare policy. Finally, the last section draws from Amartya Sen's capability approach for outlining the central elements of a post-neoliberal social citizenship, which is at the same time emancipatory and democratic, socially just and environmentally sustainable.

2 Work and Freedom: From the Ancient World to Industrial Capitalism

Ancient Greeks considered the activities aimed at producing the means for human survival to be dominated by necessity and thus unfree. For this reason, these activities were delegated to slaves. Thus, Aristotle distinguishes between labour or work (*poiesis*) and action or agency (*praxis*). While the goal of labour is external to the activity itself, agency refers to those activities that are intrinsically important (i.e. significant in themselves), that are freely chosen and whose aim is human self-realization. This difference is for Aristotle an ontological difference: work exists in the realm of necessity while action exists in that of freedom (Ruggiu, 2009, p. 28) —

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and only action allows human beings to live well (*eudaimonia*).[1] In particular, human beings are "political animals" that flourish through participating in the political life of the *polis* (Bellamy, 2008, p. 31). Hence, in ancient Greece, freedom was mainly identified with the sharing of government, whereas the private dimension of freedom was neglected. This understanding of freedom was "doubly oppressive": on the one hand, "it rested on the oppression of slaves, women and other non-citizens" — to which labour was delegated and imposed — and on the other hand "it was oppressive of citizens in demanding they sacrifice their private interests to the service of the state" (Bellamy, 2008, p. 35). These two forms of oppression were linked as "citizens could only dedicate themselves to public life because their private lives were serviced by others" (Bellamy, 2008, p. 35). Also, both forms of oppression are typical of totalitarian regimes that generally treat "non-citizens as less than fully human" and demand "the total identification of citizens with the state" (Bellamy, 2008, p. 35).

For these reasons — and in opposition to the ancient culture — modernity puts work at the core of its emancipatory project. Thus, with the Enlightenment, work becomes the key way for achieving human realization and happiness — a cultural revolution that has its origins in the broader ideology of progress, whereby the relationship between human beings and the world becomes dynamic and the emancipation from need through the domination of nature becomes its central goal (Gioia & Succimarra, 2009, p. 93). Hence, work is a good in itself for Hobbes, and working is the defining activity of mankind for Hume, the one that differentiates human beings from animals (Ruggiu, 2009, pp. 32–33).

The complete overturn of the relation between *praxis* and *poiesis* occurs with Adam Smith's distinction between productive and unproductive work (Ruggiu, 2009, p. 34). For Smith all those activities linked to politics, culture and religion are unproductive because they do not end up in a permanent object that endures after that labour finishes. Thus, professionals such as soldiers, priests, people of culture and even the king himself — those social groups that in the ancient order were socially respected precisely because they had not to work — are negatively regarded as "unproductive." Hence, what for Aristotle was the reason for devaluing labour, namely the fact that the goal of this activity is outside itself — in the product — becomes for Smith the *source* of value (Ruggiu, 2009, p. 35). Symmetrically, for Aristotle the value of human agency lies in the fact that it is performed for intrinsic reasons, whereas for Smith human agency produces value only if it realizes a vendible commodity. In a similar manner, for Hegel the authority of the master over the slave must end because master's action does not produce anything (Ruggiu, 2009, p. 43).

Locke justifies the institution of private property on the basis of human labour. Hence, all individuals can become rich and successful: in modern societies social status is no longer ascribed at birth and inherited but rather earned through one's own work. In this context, the active participation in the economy — and hence the payment of taxes — becomes the basis for the access to rights, including the right to vote. The centrality of productive work is thus also linked to a critique of aristocracy's parasitism and to the emergence of a new political subjectivity which substitutes the "citizen-owner" with the "citizen-worker" who actively participates in society, economically contributing — through labour — to the progress of society (Gioia & Succimarra, 2009, pp. 102–103). Indeed, the perception that the nobles did not contribute to

1. Also in ancient Rome, *otium* (thinking about the meaning of life, taking part in the political life, engaging in creative and contemplative activities but also simply enjoying life, eating, playing, resting, etc.) is the most important activity for human beings, whereas all forms of work are *negotium*, where the prefix "*neg-*" means "the contrary of": *otium* is thus the cardinal concept for conceiving human self-realization; work is simply non-*otium*, defined in negative terms, as the lack of something (Dummer, 2001).

collective welfare was one of the bases for the French Revolution. From this perspective, work not only represents the source of individual self-realization and of social progress but also becomes the basis on which it is possible to build a just — i.e. "meritocratic" — society.

However, with the emergence of industrial capitalism, it becomes clear that the emancipatory potential of work cannot be taken for granted. In particular, the incapacity of progress to keep its promises in terms of diffused wellbeing and freedom is at the core of the socialist critique of capitalism. For Marx, production within capitalism becomes an end in itself, involving the inversion of the relationship between means and ends: human activity is subordinated to the exigencies of production so that, from being final ends, human beings become means in the process of capital valorisation, and the whole society assumes an instrumental function with respect to the economic system (Gioia & Succimarra, 2009, p. 127). Thus, in capitalism commodities are valued more than human beings, which are reduced to means of production, thereby subverting human nature (Giovanola, 2009a, pp. 366–368). Crucially, according to Marx, it is not labour per se that constitutes a limit to human freedom but only its alienation — its reduction to a mere means for subsistence (Ruggiu, 2009, p. 40). Indeed, the capacity to engage in free and conscious activities is the specific characteristic of human beings, and these activities include non-alienated work. The problem is that within capitalism workers have no other choice than selling their labour force, which makes their condition similar to those of the slaves in the ancient world. Hence, the de-humanization of work in capitalism implies that individuals are able to realize themselves only in outside work, letting arise again the opposition between working time and "free time" that characterized the ancient culture.

Yet, despite the dramatic reality of labour under industrial capitalism, Marx embraces a nuanced position with respect to the relation between work and freedom (see Andolfi, 2004). On the one hand, Marx sees work as the sphere of alienation and exploitation, the realm of necessity and unfreedom. On the other hand, however, he also develops a positive theory of work as a fundamental human need and as a sphere in which human beings can potentially realize themselves. Building on this ambiguity, Marx argued both for more "freedom from work" (e.g. through the reduction of working time) and for more "freedom at work," (e.g. through the fight against alienation). Thus, as Andolfi (2004) argues, Marx suggests that human freedom should be realized both through work and beyond work. In contrast to Marx's understanding, the dichotomy between work and freedom seems to re-emerge in contemporary political philosophy in authors such as Arendt and Habermas, who see the possibility of human freedom mainly in the communicative-political action in the public sphere, as the economic realm is conceived of as inevitably dominated by the technical-instrumental rationality and thus by unfreedom (Arendt, 1958; Habermas, 1987).

