

Community Allowance for Resilient Economies (CARE)

A job guarantee for degrowth

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Abstract: The threat of unemployment stands as a major obstacle against transformations towards sustainability. On the other hand, the ideal of full employment and its associated work ethic is a central feature of the ideology of growth and so remains ecologically and socially maladapted to a non-growing economy. If degrowth is to be taken seriously, it must provide a satisfying answer to the question of how work will be organised in a post-growth society. The job guarantee often figures in lists of degrowth policies among work time reduction and universal basic income but only few scholars have studied the proposal in detail. This article reviews the features of existing job guarantee proposals and proposes the Community Allowance for Resilient Economies (CARE), a direct job creation programme that fits the postwork aspirations of degrowth.

Keywords: job guarantee, degrowth, postwork, work time reduction, unemployment, care

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Introduction

The threat of unemployment stands as a major obstacle against transformations towards sustainability. Most government in the world are still navigating around a perceived “jobs versus environment” dilemma where employment is directly linked to GDP.¹ The objection that a steady state economy may not be able to provide everyone with a job has too often relegated growth-critical concerns to a black list of political feasibility. How to mitigate chronic unemployment² for workers with low skills and education in a nongrowing economy? How to accommodate for changes in the size of the working population and adapt to technological progress? And what will happen to those currently working in sectors that are expected to shrink? If degrowth is to be taken seriously, it must provide a satisfying answer to the question of how work will be organised in a post-growth society.

Degrowth is an “equitable downscaling of production and consumption that increases human well-being and enhances ecological conditions at the local and global level, in the short and long-term” (Schneider et al., 2010: 512). Key to this new paradigm is the re-politisation of crucial economic institutions, most importantly property, money, and work. When it comes to the latter, degrowth questions its *quantity* and *quality*, as well as its *meta-quality*. First, it holds as an objective to reduce working time for a diversity of ecological (reduce throughput) and social reasons (work sharing to curtail under- and unemployment and to liberate leisure time). Second, it criticises the meaninglessness associated with an increasing number of “bullshit jobs” (Graeber, 2018).³ And finally, it challenges the centrality of wage-labour (or more precisely market-coordinated, commodity-producing labour) in social life with the goal of constructing a less work-centred society – an horizon that is often referred to as postwork.

In this paper, I argue that the job guarantee (hereafter JG) can, together with other labour policies (basic income and work time reduction), achieve the threefold objective of postwork. The JG has made a recent come back in American politics. In the Spring of 2018, four American senators (Elizabeth Warren, Kirsten Gillibrand, Bernie Sanders, and Cory Booker) have approved of the idea.⁴ Often citing the Article 23.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which states that “everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work, and to protection against unemployment,” advocates of a JG argue that it is the duty of the government to act as an employer of last resort to provide employment when the private sector fails to do so.

The degrowth literature on the topic is scarce. In a short essay, Alcott (2013) was first to claim that degrowth should embrace the job guarantee because it allows to create jobs without relying on an increasing Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and that this abundance of employment would weaken resistance against other structural reforms. In an even shorter entry of *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era*, Unti (2015) followed suit in arguing that the JG is “consistent with degrowth” because not only it decouples employment from aggregate demand, but it also redirects production towards social

¹ The fact that economic growth and employment are gathered under the same goal in the Sustainable Development Goals (n°8 “Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”) is an evidence of such a widespread assumption.

² In this paper, I define full employment as a situation where anyone who wants a job can find one. This differs from the way economists usually define the term, namely the Non-Accelerating Inflation Rate of Unemployment or NAIRU or the rate (usually around 4 and 6%) that characterises an idealised level of output at which resources are fully utilised, inflation is stable, and prices and wages perfectly flexible.

³ Graeber (2018: 9-10) defines a bullshit job as “a form of paid employment that is so completely pointless, unnecessary, or pernicious that even the employee cannot justify its existence even though, as part of the conditions of employment, the employee feels obligated to pretend that this is not the case.”

⁴ In February 2017, Representative John Conyers Jr. proposed with the support from 28 Democratic Members of Congress, the “Humphrey-Hawkins 21st Century Full Employment and Training Act” or “Jobs for All Act” to “establish the National Full Employment Trust Fund to create employment opportunities for the unemployed.”

and ecological needs while supporting spheres outside the realm of accumulation. It is not uncommon to see the JG among list of policy recommendation from degrowthers (e.g. Kallis, 2017: 23-24; Mastini and Rijnhout, 2018: 42). Yet, this compatibility of the policy with degrowth has been made at an abstract level, without precise considerations of *which type* of job guarantee would be most compatible with degrowth. Indeed, most of current JG proposals are, not only pro-growth (e.g. boost aggregate demand and productivity), but also framed within the broader economicist worldview that degrowth criticises – e.g. eradicate involuntary unemployment *in order to* guarantee price stability in the framing of Modern Money Theorists like Wray, 2012: Chap 7.

