Introduction

Hearing daily about climate change and the measures taken by the public authorities to mitigate or even adapt social life to its effects, we may rightly perceive ourselves as mere observers, on whom the public discourse imposes unavoidable obligations, scientifically and professionally backed by arguments, where everyone is expected to contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation, and to minimize the damage inflicted on nature. This individualized appeal seeks to influence habits and lifestyles for the benefit and well-being of both individuals and global society as a whole.

This appeal targets individuals as consumers, as purchasers of goods and services to meet various daily needs. It addresses us as rational individuals who know how to make informed choices about what is offered on the market and to abandon consumption habits that are no longer acceptable in terms of reducing our environmental impact and living a more sustainable lifestyle.

But what about our feelings of hurt, insecurity, fear of the future, sadness, anger, apathy, and ultimately our sense of helplessness and fatalistic resignation? How should individuals cope with these »by-products« of individualized rationally based appeals? Should they seek help from psychotherapists, psychiatrists and other professionals who care for our mental well-being? And, last but not least, how should we understand those individuals who courageously join environmental movements, local initiatives, conservation groups and environmental NGOs, taking matters into their own hands and consciously rebelling in the face of threats, intimidation, and death in the face of expected or changed living conditions?

To oppose measures taken by public authorities to mitigate natural/environmental damage and climate change, and to adapt social life to new environmental conditions, is nothing more than that, that these rebels are opposed to the rationally based imple-

mentation of the measures. As such, these rebels are perceived as irrational—deniers of scientific knowledge, rebellious souls without a cause, or uneducated individuals who need to be provided with the relevant information.

In more democratically organized societies, these individuals are, at best, invited to debates where, through negotiation and bargaining, they are expected to accept public-private proposals with certain concessions, based on the strength of argument and rational reflection. In more authoritarian societies, public authorities regulate resistance through direct police or military force, threats, legal sanctions or other forms of pressure and compliance, using arguments of power disguised as »rational deliberation«.

A particular problem for public authorities arises when actors resist the further implementation of public policies or measures after experiencing unexpected and undesirable effects in their living environment, when their (local-regional-global) living conditions have changed. These resisters reasonably perceive the policies and actions of the public authorities and their effects, although based on expert reasoning, when they realize that the actions are objectively forcing them to abandon their habits and ways of life. The natural conditions of their culture of living are being abolished, or, because they are untenable, they are forced to seek a new habitat, to relocate, to migrate as individuals, families or groups in order to at least preserve their bare life. They resist because the natural conditions of their existence have changed and are changing to such an extent that their communities will sooner or later disappear; their languages, their cultures and their ways of being — all nested in the natural environment or in their living space—are vanishing. It is an interplay of nature and culture on a limited piece of the Earth, and it is all slowly and steadily disappearing. It is not enough to speak only of preserving biodiversity; we must also address the preservation of cultural diversity.

How should we understand such »irrational« conflicts that arise repeatedly during the process of desired green social transitions, whether in the developed Western societies of the capitalist centre or in the semi-peripheral or peripheral societies of the global

South? How should we understand a composition in which public authorities, as benevolent generators of transitions, are the ones who, by adopting and implementing various policies and measures derived from them—usually scientifically justified—intervene in the social order and in the order of everyday life of individuals, social groups and classes, aiming to preserve the natural order and the necessary conditions of existence, yet at the same time repeatedly generating (unintentional) untenable situations in which courageous actors—individuals, movements, local initiatives, civil society associations—are born to oppose and resist the implementation of the green transition? Consequently, the public authorities, acting in good faith, produce conflicts with civil society actors who disagree with, resist and fight to preserve the »[old] order«, the status quo. Their life-and-death struggle is particularly inflamed when they realize that the natural conditions of their traditional way of life are changing before their eyes. They resist policies which, under the banner of preserving and conserving the natural living conditions, radically and traumatically alter those very natural conditions, and they discover first-hand that environmentally-oriented policies have done more harm to their living conditions and their community than the direct environmental practices themselves or the altered natural processes which public authorities seek to limit, prohibit or accommodate through policy measures or normative acts.

These new green transition paradoxes bring back to the forefront the question of how the systemic way of creating and implementing public policies and their measures are designed: to what extent the system is open to different actors and to what extent it is closed. Which ideas, interests, perceptions, and social imaginaries can enter into the creation of environmental policies, and what is excluded from the communication and decision-making system, out of the system's collective reflection?

Thus, the substantive issues of environmental policies—around which individuals, movements, initiatives and social groups, as well as various environmental experts focus their attention and wage public and political battles—must be translated into systemic

issues of environmental polity. Environmental problems become issues of political power and of the existing system of democracy. They are re-politicised and no longer viewed merely as scientific--technical and administrative issues, but as real political questions that challenge the substance of the system.

To take the point further: the environmental issues at stake cannot be resolved within the existing liberal-democratic order (this is also true of the various authoritarian or semi-authoritarian orders that some prominent environmentalists have been calling for since the 1970s), because what is repeatedly missing is the very foundation required when imagining a new social order—a universal ethical imperative, a generated and systemically supported sensitivity for all living beings.

Today, democracy is generally understood by most people as parliamentary democracy, as a parliamentary ideology by which environmental policies are made. However, people are increasingly rejecting this form of policy-making due to its undesirable social and environmental effects. It is as if they are rejecting democracy itself, instead seeking a strong, authoritarian hand capable of dealing with the accumulated and multifaceted environmental problems quickly and efficiently.

At the same time, more and more people want a voice. They want to debate, to participate in the further development of their communities, to be heard, to be involved in the communication and decision-making processes. They want more inclusive democracy. In today's democratic form, people are increasingly taking the floor unannounced and launching new social movements.