3 Work and Freedom in Post-Fordism

Despite the de-humanization of work within capitalism, empirical evidence suggests that even most alienated jobs such as those that characterized Taylor's scientific management during Fordism actually offered some possibilities of human flourishing, such as positive interactions with colleagues (Poli, 2008, pp. 66–67). Thus, work is rarely for individuals only a pure "means" aimed at obtaining the necessities for living: work has many functions, such as structuring the day, facilitating social contacts, building a personal identity and social status, and encouraging to use and improve one's own capacities and skills.

Moreover, the possibilities for self-actualization at work appear even more plausible in the context of post-Fordism since many jobs in the knowledge-intensive and service-oriented econ-

omy are potentially intrinsically rewarding. Indeed, in post-industrial societies it is possible to observe an increase in the diversity of motivations for working and especially the importance of extra-economic motivations linked to creativity and self-expression (Poli, 2008). Hence, while neoliberalism is associated with an increase in precarity, low-paid work and in-work poverty — issues of inequality linked to the "social critique" of capitalism — the "artistic critique" of capitalism based on lack of autonomy and self-realization is presented as being overcome in post-industrial capitalism (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005; Sennett, 2006).

Yet, the relationship between work and freedom in post-Fordism is not unproblematic. For example, intrinsic motivation and autonomy may also lead to "self-exploitation" (Gill & Pratt, 2008): workers no longer need external control because they are self-disciplined by their intrinsic motivation (Poli, 2008, pp. 84–85) and by new organizational forms, such as deadline- and project-based work and evaluations by results (Voswinkel, 2011, p. 97). Thus, external hierarchy-based discipline is replaced by self-coercion, and positive values such as autonomy and self-actualization turn out to be *against* the subject (Voswinkel, 2011, p. 99). This is not to say that Taylor's scientific management was better: the point is not to reject the values of autonomy and self-realization but to criticize their realization in capitalism (Voswinkel, 2011, p. 100). For example, the reality of a job without boundaries often undermines personal autonomy. Moreover, the autonomy encouraged within capitalism is limited in scope, following slogans like: "work autonomously but follow our demands!" or "be authentic in the way that is expected from you!" (Voswinkel, 2011, pp. 96–98). In this context, the problem is that individuals aspire and struggle to become how the market defines they should be, so market-conformity and authenticity go together (Voswinkel, 2011, p. 99): individuals' meaning of life becomes acquiring and increasing their market value, and their identity is shaped by the market. Thus, the emphasis often put on the capacity of paid employment to emancipate individuals from oppressive relationships in the family and from "welfare dependency" tends to obscure the fact that this kind of empowerment also makes individuals dependent on their capacity to sell themselves on the market, making their freedom market-conformed.

In particular, one central mechanism that constrains individuals' autonomy — and which is often behind self-exploitation — is the competition pressure. Indeed, remaining competitive compels individuals to subordinate all life spheres to professional success. Thus, competition generates suffering since "the individual is perpetually examined as to whether she/he is performing to their maximum potential" (Petersen & Willig, 2004, p. 343). Work in neoliberalism then is organized according to the "principle of fear," whereby individuals "fear of not being able to honour the normative expectations to be competitive and profitable" (Petersen & Willig, 2004, p. 343). Perceiving others always as competitors and evaluators makes individuals fear them, destroying the possibility for joy. Hence, such as in the Taylorist system, in post-Fordism — even if for different reasons — work is de-humanized, impeding individuals' self-realization at work (Petersen & Willig, 2004, p. 342). Thus, freedom in neoliberalism is limited because individuals are compelled to follow the requirements of efficiency, productivity and competition. It is a "pseudo-autonomy" in which the individual constantly has to motivate and optimize the self (Petersen & Willig, 2004, p. 347).

Competition pressures also promote processes of individualization that undermine the capacity for collective action. Thus, increased competition pressures — together with the difficulty of organizing workers in the service sector — have implied a sharp decline of the centrality of trade unions and of workers' solidarity. Indeed, competition weakens social ties and renders solidarity an unaffordable luxury. For the "losers" of this competitive struggle only the self-blaming feeling of not being good enough remains: in a system of apparently fair competition,

individuals are responsible for their own destiny and their lack of recognition is just (Rosa, 2006, p. 98). However, the principle of competition influences not only the life chances of the "losers" but also those of the "winners," who are obliged to live in a way that permanently improves their competitiveness (Rosa, 2006, p. 100). Since no position is secure, people are "compelled to succeed" (Poli, 2008, p. 247) so that especially high-skilled workers suffer from psychological distress and excessive importance attached to work (Poli, 2008, p. 238), scarifying their whole lives in order to achieve and maintain a position.

Hence, because of the competitive pressure and the promise of self-realization through work, contemporary capitalism reinforces the links between work, self-worth and identity, at the expense of other life domains beyond work: a person's whole life has a value only to the extent that it produces economic value and becomes a means of production, and people excluded from the labour market are socially marginalized (Totaro, 2009). Even "free time" becomes a resource rather than being intrinsically valued, whereby its function is reduced to make workers productive during their work, i.e. free time is valued only because of work. Moreover, free time is colonized by consumption — which belongs to the same ideology of production (Andolfi, 2004; Totaro, 2009) — instead of fulfilling its "anthropological function" (Giovanola, 2009a, p. 376; Caltagirone, 2009). Thus, the risk is that work occupies the entire life, becoming an obstacle to freedom. Indeed, work is only one of many meaningful dimensions in life, and "free time" is needed for reflecting and for forming a conception of the good life (Herzog, 2014, pp. 166–167).

From this perspective, while admitting that human realization is possible *only* outside work means accepting that work remains alienated and de-humanized, the aim should be to realize both the liberation *of* work and the liberation *from* work (Andolfi, 2004). Human flourishing, in this view, requires an "anthropological equilibrium," whereby work is part of a broader life project aimed at the realization of the person as a whole (Totaro, 2009). Hence, on the one hand, work is called to be a central opportunity for human realization; on the other hand, work cannot realize the whole human (Giovanola, 2009a, p. 374). In this context, the realization of human beings at work is a *necessary but not sufficient condition* for the realization of human beings as a whole. Individuals should not 'work in order to survive' or 'live in order to work' but rather be 'living and working in order to live well' (Verducci, 2009, p. 347). As Giovanola (2009a, p. 383) argues, by interpreting richness and poverty as anthropological rather than material categories, it could be argued that capitalism is characterized by anthropological poverty and mono-dimensionality (see also Marcuse, 1964) whereas "human richness" is possible under the condition that the subject resists the total identification with his or her work. However, given the difficulty of establishing once and for all the importance that work should have in human life, Andolfi (2004) seems to suggest that individuals should be left free to choose if they want to realize themselves *through* or *beyond* work. Public policies should make sure that no one is "unvoluntarily" without work (unemployed) and that none is "unvoluntarily" employed (i.e. that none is compelled to accept a job just in order to survive).

