

Building the Future from the Present: Imagining Post-Growth, Post-Productivist Ecosocial Policy

FIONA DUKELOW* AND MARY P. MURPHY** 

**Department of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland*
email: fiona.dukelow@ucc.ie

***Department of Sociology, Maynooth University, Maynooth, Ireland*
email: mary.p.murphy@mu.ie

Corresponding author, email: mary.p.murphy@mu.ie

Abstract

The environment remains on the margins of social policy. Bringing degrowth literature into conversation with social policy debates about decommodification, we argue that a re-imagined decommodification remains central to addressing the social-ecological challenges we face and to forging a post-growth, post-productivist ecosocial welfare state. We explore the implications of this for re-imagining and mapping three core areas of an ecosocial welfare state revolving around the work/welfare/care nexus: the redistribution of time across work and care; repurposing of active labour market measures; and reorienting cash transfers and services. In each case we discuss what decommodified social policy in the service of a post-growth, post-productivist future might entail. Acknowledging challenges, we identify how instances of prefiguration of policy programmes and experiments across various countries offer concrete compass points for further transformation and a necessary paradigmatic shift.

Keywords: Decommodification; degrowth; sustainability; participation income; climate crisis; prefiguration

Introduction

Despite growing environmental awareness and the imperatives of the climate crisis, the environment remains on the margins of social policy. As Gough (2017:2) argues social policy scholars have either 'blindly or willfully ignored the reality of environmental and planetary limits'. In this article we reflect on how we need to re-imagine the core social policy concept of decommodification. Decommodified forms of social policy have been transformed and eroded over the last fifty years of productivist social policy making. By bringing degrowth literature into conversation with social policy debates about decommodification, we argue that a re-imagined decommodification remains central to addressing the social-ecological challenges we face and to forging a post-growth, post-productivist ecosocial welfare state. The body of the article re-imagines an

ecosocial welfare state. We focus on policy revolving around the work/welfare/care nexus: redistributing time across work and care; repurposing active labour market measures; and reorienting cash transfers and services. In each case we discuss what decommodified social policy in the service of a post-growth, post-productivist future might entail. Acknowledging challenges, we also identify instances of prefiguration where policy programmes and experiments across various countries offer concrete compass points for further transformation and a necessary paradigmatic shift. Having ‘joined the dots’ and discussed the broader transformative project we conclude by commenting on how the discipline of social policy can contribute more towards transformative ecosocial policy.

From productivist to post-productivist social policy

The modern environmental movement can be traced to the 1960s and to various limits to growth reports in the early 1970s which drew attention to the illusion of infinite growth on a finite planet; events that had little impact on social policy. The launch of the *Journal of Social Policy* occurred in 1972, yet limits to growth, or any conceptualisation of socio-economic issues within an environmental context, remained outside the agenda and the direction of social policy research for several decades. Distributional issues predicated on economic growth remained central (Fitzpatrick, 1998). Concurrently, limits to growth thinking endured a false start. Subsequent environmental backlash decried environmental concerns and undermined the credibility of environmental limits. This coincided with difficult times for welfare states as the major macroeconomic paradigm shifted from Keynesianism to monetarism. While this posed a more hostile climate for progressive social policy, distributional issues and the implications of austerity capitalism for material welfare and well-being remained central to social policy analysis. In short, it remained within a growth imaginary and lacked a ‘growth critical’ stance.

Neglect of environmental issues turned to a growing trickle of interest within the discipline by the 1990s. Within the *Journal of Social Policy*, the first article dedicated to the intersection of environmental and social policy issues concerned water poverty (Huby, 1995), with scant attention thereafter. Some of this literature, however, conveys the monumental challenges of disrupting the growth imaginary and the productivist orientation of social policy. Of critical concern is that the principal political traditions upon which social policy rests are based on the ‘conquest of nature’ (Ferris, 1991:26). Consequently, human nature and its fulfilment is limited by what is considered economically and technically feasible and detached from ecological limits (Hewitt, 2000). Moreover, productivism is central to this understanding of human nature (Fitzpatrick, 1998). This infuses social policy with an employment ethic, which becomes

so pervasive that the wage contract, the embodiment of the commodification of labour, is judged central to self-worth and self-esteem. Another element is the 'accumulative impulse', which equates welfare with material affluence (Fitzpatrick, 1998). Consequently, it is extremely difficult to think outside production and consumption-based understandings of welfare.