The objective of this paper is to describe a possible policy design detailing how work might be organised in a post-growth society. The text is divided into three parts. The first section defines what the job guarantee is and presents five different either existing programmes, running experiments, or published proposals. Section 2 lists the justifications advocates put forward to make the case for a JG and the criticisms of its detractors. Lastly, section 3 explores critical issues regarding the policy from a degrowth perspective and proposes the Community Allowance for Resilient Economies (CARE), a direct job creation programme with specific social and ecological objectives.

1. Definition and concrete proposals

The idea of a JG has a long history, at least in American thought.⁵ Kaboub (2007) traces the proposal to several authors. Dewey (1919: 420 cited in Kaboub, 2007: 295) advocated for the right “to every individual who is capable of it, to work [...] not breaking stones in a stone yard, or something else to get a soup ticket with, but some kind of productive work with a self-respecting person may engage in with interest.” John Pierson’s (1941) “Economic Performance Insurance” in which the state would “stand ready to step in as employer of last resort; or step out, when necessary – [as] disemployer of first resort.” John Philip Wernettes’ “Full Employment Standard” with the Federal Reserve allowed to create new money to finance budget deficits. In *Full Employment in a Free Society* (1945), Williams H. Beveridge assigned the government with the responsibility to make sure there was “always more vacant jobs than unemployed (people).” The most prominent 20th century advocate of the JG is probably Hyman P. Minsky (1965, 1966, 1986) who revived the idea in the mid-sixties and continued promoting it in the following decades.

The job guarantee⁶ is “a permanent, federally funded, and locally administered program that supplies voluntary employment opportunities on demand for all who are ready and willing to work at a living wage” (Wray et al., 2018: 35). In essence, it gives the State the duty to finance the employment of anybody who wants a job but cannot find one in the private labour market. In other words, the government acts as a so-called “employer of last resort.” JG schemes are characterised by four features: they are *universal* (open to everyone), *voluntary* (only concerning those who want to work), *permanent* (indeterminate in time), and offer a *living wage and benefits* (usually larger than those of the private sector).

One should not misunderstand the JG with other forms of public or semi-public employment. First, it should not be confused with the so called “workfare” referring to the work-based welfare reforms introduced by Bill Clinton in 1996. Whereas workfare requires recipients of benefits to accept any job that is offered to them to not lose their aid, the job guarantee is voluntary; people who cannot and/or do not want to work will still be able to apply to traditional benefits. It is also different from work-fare understood as a conditional cash transfer where participants are expected to partake in certain training

⁵ For more about the history of the idea of job guarantee, see Kaboub (2007) and Stein (2018).

⁶ The proposal is sometime also referred as “universal job guarantee,” “guaranteed employment,” “public service employment,” “buffer stock employment,” and “employer of last resort.”

or community work in order to not lose financial assistance. In a JG scheme, participants receive, not benefits, but a wage to the same title as any public employee.

Current JG proposals are also different from the large public employment that occurred under the Roosevelt administration at the height of the Great Depression. From 1935 to 1943, the U.S. government became the larger employer of nation, putting 8.5 million people to work in a diversity of tasks ranging from repairing schools, road, and bridges, building airports, parks, and hospitals, delivering library books and meals, and stitching clothes, to installing water lines and performing concerts (Paul et al., 2018: 54). As Kaboub (2007) notes, however, the New Deal was not a true JG since it did not provide an infinitely elastic demand for labour.

A subtler distinction should be made between a fully fledged JG and the partial public employment systems currently in place in many countries. First, a JG is different from having the ability to join the army because it does not specify tasks to be performed in advance, nor do they constrain their location – a JG takes people *as they are* (skill-wise) and *where they are* (location-wise). Second, it is permanent and so differs from the temporary training or on-the-job training offered to young people (e.g. the French “*service civique*” – civic service – existing since 2010) and/or the unemployed (e.g. the “public employment system” that has been running in Hungary since 2011). Although close in spirit, is also different from the private jobs that are partly subsidised by the State (e.g. the *emplois aidés* in France) because it generates its own jobs instead of relying on already existing ones.

Whereas the core idea of a JG is simple, proposals differ in their design concerning wage rate, wage variations, benefits, working time, organisations allowed to participate, governance, substitution of existing welfare programs, and other details. In this section, I compare five proposals. The *Plan Jefes y Jefas de Hogar Desocupados* and the *National Rural Employment Guarantee Act* are public employment schemes that have been running in Argentina from 2001 and in India since 2005. The *Public Service Employment* (PSE) is the JG proposal made by The Levy Economics Institute of Bard College in New York, the world leading research centre on the topic.⁷ The *National Investment Employment Corps* (NIEC) is a similar proposal made by American scholars Mark Paul, William Darity Jr., and Darrick Hamilton. Finally, the *Territoires zéro chômeurs de longue durée* (TZCLD) is a job guarantee proposals initiated by All Together in Dignity (ATD) Quart Monde and Patrick Valentin that is being experimented since 2017 in ten French cities.