In concluding this section, I shall emphasize that a central problem of equating emancipation with paid work is the marginalization of other aspects of freedom and especially the freedom to participate in politics (broadly understood), which in contemporary society has largely lost its meaning (e.g. not only party- and unions-memberships but also low-intensity forms of participation such as voting). To use Benjamin Constant's wording, the "freedom of the moderns," which involves the private freedom to enjoy life in the production and consumption spheres, has completely obscured the "freedom of the ancients," which centred on political participation. Yet, in this way a great part of the population in rich democracies has

now returned to its pre-democratic condition: individuals work and pay taxes but have not the power to influence political decisions, which are increasingly shaped by economic interests (Crouch 2004). Thus, without collective self-determination, individuals cannot be said to be fully free, as without the possibility of actively co-shaping society, individuals will be subjected to circumstances to which they will have to passively adapt. In particular, the next section discusses the shortcomings of letting capitalist markets determine the nature of society.

4 Neoliberal Freedom and the Problems of "Market Paternalism"

Freedom arguably involves at least three different aspects (Herzog, 2014, pp. 68–83). First, negative freedom refers to the degree to which individuals' actions are left unrestricted, especially by the political power of the state. Negative freedom thus denotes the absence of obstacles to individuals' actions and involves various rights that protect each person vis-à-vis the arbitrary power of other persons and the state. Second, positive freedom refers to what individuals can actually be and do and the extent to which they are able to realize their conception of the good, i.e. to live a self-determined life. The notion of positive freedom points to the fact that individuals need resources — both material and immaterial — in order to be *really* free to realize the ends they value and that public action can promote this freedom through the provision of social services and the regulation of the economy. Third, republican freedom refers to citizens' capacity to influence the political agenda and thus to co-determine the direction of social change. This dimension of freedom is directly linked to a substantive democracy in which citizens have the effective power to participate in public affairs and in the elaboration of the rules governing social life.

Within neoliberalism, freedom is mainly reduced to its negative understanding and to a narrow economic interpretation of its positive dimension. Neoliberalism involves the freedom of the market actor — the worker-consumer — whereas the non-economic dimensions of positive freedom and especially the republican aspect are marginalized. In particular, for Magatti (2009) neoliberalism promotes a nihilist and self-referential understanding of freedom detached from collectively shared meanings. The social order is presented as the spontaneous and casual result of free individual actions without the intervention of a political-collective will, i.e. without defining deliberate common goals. Through the market, individuals' actions are coordinated in a coherent order, making deliberation about public values superfluous. Thus, the market and technocratic governance replace democratic deliberation about the nature of the "good society": rather than a debate on the "final ends" of public action, what is required is the enhancement of the functionality, productivity and efficiency of each institutional or individual actor. In this way, however, means and ends are reversed, and the goal becomes a perpetual expansion of the means, negating the possibility of discussing the ends of those means: while human history has been marked by scarce means in face of defined ends, today we have abundant means and undetermined ends (Magatti, 2009, p. 98).

From this perspective, neoliberalism does not aim to realize specific goals but involves a "method" or a "procedure": through competition, the "natural selection" realizes a coherent (even if open-ended) social order without requiring any final end to be achieved (Magatti, 2009, p. 153). Indeed, the principle of competition is always "relative": competition does not aim at the achievement of an absolute exogenous goal but rather at being better, faster, more profitable etc. than competitors, thereby becoming an end in itself (Rosa, 2006, pp. 94–96). Thus, rather than a means to improve human life, competition involves a self-reinforcing coercive system,

which obliges individuals to always increase their competitiveness in the absence of exogenous objectives to be achieved or needs to be satisfied (Rosa, 2006, p. 94).

This, however, means renouncing the possibility of any shared meaning, including on the criteria informing competition: the process selects the "best" ones, but the actors involved in the process do not have the possibility of choosing the criteria that establish what is "better" and what is "worse." *Functionality* (i.e. what works, what is efficient) is the sole criterion, which implies ever-increasing performance standards to be met (Magatti, 2009, pp. 201–207). Hence, while the market apparently allows each individual actor to freely pursue his or her personal goals without the need to agree on collective aims, individuals' "free" choices are actually a response to functionality imperatives. The market defines the value of all entities that are put in competition with each other, including products, activities, individuals, institutions, states, etc. In neoliberalism the market is the "tribunal" establishing what is truthful and valuable (Foucault, 2004).

Without a collective debate about valuable goals, the apparently democratic market mechanism de facto implies that the only possibility is the passive adaptation to a social environment that remains beyond any evaluation or choice (Magatti, 2009, p. 338). Freedom is reduced to freedom within the market. On the one hand, freedom in neoliberalism is consumer's freedom: we are free to choose among a huge variety of ever-improving products and goods, which cannot, however, improve our quality of life (Bartolini, 2013). Consumers' freedom is a rather restricted form of freedom: we can only choose among available options without the possibility of discussing the nature of those options, i.e. we cannot decide what goods should be produced and how — decisions that are taken by democratically unaccountable economic powers. From this perspective, freedom is identified with the *quantity* of (mainly irrelevant) options open to individuals. On the other hand, freedom in neoliberalism is the freedom of the "entrepreneurs." In this context, individuals are free but they should make "appropriate" uses of their freedom (Burchell, 1993, p. 273): neoliberalism "specifies entrepreneurial conduct everywhere," constraining the subject "to act in a capital-enhancing fashion" (Brown, 2016, p. 3). Hence, also in this case, freedom remains rather narrowly defined: individuals' freedom is tied to the imperative of being successful in the market and being better than others.

As Rosa (1998) argues, while liberalism assumes that individuals should define what a good life consists in, they end up defining their conceptions of the good life in ways that are congenial to the requirements of capitalism or at least that are compatible with its systemic imperatives:

> Only if the vast majority of people view themselves primarily as consumers and producers, and consequently direct their energies and aspirations towards professional careers on the one hand and ever increasing consumption on the other (and not, e.g., towards a life of asceticism [...] meditation, artistic creativity or social solidarity) can growth-dependent capitalist societies sustain themselves (pp. 202–203).