Efforts to 'green' social policy and the welfare state have ensued (Gough *et al.*, 2008). However, there has been no major turn against these disciplinary norms. As such, it is unsurprising that social policy can fit reasonably neatly within what is now the main environmental paradigm: green growth (Buch-Hansen and Carstensen, 2021). While green growth hosts many strands of thinking, growth remains hegemonic; the challenge is to 'green' and decouple it from Co₂ emissions. There is room for social policy in this paradigm: calls and plans for, *inter alia*, inclusive green growth, and particular versions of a green new deal, a just transition, and green social investment can and do accommodate social policy, and entail no break with its productivist orientation.

As a future direction for an environmental agenda within the discipline of social policy, green growth cannot adequately address the extent, intensity and velocity of contemporary environmental challenges. This approach adds an environmental 'tick box' to social policy analysis but does not fundamentally rethink how we live, work and relate within ecological limits. Contemporary social policy not only fails to address the inter-locking nature of economic, social and environmental challenges to human flourishing; neither is it likely to contribute to decoupling growth from resource use and from rising levels of Co₂ emissions. These are the two key elements of decoupling if green growth is to be feasible. As substantiated by Hickel and Kallis (2020) resource use has actually intensified, growing at a faster rate than GDP growth in the twenty first century. Future modelling studies, from the most pessimistic to the most optimistic, predict relative decoupling of resource use from economic growth at best. As for Co₂ emissions, the evidence suggests absolute decoupling in some regions but, in the context of continued economic growth, this is insufficient and occurring too slowly to meet carbon budgets that ensure we stay below warming levels of 1.5° or 2° C. As Hickel and Kallis (2020:483) conclude 'there are no scientific grounds upon which we should not question growth, if our goal is to avoid dangerous climate change and ecological breakdown'. These challenges have therefore come to a point under the existential threat the climate crisis poses. To that end there has been nascent interest and recognition of the need for a new disciplinary composite and domain of ecosocial policy (Koch and Fritz, 2014; Gough, 2013, 2017).

Underpinning the nascent turn to ecosocial policy is the return to limits to growth thinking, denoted as degrowth or post-growth, from which we take it as given that ecological limits will of necessity shape the future direction of social policy. Ecological limits not only serve as an ecological corrective to growth-

based social policy. These limits chime with the many other ways in which welfare states are 'broken' entities in the context of a contemporary capitalism that is reaching the limits of the 'treadmill' of productivism and commodification as the organising logics of work, welfare and well-being (Wiese and Mayrhofer, 2020). In particular, the social benefits of continued growth are highly questionable. Jackson (2009) and Wilkinson and Pickett (2014), for example, demonstrate the futility of further economic growth for wellbeing and social relations. Higher material standards of living have diminishing returns in this respect and, to the contrary, lock people into an 'iron cage' of consumption and social comparison. This prompts the idea of the social limits or a social corrective to growth-based social policy in advanced welfare states. Such ideas are echoed in Raworth's (2017) 'doughnut', which offers a concept of a safe and just operating space, depicted as two concentric rings between minimum social standards and bio-physical limits, and makes clear that sustainable social policy has to consider planetary and social boundaries.

With limited exceptions (the aforementioned work by Koch and Gough, and recently Koch and Hirvilammi, 2020), degrowth thinking has not impacted on social policy. Much of the growing attention occurs outside the discipline; principally within ecological economics. In plainest terms degrowth involves a reduction in 'material and resource throughput' to realign economic activity with ecological limits, or with planetary biophysical limits in terms of natural resources and assimilative capacity (Hickel, 2020). There is much within the emerging degrowth paradigm that can inform a post-growth and post-productivist approach to social policy; particularly the fact that degrowth is ultimately an ecosocial vision of a 'degrowth society' (Latouche, 2010), requiring a fundamental re-think of work and welfare, and the expansion of many areas of social policy.

While degrowth can serve as a catalyst for thinking beyond the growth imaginary in social policy, it is somewhat of a weapon word; thinking about limits to growth in social policy as *post-growth* offers a more constructive way forward and is the term we adopt here. There are, moreover, aspects of degrowth discourse that pose blind spots and problems to which social policy can speak. Specifically, while many degrowthers call for state-based action, the literature is typically defined by a skeptical attitude to the state. As Koch (2020:127) notes 'neither state theories nor policies are especially popular in post-growth/degrowth circles'. Consequently, there is limited attention and understanding of the potential role of the state and related institutions in shaping policy and driving change. As D'Alisa and Kallis (2020:7) remark, 'those who make degrowth policy proposals address them in a void'. Regarding policy detail and coherence, there is much ambiguity and fragmentation: calls are made, for example, to de-commodify work by proposing instruments such as a universal basic income, and by reducing working time, without detail or

considering how proposals work together. Furthermore, while degrowth calls for decommodification, its ecological economics base is actually more pre-occupied with critiquing processes of commodification: ‘decommodification-oriented public policies and local alternatives have somehow disappeared from the picture ... This is a serious omission given the fact that larger-scale decommodification may remain our best option for a sustainable future’ (Gerber and Gerber, 2017:555).