These movements represent the democratic affirmation of the principle of equality, which is of paramount importance for the development of democracy (as argued by Ranciere, Badiou, Swyngedouw). The principle of equality asserts that people are a priori equal, and that their empirical differences—though easily demonstrable and obvious—are not, and cannot be, decisive. This principle repeatedly challenges the established democratic system (today the liberal-democratic order) for its normative charge. Under the banner of greater equality, this system was established at a

certain point in history on the basis of the relationship of political power between political actors, as a democratic system of communication and decision-making, which was normatively protected by the constitution. However, the project of equality, set in motion at a specific historical moment, remains incomplete; it awaits, as it has many times before, further modification or perhaps a more radical transformation.

This awakened group of people is increasingly aware that the democratisation of existing democracy will not occur without political struggle. They organise themselves as movements, initiatives, civil society associations, advocacy groups, networks, social lobbyists, and opinion-makers. The powerless within a liberal-democratic system demand systemic changes that will amplify their power and influence over political decisions. They demand that their systemic powerlessness be transformed into systemic power, into a more democratically ordered society that is sensitive towards all living beings.

Equality among people is not self-evident, and the principle of equality even less so; it cannot simply be seen or perceived through the senses, but it can be conceptualised. Achieveing this requires a collective mental effort—a construction, a design, which is not a simple matter. Philosophers argue that the collective equality of human beings is something that exists and is empirically confirmed time and again through human behaviour and action. This recurring demonstration of the principle's validity, meaningfulness, and relevance to people's everyday lives (as discussed by Rutar) suggests that it is worth elevating to an ethical principle.

This forms the basis for a new concept of democracy, one that relies on the functioning of a new political subject that takes social and political power relations personally and that constantly resists hierarchical and patriarchal relations between people. It emphasises collective, common action, where people and associative networks insist on the principle of equality and demand the creation of a new democratic system.

The new concept of democracy requires the re-institutionalisation and transformation of communication and decision-making

processes. The purpose of re-institutionalisation and the introduction of deliberative principles into our interactions is to involve an increasing number of people in decision-making processes, especially in those processes that will have a significant impact—directly or indirectly—on their daily lives, including the natural living conditions of all living beings.

Such decisions aim to reduce the suffering of the growing majority for the benefit of the well-being of the shrinking minority. In this way, a sensitive way of life and a sensitive society are fostered and reproduced in everyday life through the engagement of an ever-growing number of people who stake their claim to the principle of equality, both at the systemic and communicative levels, to the point where the recomposition of the social and political relations of power will necessitate changes in the fundamental social relations themselves.

The lecturers who participated in the International Summer School of Political Ecology 2024 address these issues in their contributions published in these proceedings. Some of the texts included here have already been published in other publications and scientific journals and are reproduced here with the permission of the authors and publishers.

The following proceedings are structured into two sections. In the first part, **Gareth Dale** writes about the stalling and reversing of some of the socioeconomic trends and their environmental impacts, and explores what this means for the future of humanity. Dale, discussing the concept of great acceleration, responds to Dorling's slowdown thesis, arguing that the standout feature of the coming era will be a matter of instability, not pace; namely that the structural processes that shape world economy and world ecology are becoming increasingly unstable, **James Meadway** challenges conventional views on how climate change and nature crises operate, arguing that the analysis we need is that of a capitalist society plagued by shocks and instability—resulting in shortages, stagnation, and declining living standards—because it cannot deal with the climate and nature crisis in a way that works for people, **Maura Benegiamo** shows the limits and the speculative nature of

the promises of the green/digital transition in the agricultural sector, which she argues fails to respond to emergencies and instead accelerates the destruction of the socio-ecological foundations on which societies are based, **Kai Heron** discusses the two distinctly opposing perspectives in ecosocialist debates: degrowth and left ecomodernism. He outlines the differences between them and responds to the arguments of the proponents of a left ecomodernism, **Vishwas Satgar** argues that insights into democratic ecosocialist strategy and the climate justice project in South Africa can serve as an example of how to respond to the larger ecofascist conjuncture. He contends that the South African climate justice movement presents a model for popular revolt against ecofascist projects and presents the challenges it faces.

In the second part, **Mariano Féliz** examines the global energy transition and the resulting new dependencies in Argentina, arguing that they are deeply intertwined with the dynamics of capitalist expansion, exploitation, and domination. He asserts that the reconfiguration of dependency relationships within the country reflect social and environmental injustices perpetrated by the pursuit of profit at the expense of people and nature, **Chris Vrettos** calls for dismantling the false dilemma that pits »climate« against »people«, advocating for a global Green Deal with practical, community-rooted solutions that leave no one behind, and solutions such as energy communities that offer a practical articulation of the post-growth vision by prioritising social and environmental outcomes over profit, **Lavinia Steinfort** explores how feminist energy transition can reshape our approach to climate justice by raising questions of ownership and control. She argues that in order to meet peoples' energy needs, whilst tackling the climate crisis, we must envision systematic alternatives such as public ownership and energy democracy, **Melissa García-Lamarca** conceptualizes the commons and the common and explores how the emancipatory urban political activities, specifically acts of being-in-common, relate to making urban commons, by taking the example of the urban struggles over housing in Spain. She also reflects on the question of the potential of acts-of-being-in-common in building

emancipatory urban commons, Finally, **Giustina Selvelli** discusses the interrelationship of nature and language, arguing that environmental destruction affects not only the physical environment of vulnerable minority communities, but also their intangible heritage. This destruction causes not only pollution but also forced displacement, urbanization, and language loss.

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