Personal identities are thus shaped by what Rosa calls "market paternalism," which defines the range of possible answers to questions like: What can I do? Who can I become? What can I want? (Rosa, 1998, p. 206). In this context, a crucial role is played by the advertising industry, which inculcates consumerist values, imposing a vision of the good life from early childhood (Bartolini, 2013): 'approximately 350,000 television commercials have passed before the eyes of the average teenager by the time he or she reaches the age of 18' (Rosa, 1998, p. 204). More generally, the point is that 'we do not define our conceptions of the good life autonomously; we always depend on the fact that we want to be recognized, and consequently we depend on

what we are recognized for in our culture' (Rosa, 1998, p. 207). Thus, we end up *authentically* wanting to be good producers-consumers. The main problem here is that the ethical question on the good life has been privatized and individualized. In contrast, Rosa (1998, p. 212) calls for a process of re-politicization, which involves developing "public and participatory deliberations on questions of the good society and the good life" since "only if conceptions of the good are articulated and discussed, can ideological bias and neglect be detected, criticized and potentially avoided."

From this perspective, the "freedom of the ancients" (political participation and democratic deliberation) is actually a precondition for enjoying the "freedom of the moderns" and having the possibility of authentically defining the nature of the good life: there cannot be real individual autonomy without collective autonomy and collective self-determination since collectively shared meanings enable individuals to lead a meaningful life (see also Castoriadis, 1991; Taylor, 1998).

In particular, the central problem of delegating to capitalist markets the questions of the good life and the good society is that capitalism is oriented towards profit-maximisation and exchange-value rather than use-value and the satisfaction of social needs. In this context, satisfying social needs — the "scarcity of scarcity" — becomes "market saturation," which is the worst thing that could happen to a capitalist economy (Rosa, 2006, p. 94). Indeed, productivity growth has not been used to liberate time from work but to increase the number of meaningless jobs that do not contribute to social welfare (Graeber, 2020). Many people are themselves aware that the jobs they are doing are not making any meaningful contribution to the world and should not actually exist. At the same time, while many activities that benefit society are unpaid or badly paid, the demand for — and thus the pay of — "bullshit jobs" such as specialists in corporate law is much higher as a result of inequality: "if the 1% of the population controls most of the disposable wealth, what we call 'the market' reflects what *they* think is useful or important, not anybody else" (Graeber, 2020). As Clarke (2005) argues, within neoliberal capitalism the market

> is an instrument of 'natural selection' that judges not on the basis of an individual's ability to contribute to society, but on the basis of the individual's ability to contribute to the production of surplus value and the accumulation of capital" (p. 55).

In the same vein, Herzog (2014, pp. 83–92) rejects the common assumption that the income earned in the market is deserved and reflects individual merit. The point is that markets are socio-political constructions that can function in different ways. The crucial question then is to understand what kind of activities and behaviour the economic system rewards and encourages. This directly interrogates the meaningless increase of competitiveness, productivity, efficiency and economic growth and poses anew the question about the purpose of production and the meaning of work (Herzog, 2014, pp. 151–169).

5 Emancipation beyond Neoliberalism: Freedom, Solidarity and a Politicized Definition of Work

According to Magatti (2009), for the first time in human history, societies of the rich part of the world have made experience of diffused freedom, whereby individual freedom has been a mass phenomenon. In these societies, we are thus now confronted with the question of what

we should do with this freedom. Thus, the central problem of freedom today is less about "freedom from" than that of deciding what we should make exist thanks to our freedom (Magatti, 2009, pp. 346–347) — the meaning of this freedom. Building on Erik Erikson's theory of psychological development, whereby individuals gradually mature from being *objects* of care (as children) to being *subjects* who care for others (e.g. as parents), Magatti (2009, pp. 396–398) argues that one of the highest expressions of human freedom is that of *taking care* of someone or something. In this context, self-realization entails giving a positive contribution to the world. Thus, individuals' aspirations for self-realization through work and their contribution to social welfare potentially coincide — a point emphasized also by Graeber (2020), for whom meaningless jobs, even if well paid, generate frustration and depression in those who perform them. This suggests that the shortage of both self-realization and social welfare is a problem rooted less at the individual level than at the collective level, i.e. in the ways in which individuals' freedoms are coordinated.

Indeed, capitalist markets, which use prices for signalling the value of things and activities, fail to properly value positive contributions to the world and often encourage activities that damage social welfare. Many low-paid and precarious workers of the 'social' sector such as child and elderly care workers, hospital cleaners and waste recycling workers greatly contribute to the common good. In contrast, other workers, such as top advertising executives — earning astronomical salaries *per annum* — actually *reduce* societal welfare. For example, tax accountants — those aiding corporations to elude taxation — are estimated to destroy £47 of social worth for every pound in value they generate for themselves (Lawlor et al., 2009). Moreover, as already seen, the ideal of self-realization through paid work in neoliberalism is actually an ideological cover for new forms of (self-)exploitation and alienation, whereby self-realization is constrained by competitive pressures and by the imperative of efficiency and productivity maximization in a situation of growing insecurity. In this context, alienation emerges because individuals cannot find what is "meaningful and valuable for their existence" as a basis for their identity (Petersen & Willig, 2004, p. 345).

From this perspective, capitalist markets fail both at the social and at the individual level: they fail to properly reward positive contributions to the world at the social level and to promote self-realization and human flourishing at the individual level. The reason is at least twofold. First, capitalist markets are oriented towards profit-maximization rather than social or human wellbeing. Second, since markets do not need people to agree on collectively shared meanings, they generate a sense of both meaninglessness and heteronomy in individual and social life.