Re-imagining decommodification in a post-growth, post-productivist context

This is a cue for looking at how the treatment of decommodification within social policy can inform a fuller account of decommodification to move towards living within limits. Yet, within social policy discourse decommodification also needs re-imagining for a post-growth and post-productivist mode of ecosocial policy. Discussions and understandings of decommodification that have remained on the margins of social policy can be situated within a post-growth framework. Esping-Andersen’s (1990:3) formulation conceives the decommodification of labour as a form of ‘immunisation’, making ‘living standards independent from pure market forces’. This is enabled by granting social rights based on social citizenship rather than on labour market performance. These concepts have a kinship with post-productivism – however, in Esping-Andersen’s ‘parsimonious’ framework (Vail, 2010), decommodification is limited to the degree to which it protects labour from pure market forces. Conventional social security measures protect against situations of non-work (principally unemployment, ill-health and old age) but never question productivism nor the growth economy.

Room (2000) discusses a dimension to decommodification that would allow for self-development, yet this is still narrowly understood as work-centred. Room (2000:346) acknowledges that another ‘humanistic’, but ‘weakly articulated’ strand of self-development is possible: this would focus on ‘economic production as a means to life not its end, and unpaid but socially significant activities outside the workplace receiving fuller recognition’. This speaks to an earlier conceptualisation offered, but not further developed, by Offe (1996:265): ‘areas of social life that have been decommodified by welfare state interventions can be developed, through political struggle, into relatively autonomous sub-systems of life oriented to the production and distribution of use values’. Following this, Vail (2010) explores decommodification’s potential not merely to mitigate, but to provide an alternative to market hegemony and to expand the social domain. Albeit not explicitly concerned with limits to growth, Vail’s understanding rests on a fuller social intent and capacity to transform society including public goods provision, decommodified economic

circuits, and a more expansive vision and remit for social protection. Vail (2010:332) particularly recognises that ‘the realm of necessity that constitutes paid work also deeply shapes and influences the terrain of non-work – how much leisure time we are fortunate to enjoy, how much time we can devote to caring activities, the limits of our physical and emotional strength after our work has drawn to a close – and this market dependency can be a catalyst for additional forms of insecurity that people have little control over’. This calls for different types of social security that promote post-productivism and change our relationship to work from the realm of necessity and market dependence to one that ‘enhances autonomy and develops human capabilities’ (Vail, 2010:332). This does not make commodification disappear but instils a more autonomous relationship with paid work, fusing it with the freedom and time to pursue socially (re)productive work, facilitated by social security measures such as basic income, reduction of working hours, lifelong education and skills development, and through a mixed economy of welfare, including state institutions, social enterprises and other non-profit and community groups (Jackson, 2009).

This re-imagining of decommodification chimes with another strand of thinking on the margins of social policy; that of feminist economics, which provides another source for re-thinking decommodification in the service of post-growth. Feminist scholarship has been long critical of the lack of attention to gender inequality in Esping-Andersen’s understanding of decommodification; noting the lack of recognition of gender inequalities in social reproduction and the significance of paid work to women for self-development (Orloff, 1993). Continuing this tradition, recent feminist contributions to degrowth discourse promote a vision of post-productive and post-growth forms of decommodification that provide a more holistic view of productive and reproductive work. Dengler and Strunk (2018) note that care and the environment, both part of the ‘maintenance economy’, are structurally devalued in the growth imaginary and there is a synergy, albeit overlooked, to their role as a ‘reproductive economy of care’ in a degrowth context. Similarly, Nierling (2012) speaks of the need to develop a societal redefinition of work that equally values paid and unpaid work, the latter being crucial to social sustainability and sustainable consumption. This would enable people to creatively, autonomously and convivially meet their needs over the lifecourse, providing time and recognition of care work, voluntary work and ‘do it yourself’ work without productivist benchmarks.