One solution to these two problems would be to at least partially replace the market mechanism with participatory-deliberative democracy as a way of taking collective decisions and coordinating individuals' freedoms. In this context, increasing democratic control over the economy would allow for directing it towards the promotion of sustainable social welfare on the one hand and human flourishing on the other. As Cangiani (2011, 2012, 2017) — building on the work of Karl Polanyi — argues, capitalism is indifferent towards public utility (e.g. social and individual needs), environmental sustainability and social justice because it is oriented towards the goal of profit maximization. Hence, in order to promote "social productivity" — rather than economic growth — it is necessary to extend democratic control over economic processes. In this context, "efficiency" is conceived not in terms of profits but of social wellbeing, and this kind of "social efficiency" is proportional to the degree of democratization of the economy, whereby conscious democratic governance replaces the spontaneous, autonomous and self-regulating market mechanism. Crucially, in contrast to neoliberalism that always sees a

loss of freedom in planning, the conscious subordination of economic activities to democratic will (i.e. the supremacy of the cultural and the political over the economic) can potentially realize higher levels of freedom, reducing the "economic determinism" and the subordination of society to the needs of the economy that characterize capitalist societies. Indeed, "planning *for* freedom" and the establishment of purposeful social organization oriented towards the realization of deliberately *chosen* aims allow for realizing a deeper form of emancipation than the one permitted within a capitalist system governed by supposedly natural economic laws.

A central way of extending democratic control over the economy is the *politicization of the definition of work*, partly replacing the market mechanism with democratic deliberation on the evaluation of contribution to social welfare. Indeed, as Weeks (2011) argues, the conceptualization and organization of work are socio-political constructions, which can thus be altered. In this context, a framework centred on the promotion of human wellbeing and the creation of societal value could replace the current focus on economic growth, shifting rewards away from those forms of work that contribute to maximizing profits towards those that contribute to people's quality of life and sustainability.

This perspective resonates with the idea of a contribution economy (e.g. Stiegler, 2010; Bottazzi, 2019, pp. 10–13). Moreover, the feminist tradition — especially the "ethics of care" (e.g. Tronto, 2013) and the theory of "social reproduction" (e.g. Bhattacharya, 2017; Barca, 2020) — may be especially useful for redefining the meaning of work (see also Littig, 2018). While in neoliberalism, individuals are atomistic self-sufficient entities and relationships between them are reduced to market exchange and competition, the paradigm of care emphasizes a relational understanding of freedom, in which individuals are interdependent and care about the wellbeing of others (Tronto, 2019). The framework of care also allows posing the following question: "What do we as society care about?". As Tronto (2019) argues, our society values wealth more than people: in this system of "wealth-care" people working for financial institutions and banks are highly paid because they protect and generate what we care about most: wealth. Adopting the care perspective, work could be redefined in terms of care for people and planet — a politicized definition of work that could encourage a democratic debate on the kind of society we want to build (on "what we care about"), thereby becoming an effective "multiplier of democracy."

Moreover, this concept of work would have a great potential for generating a wide basis for solidarity given that it is highly inclusive. Indeed, rejecting the androcentric view of work as paid employment and re-defining it as "taking care" is consistent with feminists' struggles for valuing and recognizing care work. Understanding work in terms of "care" shifts the emphasis from profit-led production for economic growth to "social reproduction," i.e. all those activities essential for the reproduction and flourishing of societies that remain largely obscured in a capitalist system. This re-conceptualization of work also addresses environmentalists' concerns, putting the care for nature at its very core. But this broader notion of work may also gain the support of the disability movement (Taylor, 2004) and other marginalized groups, such as unemployed people, whose contributions and dignity are made invisible by a system exclusively focused on paid employment. Furthermore, social movements and civil society organizations involved in promoting a democratic renewal could support this broad definition of work that includes civic engagement and political participation.

From this viewpoint, a framework based on work as a valuable contribution to societal welfare can provide the basis for potential cross-society alliances and solidarities, backing political demands for increasing the income of low-paid and unwaged workers making a valuable contribution to society (e.g. care-givers, human rights and ecological activists, etc.), as well as

for taxing the income of those destroying the environment and speculating on — rather than contributing to — society, such as those working in the speculative financial sector.

6 Towards a Capability-Oriented Eco-Social Citizenship

In the previous sections of this paper, I have argued that in order to theorize social citizenship after neoliberalism, it is necessary to re-think the meaning of freedom beyond marketization, challenging the ideology that equates emancipation with inclusion in the labour market and that identifies work with paid employment. In this section, I argue that Amartya Sen's capability approach (e.g. Sen, 1987, 1999, 2009) allows for developing a theory of post-neoliberalism that frames welfare reform to consider the emancipatory critique of the welfare state *without* identifying emancipation with empowerment for the labour market.

The central advantage of the capability approach is that it provides a normative framework that rejects the identification of social progress with economic growth and assigns a key role to democratic deliberation in establishing social priorities. On the one hand, development is conceptualized not as the increase of people's material wellbeing but as the expansion of their "capability," i.e. the real freedom that people enjoy to "lead the kind of lives they value — and have reason to value" (Sen, 1999, p. 18). This understanding of freedom is very broad, involving what a person is free "to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important" (Sen, 1985, p. 203), i.e. "what a person can do in line with his or her conception of the good" (p. 206). On the other hand, the goal of expanding substantive freedom to lead a *valuable* life presupposes a collective debate on what is valuable. Thus, the capability approach acknowledges the central importance of values and social norms in shaping the use that individuals make of their freedom. In turn, this recognition assigns a crucial role to political participation as a fundamental way to deliberate about values. As Sen (1999) puts it: "The exercise of freedom is mediated by values, but the values in turn are influenced by public discussions and social interactions, which are themselves influenced by participatory freedoms" (p. 9). This is why deliberative democracy is an essential component of the capability approach and the freedom to effectively participate in governing public affairs and in the "process of value formation" is considered "among the most crucial freedoms of social existence" (p. 287).

This conceptualization breaks with the neoliberal understanding of freedom, potentially valorising the non-economic uses of positive freedom and the republican (political-democratic) dimension of freedom. However, in order to use the capability approach as a normative framework for a post-neoliberal eco-social politics, it is necessary to overcome some of its limitations. Indeed, one of the most important critiques of the capability approach is, for the purpose of this paper, Hartley Dean's argument that the capability approach neglects the exploitative nature of capitalism, especially with respect to the relationship between work and freedom. As Dean (2009, p. 272) puts it: "although wage labour is preferable to slave labour, a contract for labour cannot be wholly free entered so long as one party depends upon the sale of her labour power in order to obtain the means of subsistence." On this basis, a post-neoliberal interpretation of the capability approach needs to problematize the relationship between employment and capability-freedom. Emancipation and empowerment should thus not be conceived of as inclusion in the (labour) market: the goal is to enhance "human richness," reframing development as the expansion of potentialities for human flourishing in its multidimensionality both within and beyond work (Giovanola, 2005, 2009b). This requires emphasizing both "freedom from work" and "freedom at work" (Laruffa, 2020; Bueno, 2021).

6.1 Freedom from work

With "freedom from work," I refer here to the fact that human capabilities cannot be reduced to the freedom to participate in the economy. On the one hand, human beings flourish through other activities beyond work, including through caring (e.g. Anderson, 2003; Lewis & Giullari, 2005; Hobson, 2013), community involvement, play and leisure (Nussbaum, 2000, pp. 79–80). Crucially, the fact that individuals engage in valuable activities beyond employment is not only important for *their* human flourishing. As Bueno (2021) argues, it may well be the case that "unproductive" work, i.e. work performed outside the labour market on an unpaid basis such as caring for children or elderly, contributes more to social welfare and to the "capabilities of others" than "productive" work performed in the market. Indeed, certain types of work such as speculating on food or housing — while being well-paid and wealth-creating — may actually *reduce* the capabilities of others and undermine social wellbeing.

On the other hand, employment is not necessarily good for workers' human flourishing — and exploitative and alienating jobs may well *undermine* workers' capabilities (e.g. Koggel, 2003). This means that, as I will discuss below, "freedom at work" cannot be taken for granted and requires profound reforms of the economy. What I want to emphasize here is that social policy can play an essential role both in increasing individuals' freedom to reject exploitative jobs and in supporting a broad range of valuable activities beyond employment. Indeed, generous welfare benefits and the provision of social services that are highly accessible (for free or low-cost) promote emancipation from the market (de-commodification), increasing discretionary time and the possibility to engage in freely-chosen activities both within and beyond the labour market. In other words, the presence of an exit-option from the labour market decreases individuals' economic need and thus the instrumental reasons for working (Bueno, 2021), enhancing their freedom to engage in activities they *intrinsically* value — which is what contribute most to human wellbeing (e.g. Bartolini, 2013; Herzog, 2014).

6.2 Freedom at work

With "freedom at work" I refer to the need to promote workers' agency while at work. In this context, human beings are seen as the final purpose of economic activity so that work should be conceived of not as a commodity but as a meaningful activity that is valued by the person concerned and that offers opportunities for human flourishing (Orton, 2011; Bonvin, 2012; Weidel, 2018). In this context, capability at work cannot be reduced to workers' freedom to choose among different means with given ends; it should involve giving them the possibility to co-decide the *ends* of production (Zimmermann, 2014, pp. 209–214). Hence the republican dimension of freedom should be enhanced also *within* employment through the promotion of workplace democracy (Yeoman, 2014).

This in turn allows re-politicizing the economy, debating the final ends of economic activities. Indeed, the fact that the capability approach rejects the identification of development with economic growth allows rethinking the value of work not only at the individual but also at the social level, shifting the emphasis from its commodity value determined by financial capitalism to its *societal value*. Hence, while at the individual level work is assessed on the basis of its contribution to individual flourishing, at the societal level it is judged as a valuable contribution to social welfare, where the latter is defined through democratic deliberation. Bueno (2021) develops a similar argument, claiming that while mainstream economics defines "productive" work in terms of its contribution to wealth-generation, the capability approach should embrace a different, "human-centred" framework for assessing the value of work. In this context, the con-

cept of "socially capability-enhancing work" comes to the fore — a concept that interrogates the usefulness of work in terms of its contribution to the "capabilities of others" (pp. 8-10). Overall, this framework suggests to discuss "what makes work useful, on what grounds and for whom" (p. 15).

This clearly resonates with the work of Ruth Yeoman (2014), who argues that "*meaningful work*" includes both a subjective and an objective dimension, whereby the subjective attractiveness of work meets the worthiness of work from an objective viewpoint. In other words, for work to be meaningful it is not enough that it involves subjective feelings of attachment, satisfaction and fulfilment for the individuals who perform the work. Meaningful work should also constitute an objectively valuable contribution, whereby the source of value lies outside the individuals performing the work. Crucially, the objective dimension of meaningful work is not imposed in a paternalist or authoritarian way from the state, but it is the result of agonistic democratic practices; all citizens participate with the equal status of co-authorities in the realm of value, joining the debates — and conflicts — over the definition of what is valuable. Thus, all citizens are equally entitled to make judgements upon the worthiness of objects and activities. Moreover, a wide range of activities should be recognized as objectively valuable, diversifying and pluralizing the sources of value in order to increase individuals' freedom to choose the work that they also subjectively value. Finally, Yeoman (2014) emphasizes that these democratic deliberations and struggles over the meaning and value of work should not only take place in the public sphere but also in the workplace itself: the "political mode of being" and the republican dimension of freedom should be promoted at work through workplace democracy and the development of workers' capability for voice and co-determination rights.

6.3 Work and the "capability to take care of the world"

Combining the argument on meaningful work with the "ethics of care" and the capability approach, work could be redefined as the "practice of taking care of the world" and this capability for caring could be placed at the heart of capability-oriented public action (Laruffa, 2021). Indeed, this allows reformulating the capability approach in line with the feminist and ecological concerns discussed in the previous section: rather than accepting the capitalist interpretation of work as a marketable commodity, the capability approach would thus embrace a broader and deeper understanding of work, including all meaningful and life-sustaining activities undertaken to care for people and the planet and shifting the focus of public action from economic production to social reproduction. Moreover, the capability to take care of the world presupposes the freedom to participate in the democratic debate on what is worthy of care, i.e. what is meaningful and valuable. In this way, re-defining work as "the practice of taking care of the world" includes both the subjective and the objective dimension of meaningfulness. Moreover, this broad definition of work encompasses important activities beyond employment, thereby pluralizing the possible forms of valuable work and thus increasing individuals' freedom to flourish and to choose the activities they value most. In doing so, this conceptualization also encourages individuals to engage in meaningful activities that are urgently needed from the societal and environmental viewpoint and that are in shortage under neoliberal capitalism. Thus, the goal of public policies should be to align, as far as possible, the objective and the subjective dimensions of meaningful work, creating "opportunities for personally capability-enhancing labour that is also socially capability-enhancing" (Bueno 2021, p. 14). Finally, this re-conceptualization of work requires a democratic debate on the precise meaning of "caring for the world," thereby encouraging processes of democratization and be-

coming itself a source of democratic renewal.