In short, this discussion has sketched a way of re-imagining decommodification in a post-growth and post-productivist context, which could guide how social policy engages with limits to growth and evolve as ecosocial policy. The next section takes this task further by exploring how decommodification for post-growth and post-productivism can be mapped in more detail as an ecosocial policy agenda. What is required is urgent and cannot occur through slow

drift, incremental layering or gradual displacement (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010). Where possible we offer examples of ecosocial policy already in the process of prefiguration, arguing contemporary experimentations offer hopeful evidence of an emerging post-productivist, ecosocial welfare regime.

The scale of transformation required in each diverse welfare state means there can be no blueprint for the larger journey of change (Wright, 2013) – rather, the policy experiments outlined in the next section orient the direction of travel for steps towards transformation (Murphy, 2013). A decade after Wright published *Real Utopias* there is an urgent need to take advantage of opportunities for ruptural change. The symbiotic reforms and prefigured experiments discussed below offer compass points for a more substantial transformation, the scale of which needs to be more consistent with paradigmatic change.

Reimagining welfare as ecosocial welfare: redistribution of work, cash and services

Reorienting cash transfers and services to support new forms of sustainable participation

Above we rehearsed Vail's (2010) ambition for a more expansive vision and remit for social protection, taking into account a wider orbit of social risks and promoting post-productivism and enhanced autonomy. In imagining how social security or cash transfers can facilitate transition to new forms of decommodified sustainable participation we follow Raworth's (2017) and Büchs' (2021) logic, seeking to ensure income support is designed and delivered to meet individual needs and societal goals but staying within ecological limits. Ecosocial policy debate, where it focuses on cash transfers, has been dominated by proposals for unconditional Universal Basic Income (UBI) (Koch, 2020; Raworth, 2017). UBI is often promoted as a vehicle for shifting to a decommodified, post-growth and post-productivist world but can be oversold as a panacea. There are questions about how it might be financed (Büchs 2021) and its full implementation could distract from and substitute investment in core public services (Coote and Percy 2020). From an ecosocial policy perspective often libertarian-leaning UBI propositions seek unconditional maximisation of individuals' freedom over their consumptive choices; arguments which can overlook potential for wasteful and individual over-consumption and ignore the potential of collective social and public services. UBI's untargeted orientation also misses the opportunity to use cash transfers to target societal goals including democratic, care and ecological participation (Murphy and McGann, 2020). Instead, we argue that Participation Income (PI), a targeted income support enabling engagement in social, ecological and democratic activity that fosters sustainable outcomes, might better enable transition to a decommodified, post-growth and post-productivist future, and better

complement a universal provision of social services, erode consumerism, and foster solidaristic and sustainable lives.

Crucial to this is understanding income transfer programmes not only as cash but as tools to motivate people to engage in socially valuable activities including care and ecological activity (Pérez-Muñoz, 2018). Contemporary welfare models, based on social insurance and/or means testing, are overly prescriptive requiring that claimants meet productivist conditions of eligibility, entitlement and conduct and are embedded in the logic of growth. By contrast, PI has capacity to promote ecologically sustainable participation, outcomes and lives. Atkinson (1996) argued PI, as a halfway house, was a politically feasible variant of income reform. PI, transitional or long term, enables us to reimagine an enhanced societal reciprocity and interdependence. Gender equality as a goal of a reimagined ecosocial policy is also facilitated by income support reform that individualises entitlement, removing the application of means-testing households in male-breadwinner systems (which denies women individual entitlement, autonomy and equality).

A PI can incorporate a broad range of activity (education, care, voluntary work, political participation, life-long learning, reproduction, satisfying essential needs unmet by the market and environmental reproduction), or be narrowly targeted. Swaton's (2018) concept of an ecological transition income, for example, targets a decommodified social or ecological contribution. The pandemic has more recently caused many states to configure forms of income support with substantially eased eligibility, entitlement and conduct criteria. While designed as short-term measures some configurations may be disruptive policies with longer term legacies.

Büchs (2021) discusses the need to develop a complementary integration of income and services as a fundamental feature of sustainable welfare. The pandemic certainly highlighted the crucial role public services play in meeting needs and deficiencies in such services. Coote and Percy (2020) promote Universal Basic Services (UBS) as a way to transform how services are provided. Here the primary role of the state is the regulation of services to ensure equality of access, distribution of resources, quality standards and co-ordination of inter-agency delivery across different areas of need. In determining need, policy has to distinguish it from want and be informed by the objective of constraining patterns of consumption and production within ecological limits. In many states there is now a process of remunicipalising public services that had been privatised (TNI, 2020). This often involves experimentation with new forms of service delivery involving user participation and economic democracy, thus prefiguring new forms of public services and social policy that are less statist, and more autonomous and distributive (Jackson, 2009:223). A core issue for ecological sustainability, including fiscal, democratic and political sustainability is the balance in an ecosocial regime between cash income transfers and UBS

(Büchs 2021). In a ‘virtuous circle’ (Hirvilammi, 2020), the more modest the cash contribution, the more fiscally feasible is investment in uncommodified basic services that enable citizens to share common lives and create more solidarity. Concurrently, UBS are less consumption oriented and more ecologically sustainable (Gough, 2013, 2017; Coote and Percy, 2020).

Redistribution of time across work and care

Keeping the focus on decommodification in a post-growth and post-productivist context, our next task is to reimagine the redistribution of paid or commodified work (Jackson, 2009). Social policy offers multiple ways of reimagining how paid work might be redistributed and/or revalued, across the working week, gender and the life-course, or through minimum and maximum income or hourly thresholds, all of which have potential to link with the environmental dimension of post-growth. Gough (2013) outlined the direct environmental gains from the reduction in aggregate demand of a shorter working week, as does Jackson (2009). A number of interesting experiments build on the New Economics Foundation’s call for ‘21 hours’ (Coote *et al.*, 2010), piloting reduced daily and weekly hours. Sweden previously piloted a six hour working day (Coote *et al.*, 2020), while in New Zealand, Perpetual Guardian introduced a four-day working week in 2018 focused on generating 100 per cent productivity, over 80 per cent of the time, with 100 per cent of the pay. In 2021 Spanish companies are being invited to participate in a three year pilot four day week project. This focus on the recovery of ‘time’ captured in the slogan of the European Trades Union Congress campaign ‘working shorter to live longer’ (Passchier, 2014), facilitates redistribution of care across men and women, and more time for leisure. As well as direct links to environmental gains of post-growth, it offers time and opportunity for mobilisation across workers, carers and ecological activists, generating new political coalitions and policy dynamics (Raworth, 2017).

Redistribution and reduction of commodified productivist work also enables fairer sharing of decommodified social reproduction, itself a necessary dimension of post-growth. Earlier discussion of feminist social policy drew attention to the need to advance a ‘reproductive economy of care’ in a degrowth context which necessitates revaluing paid and unpaid work (Nierling, 2012), as well as restructuring of and reduction in working time to decrease stress, increase gender equality in working time, and facilitate the achievement of work–life balance, as well as greater ecological sustainability. A post-growth and feminist informed care ethic understands care as ‘a species activity’ and includes care for ‘our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life sustaining web’ (Fisher and Tronto, 1990:40). Proposals for decommodification that speak directly to redistribution of care and paid work include shorter working weeks, long part time hours

(30+ per week) and three-quarter working time arrangements. Many countries, led by the Nordic states, are actively experimenting with parental and paternity leave policies that enable a shift from adult-worker regimes to a more decommodified post-growth distribution of care and work or 'universal care giver' regimes, where both care and paid work are more equally shared within households (Folbre 2021: 204). In 2021 Ireland's Citizen's Assembly on Gender Equality recommended such a combination of care policies.

Decommodification in a post-growth and post-productivist world also requires redistribution of work across the life course. Policies and debates about raising the pension age, 'the commodification of life's time' (Biggs *et al.*, 2017), are common across the OECD. Shifting from a productivist approach points towards policies that enable earlier retirement and decommodify pensions, disentangling them from commodified work (as in the New Zealand Superannuation). Biggs *et al.* (2017) address decommodification and sustainability from the perspective of aging, arguing against 'productive ageing' and 'commodity consumption' that denies older people alternative personal, bodily and psychosocial elements of a 'long life'. Choice in retirement refers not only to retirement age, which averages 64 in 2017 but is projected to rise to 70 within 50 years (OECD, 2017); flexibility and choice requires access to retirement income and universal care services. Valuing the decommodified, post-productivist contributions people can make to sustainability is key to enabling generational relationships evolve in a complementary sustainable rather than competitive framework.