In the context of this democratic debate on the nature of social wellbeing, a capability-oriented social citizenship assigns a key role to progressive intellectuals and academics. Social policy scholars in mainstream "positivistic" approaches often act as "experts," prescribing policy solutions and welfare reform proposals in a top-down and technocratic manner based on "scientific evidence." In contrast, the capability approach calls for the democratization of the production of the knowledge informing public action (Bifulco, 2017; Borghi, 2018; de Leonardis et al., 2012; Salais, 2009). In this vein, the approach developed in this paper recognizes the social construction of possible futures and argues for democratizing the debate on the future of society. In acknowledging that this process of social construction, which establishes what counts as a realistic or desirable future, is marked by deep inequalities in the power of aspiring, planning and effectively realizing those possible futures (de Leonardis & Deriu, 2012), progressive social policy scholars act less as experts and more like Gramsci's "organic intellectuals" who engage with various groups and associations within civil society to promote transformative and emancipatory social change. In particular, building on Gramsci's work, Sen (2009) argues that progressive intellectuals are called to adhere to established and anchored ideas of justice within the population while at the same time reconstructing and reconfiguring them, with the aim of promoting solidarity. Thus, even if the goal is to change "people's thinking and priorities" — as it was the case for Gramsci — this still requires "an engagement with the shared mode of thinking and acting" (Sen, 2009, p. 121). This is "a kind of a dual task, using language and imagery that communicate efficiently and well through the use of conformist rules, while trying to make this language express nonconformist proposals" (Sen, 2009, p. 122).

From this perspective, re-defining work as the practice of caring for the world allows combining the "conformist" value of meritocracy — for which a person's earnings should reflect his or her contribution to society — with the "nonconformist proposal" of overcoming the ideology that sees capitalist markets as the best mechanisms for enabling and evaluating individuals' contributions to society. Hence, while meritocracy is linked with the crisis of solidarity and the widespread "preference for inequality" within the population (Dubet, 2014), social scientists can highlight how within contemporary patrimonial capitalism, "much of the wealth of many rich people is actually due to inheritance and other forms of unearned wealth" (Rowlingson & Connor, 2011, p. 440) and how, even within the labour market, people's earnings are unrelated to their contribution to social welfare, working hours or effort, degree of unpleasantness or danger at work (usually highest in low-paid manual jobs), productivity skills or human capital (see also Franzini et al., 2014). The meritocratic ideal for which individuals' position in society should reflect their contribution to social welfare is a fundamental pillar of modernity and can help to re-build solidarity and democracy once the definitions of "merit," "work" and "social contribution" are politicized instead of equating them with "spontaneous" market outcomes, which actually reflect the preferences of the powerful.

Moreover, I shall stress that adopting the capability approach implies a *global* understanding of social justice, oriented towards the promotion of human rights (Sen, 2009), thereby challenging the contemporary emergence of "welfare chauvinism." Thus, a capability-informed social citizenship is to be realized through international solidarity and cooperation, abandoning the "competitiveness paradigm" that characterizes neoliberalism. This global perspective is reflected in the redefinition of work as the practice of taking care of the *world* — an understanding of work that may provide a political concept for re-imagining the workers movements' original ambitions of international solidarity and global justice.

Finally, redefining work as the practice of taking care of the world may contribute to re-

imagining the labour movement, fundamentally renewing trade unions with a view to making them representatives of the interests of both the "environment" and "society" — including of those "workers" not involved in the labour market. Indeed, with respect to the environmental question, trade unions have ambiguous positions (on the role of the labour movement in the ecological transition, see e.g. Felli, 2014; Stevis et al., 2018; Brand & Niedermoser, 2019): they often ally with business *against* environmental interests with a view to protecting workers' jobs and/or they support the green growth approach — where priority is given to production and jobs, and eco-compatibility is enhanced through technological innovations. However, trade unions may also become environmental actors that represent the interests of the whole community, rejecting the "jobs-environment trade-off": they can then assert the priority of "social reproduction" and the "value of life" over profits-led production, politicizing and re-framing the economy "from below" — i.e. declaring that citizens should be the ones who decide about "what, how, when, how much, where to produce" (Barca & Leonardi, 2018; see also Pusceddu, 2020). Such a renewal of the labour movement, which connects labour and environmental struggles with the fight for democratization (see also Ferreras et al., 2020), may be inspired by the reconceptualization of work as the "practice of taking care of the world."

Table 1 summarizes the main elements of the capability-oriented vision of eco-social citizenship and its main differences with the post-war welfare state and the neoliberal competition state.

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Table 1: Summary of the vision for a capability-oriented eco-social state and of the main differences with respect to the post-war welfare state and neoliberal competition state.

	Post-War Welfare State	**Neoliberal Competition State**	**Capacitating Eco-Social State**
Welfare principle; kind of emancipation	De-commodification: emancipation from the market.	Re-commodification: emancipation from "welfare dependency"; emancipation as labour market empowerment.	Capacitation: emancipation from the market ("freedom from work"); "freedom at work"; and democratization.
Policy instrument	Provision of welfare benefits and services; income redistribution; workers' rights.	Active social and labour market policies (from reducing welfare benefits to investing in "human capital" and in childcare services for enabling women's employment).	Provision of welfare benefits and services; redistribution; support for a plurality of activities including but not limited to employment; workplace democracy.
Definition of progress	Economic growth (in principle – at least for Keynes – the long-term goal is to liberate human beings from the "economic problem")	Economic growth and competitiveness (as ends in themselves)	Sustainable human development
Definition of work	Employment in the labour market: market-based conception	Employment in the labour market: market-based conception	Practice of taking care of the world; valuable contribution to social welfare (the meaning of which is open to democratic deliberation and conflict): politicized conception
Form of social solidarity	National social solidarity, primarily among white male workers (women and poor countries are largely excluded from its benefits) in the context of a regulated international order (e.g. capital control).	"Competitive solidarity" in the context of globalization (whereby countries compete for attracting capital, which is free to move across national borders). Social policy is promoted to the extent that it positively contributes to competitiveness	Global justice grounded in human rights; inclusive understanding of solidarity; international cooperation for promoting the real freedom to flourish of every human being; environmental justice
Actors sustaining the model	Working class; labour movement (trade unions, labour parties); progressive intellectuals	Capitalist class; the global economic and financial elites (multinational enterprises, international financial institutions, etc.); neoliberal think tanks and intellectuals	Global civil society; renewed labour movement and trade unionism centred on a broader and politicized understanding of work; progressive intellectuals