Repurposing of active labour market measures

Over the last forty years many OECD countries experienced a shift from passive to active social policy where work-first conditional activation regimes commodified income support. Shifting the present focus of activation policy is a key requirement for a shift to a decommodified, post-growth and post-productivist world. Brodtkin and Marston (2013) understand activation as a combination of enabling, compensatory and regulatory policies that in the contemporary context amount to a workfare project which seeks to commodify people in low paid precarious labour. Decommodification requires a reorientation of such policy and institutions to focus on enabling functions, enhancing capability so citizens can transition at different stages in their life cycle, and seeing work as a form of social participation (Jackson, 2009). Activation policy has been widely critiqued for its failure to generate sustainable, good quality employment, especially for the more vulnerable (Brodtkin and Marston, 2013). Both public employment services (PES) and active labour market programmes (ALMPs) can support new forms and patterns of participation including decently paid labour market participation, but also other forms of sustainability enhancing participation, which could work in conjunction with

PI and UBS as already discussed. Activation policy and practice can be resituated in a voluntary decommodified PES focused on promoting a broader navigational agency for active citizenship (Claassen, 2018). This is the focus of active experimentation in the Netherlands Participation Act and in local experiments in Denmark and Scotland (Larruffa *et al.*, 2021), where processes of co-production enable welfare claimants to identify and take up forms of socially valuable participation.

Rethinking the aims and value of ALMPs from an ecosocial perspective – that is, valuing and designing activation policy around ecological and social goals – speaks to how various countries have historically used ALMP to promote non-labour market objectives, and how some are consciously widening what is seen as acceptable forms of activity in contemporary ALMPs (Dukelow, *forthcoming*). Stamm *et al.* (2020) find examples in Finland, Germany, Belgium and Italy of ‘ecosocial innovation’; activation projects that support local communities, and are of clear holistic benefit to participants and the environment. Swaton (2018) describes as ‘ecological citizenship’ the use of labour market programmes in France to meet ecological objectives. In Ireland aspects of activation policy had clear roots in the social economy, social cohesion and local communities, and such ALMPs have supported ecological participation. Across Europe such existing ideas, instruments and programmes ‘hiding in plain sight’ can be integrated into a new understanding of ecosocial welfare policy. These programmes offer modest but clear starting points to reconfigure social policy towards new forms of active citizenship in an ecosocial model of activation, and for providing vital care, ecological and community services.

Joining the dots: From a welfare imaginary to a political project

Enabling social policy to serve society and re-integrating it into social values and institutions requires no less than a paradigm change in how we understand work and welfare. We have offered examples of prefigurative institutional building and argued that some aspects of such a shift are ‘hiding in plain sight’ as pilots or mainstream policies, more of which have been hastened by the pandemic. In some respects, ‘the cart has gone before the horse’ with elements of a new welfare architecture being discussed and developed in the absence of an ecosocial blue-print or a fuller articulation of paradigmatic change. The challenge is to join the dots making the connection between prefigurative experimentation, somewhat siloed reform proposals, and the welfare imaginary, and making more concrete the ambition of a decommodified, post-growth and post-productivist ecosocial welfare world.

Following Jackson’s (2009:221) call for a pragmatic ‘innovative palette of policy options’, Table 1, reinforcing Gough’s (2017) schema of redistribution, social compensation and social investment but also stressing the importance

TABLE 1. Diversity of working age policies in an ecosocial welfare regime

Promoting autonomy and democratic control	Redistribution	Social Consumption		Social Investment	
Enabling Institutions	Cash Income	Consumption Services	Distribution of paid employment	Distribution of non-paid work (care, ecological, democratic)	Active labour market policy
Capacity building and integrated delivery	Universal Basic Income Transition Income Participation Income	State services including care	Minimum/Maximum incomes	Childcare infrastructure	Enabling Public Employment Services
Navigational agency	Social insurance and income tested income support	Free consumption goods	Paid work equality policies	Taxation policy and carbon budgets	Capacitating Education and Training
Community innovation, initiatives, institutions	Taxation (income, wealth, consumption and environmental)	New forms of public innovation and ownership	Four-day week and reduced working time	Time equality parental care policies	Ecological and other sustainability projects
Local government/ local democracy	Quasi currency vouchers	Needs vouchers	Regulated decent part time/remote/flexible work	Shift vouchers	Decent work, employment protection regime

Source: Authors.

of rebuilding anchoring enabling institutions, identifies a range of working age relevant policy options that enable decommodification for post-growth and post-productivism. As a suite of ecosocial policies, the table showcases a diverse range of policy options, including options such as minimum/maximum incomes, which we have not had space to discuss in this article. This diversity is important: there is a common vision but no blue-print representing a 'best fit'. Most ecosocial welfare regimes will be pragmatically hybrid and specific to national contexts. Different mixtures and scales of policies will be adapted, in part determined by both historical trajectories and contemporary institutional capacities of administrations, and in part by critical junctures or a path disrupter such as the pandemic.