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Hence, the approach developed here requires going beyond both contemporary neoliberalism and traditional social democracy. Indeed, both neoliberalism and social democracy share the desirability of economic growth either as an end in itself or as a solution to the class conflict and as a way to create jobs and improve people's living standard (even if the latter is defined rather narrowly in terms of material wellbeing and access to mass consumption). Moreover, both neoliberalism and social democracy share the emphasis on paid employment as the gateway to social inclusion and democratic citizenship. In contrast, a capability-oriented social-ecological transformation aimed at subordinating the economy to social and ecological needs entails an understanding of work as the practice of taking care of the world — where the precise meaning of the latter should be democratically defined. This requires reducing the room given to the market in society, instead increasing the space accorded to participatory-deliberative practice.[2]

7 Conclusion

With respect to the question of work, neoliberal societies appear marked by two contradictory trends. On the one hand, they are characterized by persistent unemployment, precarious/insecure work and in-work poverty — what could be described as a "crisis" and a "marginalization" of work. On the other hand, in these societies it is also possible to observe an increase in the centrality of work, with phenomena such as "self-exploitation," overwork and "workaholism" on the rise. In this second trend, the promise of self-realization through work is often turned on its head, as the subordination of the whole life to work imperatives has negative consequences for people's (physical and mental) health, family life and human flourishing. In face of this ambiguity, Marxist arguments for liberating human beings both *from* and *through* work appear especially relevant today. Moreover, since in the societies of the Global North individual freedom is now largely a mass phenomenon, the central question appears to involve the *purpose* of freedom (i.e. freedom to do and to be what?). Thus, the fact that the great majority of people in these societies have their material needs satisfied opens the question on the meaning of production and the meaning of work.

This paper discussed the possibility of building a counterhegemonic project and a progressive alternative to neoliberalism, re-thinking the meaning of freedom beyond marketization and commodification for adopting a broader and richer understanding of emancipation. I have argued that developing such project requires re-articulating individual freedom with the values of social solidarity, justice and democracy, as well as with the imperative of reforming the dominant socioeconomic model in line with the goal of environmental sustainability through a "social-ecological transformation."

In particular, this paper has problematized the relationship between work and freedom in neoliberalism. A strict dichotomy between work and freedom — like the one that characterized the ancient culture and that re-emerged in some influential contemporary political theories — should be rejected. Indeed, not only empirical research has shown that human beings flourish also through work but assuming at theoretical level that the sphere of work is necessarily alien-

2. Table 1 echoes the one developed by Borghi (2011, pp. 330–331) but puts greater emphasis on the different conceptualizations of work (market-based vs. politicized) at the core of each welfare model. More generally, this paper tries to expand Borghi's framework for taking the ecological dimension more into account. This is why I not only connect here the literature on welfare, work and public action with the literature on the capability approach (as also Borghi does) but also with the literature on the "social-ecological transformation." The final goal is to develop a normative framework for a capability-oriented eco-social state.

ated and de-humanized means accepting or even promoting (like in a self-fulfilling prophecy) the alienation and de-humanization of work in the real world. Furthermore, the meritocratic idea that individuals' social positions should reflect their contribution to societal progress and the common good — rather than being inherited as a matter of privilege — is at the core of the project of modernity and should be maintained.

Thus, the purpose of this paper is not to challenge the centrality of "work" — understood as an activity aimed at contributing to both individual and social welfare — but rather to contest the narrow understanding of work as paid employment and the neoliberal assumption that the market provides the best mechanism for creating human flourishing opportunities and for evaluating individuals' contributions to the common good. Therefore, the neoliberal emphasis on paid employment as the main — if not the sole — source of individual and collective emancipation is misleading. Work within neoliberal capitalism demands individuals to follow market imperatives and employers' exigencies, thereby promoting a pseudo-autonomy rather than real freedom. Moreover, the meaningless cycle of ever-growing production-consumption not only fails to improve people's quality of life but it is also increasingly unsustainable from the environmental viewpoint. Finally, the democratic crisis, whereby the levels of political and socio-economic inequalities are now extreme and similar to those of pre-democratic times, demands re-emphasizing the importance of the "republican" dimension of freedom (which involves citizens' active political participation in the governing of common affairs) — an aspect of freedom that is neglected in neoliberalism. Crucially, this political dimension of freedom as collective self-determination should be promoted not only in the "public sphere" — which could potentially re-propose the dichotomy between work and freedom — but also *within* the economy and the workplace, fostering individuals' political mode of being also when they work.

Against this background, this paper has proposed a vision of social citizenship for the 21st century based on the capability approach and the ethics of care. Dominant interpretations of the capability approach in social policy — reposing on a rather narrow understanding of capability as the capacity to participate in the economy — highlight the role of social policy in "capacitating" individuals for the labour market, empowering them as "human capital." Reform proposals based on these interpretations ultimately fail to provide satisfactory answers to the socio-political and environmental challenges of our time: in line with neoliberalism, they equate emancipation with labour market empowerment, thereby implicitly devaluing other life domains such as care work and non-work; they do not aim to profoundly reform our unsustainable economic model; and they overlook the need for democratic renewal, leaving unchallenged the subordination of the "competition state" to powerful economic interests.

In this paper I proposed a more radical interpretation of the capability approach, whereby the non-economic dimensions of freedom come to the fore and work is not identified with paid employment but with a meaningful activity that contributes both to individual flourishing and social welfare. Re-defining work in this way could shift economic rewards and social recognition away from profit-led production towards "social reproduction" and the activities aimed at "taking care of the world," thereby responding to feminist and environmentalist concerns as well as to the interests of many precarious, unpaid or low-paid workers, unemployed and disabled people and many other social groups that are marginalized in the current system based on market competition.

At the time of finalizing the writing of this paper, the world is still immersed in the COVID-19 pandemic. The public health, social and economic crisis caused by the pandemic confirms many of the problems of neoliberal capitalism identified in this paper. In particular, the current crisis has revealed the inadequacy of the market as an "epistemic" mechanism for evaluating the

importance of societal contributions, as many of the "essential workers" in the fundamental sectors of healthcare, transport, food supply, mail delivery, waste collectors, etc. are badly paid. At the same time — and symmetrically to these problems — the current crisis also indicates possible solutions and hopes for the future. The crisis potentially provides the opportunity to push for a progressive and transformative reform strategy centred on promoting "social efficiency" rather than profitability and where "taking care of the world" and "contributing to sustainable social wellbeing" become the cornerstones of a new welfare architecture and a re-imagined work-welfare relationship.

Crucially, a politicized conception of work as a valuable social contribution may not only provide the basis for new international solidarities among those "essential workers" — including unpaid ones — that are marginalized and exploited in the contemporary neoliberal order. It could also promote a democratic renewal, fostering discussions and struggles on the definition of sustainable social welfare — and on what it means to contribute to it.

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