To be politically feasible, to move from a welfare imaginary to a reconfigured welfare architecture, is in essence a renegotiation of the social contract to incorporate new understandings of fiscal and carbon sustainability. That includes shifting from income to resource taxation in the form of ecological taxes (Daly, 2007; Hickel 2020; Büchs 2021), financial transaction taxes, wealth taxes, production and energy taxes and consumption taxes, as well as tackling private and corporate legal tax avoidance and illegal tax evasion methods and/or a global progressive tax on individual net worth (Piketty, 2014).

Concluding reflections: Implications for social policy research

The discipline of social policy is crucial both in enabling education of informed and active citizens but also in generating academic research and ideas that can become a focus of mobilising for transformation. Expanding the welfare imaginary lends itself to a political project that unifies debates within welfare and across the larger degrowth movement, thus contributing to and enabling paradigmatic change. Further interdisciplinary research is needed to broaden and deepen the theoretical concept of sustainable welfare (Hirvilammi and Koch, 2020), as well as the related understanding of how environmental change impacts on the distribution of welfare in societies. 'Ecosocial policies' that respect social equality and planetary limits are needed at transnational, national, and local levels. Analysis of welfare and social policy responses to the pandemic will offer important learning, and opportunity to foreshadow models for ecosocial welfare reform. Such research must reach beyond academic circles as part of a transformative politics. An ecosocial welfare architecture must also be informed by active citizenship, and participative and deliberative democratic processes that inform, educate and give voice to different public interests, complementing representative democratic processes and mediating the inevitable political conflict in bringing to life an ecosocial post-growth world.

Declaration of competing issues

Competing interests: The authors declare none

References

- Atkinson, A. B. (1996), The Case for a Participation Income. *The Political Quarterly*, 67(1), 67–70.
- Biggs, S., McGann, M., Bowman, D. and Kimberley, H. (2017), Work, health and the commodification of life's time: reframing work-life balance and the promise of a long life', *Ageing and Society*, 37, 1458–1483
- Brodin, E. and Marston, G. (2013), Work and the welfare state. Street-Level organisations and workfare politics, Georgetown: Georgetown UP.
- Buch-Hansen, H. and Carstensen, M. (2021), Paradigms and the political economy of ecopolitical projects: green growth and degrowth compared, *Competition and Change*, 1–20. doi: [10.1177/1024529420987528](https://doi.org/10.1177/1024529420987528)
- Büchs, M. (2021), Sustainable Welfare: How do universal basic income and universal basic services compare? *Ecological Economics* 189 107152
- Claassen, R. (2018), *Capabilities in a just society: A Theory of Navigational Agency*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Coote, A., Franklin, A. and Simms, A. (2010), *21 Hours*, London: NEF.
- Coote, A., Harper, A. and Stirling, S. (2020), *The Case for a Four Day Week*, London: Polity.
- Coote, A. and Percy, A. (2020), *The case for Universal Basic Services*, London: Polity.
- D'Alisa, G. and Kallis, G. (2020), Degrowth and the state, *Ecological Economics*, 169, 106486.
- Daly, H.E. (2007), *Ecological Economics and Sustainable Development: Selected Essays of Herman Daly*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Dengler, C. and Strunk, B. (2018), The monetised economy versus care and the environment: Degrowth perspectives on reconciling an antagonism, *Feminist Economics*, 24(3), 160–183.
- Dukelow, F. (forthcoming), What role for activation in eco-social policy? *Social Policy and Society*
- Esping-Andersen, G. (1990), *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Ferris, J. (1991), 'Green politics and the future of welfare' in N. Manning, (ed.), *Social Policy Review, 1990-91*, Harlow: Longman, 24–41.
- Fisher, B. and Tronto, J. (1990), 'Toward a feminist theory of caring', in E.E. Abel and M. Nelson, (eds.), *Circles of Care*, Albany: SUNY, 35–62.
- Fitzpatrick, T. (1998), The implications of ecological thought for social welfare, *Critical Social Policy*, 18(1), 6–26.
- Folbre, N. (2021), *The Rise and Decline of Patriarchal Systems An Intersectional Political Economy*, London: Verso.
- Gerber, J-D. and Gerber, J-F. (2017), Decommodification as a foundation for ecological economics, *Ecological Economics*, 131, 551–556.
- Gough, I. (2013), Carbon mitigation policies, distributional dilemmas and social policies, *Journal of Social Policy*, 42(2), 191–213.
- Gough, I. (2017), *Heat need greed, climate change, capitalism and sustainable wellbeing*, London: Edward Elgar.
- Gough, I., Meadowcroft, J., Dryzek, J., Gerhards, J., Lengfeld, H., Markandya, A. and Ortiz, R. (2008), JESP symposium: Climate change and social policy, *Journal of European Social Policy*, 18(4), 325–344.
- Hewitt, M. (2000), *Welfare and human nature*, London: Macmillan
- Hickel, J. (2020), What does degrowth mean? A few points of clarification, *Globalizations*, DOI: [10.1080/14747731.2020.1812222](https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2020.1812222)
- Hickel, J. and Kallis, G. (2020), Is green growth possible? *New Political Economy*, 25(4), 469–486.

- Hirvilammi, T. (2020), The virtuous circle of sustainable welfare as a transformative policy idea, *Sustainability*, 12(1), <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12010391>
- Hirvilammi, T. and Koch, M. (2020), Sustainable welfare without growth, *Sustainability*, 12(5), 1824, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12051824>
- Huby, M. (1995), Water poverty and social policy: a review of issues for research, *Journal of Social Policy*, 24(2), 219–36.
- Jackson, T. (2009), *Prosperity without growth: Foundations for the economy of tomorrow* (2nd edn.), London: Routledge.
- Koch, M. (2020), The state in the transformation to a sustainable post-growth economy, *Environmental Politics*, 29(1), 115–133.
- Koch, M. and Fritz, M. (2014), Building the eco-social state: Do welfare regimes matter? *Journal of Social Policy*, 43(4), 679–703.
- Larruffa, F., McGann, M. and Murphy, M. P. (2021), Enabling Participation Income for an Ecosocial State, *Social Policy and Society*, doi: [10.1017/S1474746421000750](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746421000750)
- Latouche, S. (2010), Degrowth, *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 18(6), 519–522.
- Mahoney, J. and Thelen, K. (eds) (2010), *Explaining institutional change: agency, ambiguity and power*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Murphy, M.P. (2013), Translating degrowth into contemporary policy challenges: a symbiotic transformation strategy, *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 21(2), 76–89.
- Murphy, M.P. and McGann, M. (2020), Renewing welfare through universal entitlement: lessons from Covid-19 Social Europe Blog 24 September 2020 <https://www.socialeurope.eu/author/mary-murphy-and-michael-mcgann> [accessed 27.4.2021]
- Nierling, L. (2012), 'This is a bit of the good life': recognition of unpaid work from the perspective of degrowth, *Ecological Economics*, 84, 240–246.
- OECD (2017), *Pensions at a Glance*, Paris: OECD.
- Offe, C. (1996), *Modernity and the State*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Orloff, A. S. (1993), Gender and the social rights of citizenship: the comparative analysis of state policies and gender relations, *American Sociological Review*, 58: 3, 303–28.
- Passchier, C. (2014), 'New path for Europe, new model for Ireland'. Panel discussant, 'A new course for better times', Irish Congress of Trade Unions, 11 April, Dublin.
- Pérez-Muñoz, C. (2018), Participation income and the provision of socially valuable activities, *The Political Quarterly*, 58(2), 268–72.
- Piketty, T. (2014), *Capital in the 21st Century*, New York: Belknap.
- Raworth, K. (2017), *Doughnut economics seven ways to think like a 21st century economist*, London: Random House.
- Room, G. (2000), Commodification and de-commodification: a developmental critique, *Policy and Politics*, 28(3), 331–351.
- Stamm, I., Matthies, A.L., Hirvilammi, T. and Närhi, K. (2020), Combining labour market and unemployment policies with environmental sustainability? A cross-national study on ecosocial innovations, *Journal of International and Comparative Social Policy*, 36(1), 42–56.
- Swaton, S. (2018), For an Ecological Transition Income. <https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/for-an-ecological-transition-income/> [accessed 18.1.2021].
- TNI (2020), *The future is public: Towards democratic ownership of public services*, Amsterdam: Transnational Institute.
- Vail, J. (2010), De-commodification and egalitarian political economy, *Politics and Society*, 38(3), 310–46.
- Wiese, K. and Mayrhofer, J. (2020), *Escaping the growth and jobs treadmill, a new policy agenda for post-corona virus Europe*, Brussels: EYF and EEB.
- Wilkinson, R. and Pickett, K. (2014), *A convenient truth A better society for us and the planet*, London: Fabian Society.
- Wright, E.O. (2013), Transforming capitalism through real utopias, *American Sociological Review*, 78(1), 1–25.