Argentina

*Plan Jefes y Jefas de Hogar Desocupados*⁸ (Program for Unemployed Male and Female Heads of Households) is a direct job creation program that was launched in 2001 by the Argentinian government. The State guarantees employment to the head of the household for at least 4 hours a day at minimum wage (**how much**) and with the benefit of obtaining a social security card. Most jobs are part of local community projects including food kitchens, tailor shops, day-care centres, irrigation schemas and road maintenance, public libraries, or afterschool activities for children. For 1% of GDP in expenditure at its peak, the programme employed 13% of the labour force and reduced extreme poverty by 25% (Tcherneva, 2013: 79). In **(date)**, the programme was terminated and turned into *Plan Familias* (Family Plan), a kind of universal basic income. (**Several sentences about the programme’s specific features**).

India

⁷ Two other, more recent organisations are also researching the job guarantee: the Centre for Full Employment and Price Stability in Kansas City (United States) and the Center for Full Employment and Equity in Newcastle, Australia.

⁸ For more on the Argentinian experiment, see Tcherneva and Wray (2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2005d), Pastoret and Tepepa (2006), Garzon ade la Rosa (2006), Kostzer (2008), Tcherneva (2012).

In 2005, the Indian government passed the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act,⁹ which guarantees employment in public work projects for a minimum of 100 days to any willing adult living in a rural area. Beneficiaries receive minimum wage (**how much**). Eligible tasks are set in advance by law, mostly having to do with water work (harvesting, conservation, irrigation, drought and flood control etc.). (# **Several sentences about the programme's specific features**).

United States

The Public Service Employment (PSE) and the National Investment Employment Corps (NIEC) are two recent American proposals with similar features.¹⁰ Permanent yet voluntary, both scheme guarantees employment for any adult able, ready, and willing to work. In the NIEC, the yearly wage is as low as \$24,600 (corresponding to the poverty line for a family of four) and as high as \$32,500 allowing career advancement and regional variation; the working time is either 20h or 35-40 hours per week. In the PSE, a uniform wage is set at \$15 per hour (\$31,200 per year) for an average workweek of 32 hours including part-time and full-time workers. Both offer a wide range of benefits including health insurance, retirement plans, childcare, paid family and sick leave, and paid vacation. PSE and NIEC are federally funded but locally administered by eligible entities, including state and local government, non-profit and not-for-profit organisations. The created jobs are tailored to participants in terms of ability and location, and should produce goods and services for the benefits of both the community and society as a whole without competing with individuals performing similar work in the private sector. Examples of jobs cited in the NIEC include the repair, maintenance, and expansion of the nation's infrastructure, housing stock, and public buildings; energy efficiency retrofitting; ecological restoration; engagement in community development projects; preschool and afterschool services; teachers' aids; elder care and companionship; supports for the arts. As for PSE: installing playground equipment, planting vegetation, renovate and beautify urban spaces, adding insulation to housing and community building, community clinics, urban fisheries and aquaponics, veteran services, youth mentoring.

France

*Territoires zéro chômeurs de longue durée*¹¹ (Territories without long-term unemployment) is a five-year experiment that started in January 2017 in 10 French cities. The idea is to subsidise organisations of the social and solidary sector to create permanent jobs fitted to the skills and aspirations of people who have been unemployed for a long period (4 years in average for the current 500 participants) and that will facilitate their re-insertion in the private labour market. Remuneration is set at the French minimum wage (€9,88 in 2018) with (**benefits**) for a (**working time**). Employment is provided via the setting of a *entreprise à but d'emploi* (employment-creating company) where diverse workers and activities co-exist. As for the American schemes, these new companies should not compete with already existing private and public ones, which means they must provide goods and services that are currently unprovided. Also the entire scheme is managed at the local level where all stakeholders (unemployment office, not-for-profit companies, associations, local government, and people seeking employment) gather in a "local employment council" whose task is to match the tasks a community would want to see performed with the ones those deprived of a jobs can and want to perform. In TZCLD, participating companies interview job seekers first, and only then look for socially deemed useful task that would fit their abilities and aspirations. Examples of jobs include a community garage, computer repair, gardening, retrofitting buildings, and assisting other workers in their commute.

⁹ For more on the India experiment, see Muralidharan et al. (2017).

¹⁰ For more on the PSE, see Wray et al. (2018) and Wray (2018); for the NIEC, see Paul et al. (2018a), Paul et al. (2018b).

¹¹ For more on the TZCLD, see TZCLD (2018), Grandguillaume (2018), and Dorival and Nahapétian (2018).

(# One paragraph to compare the schemes).

2. Justifications and controversies

Very little research has studied the impacts of a job guarantee. Proposals often come with lists of expected benefits (e.g. Wray et al., 2018: 36-37 for the Public Service Employment). While criticisms have been raised in popular media (e.g. Bruenig, 2017; Roth, 2017; Chait, 2018; Baker, 2018; Waldman, 2018; Ozimek, 2018a, 2018b; Matthews, 2018a, 2018b), I am not aware of any scientific study whose findings warned against the dangers of a JG. In this section, I do not enquire in the impact of a JG but only list the consequences announced by both supporters and critics.

Justifications

Advocates of a job guarantee point to a number of expected benefits.

- **Full employment:** eliminate involuntary unemployment and its associated ills.
- **Reduce poverty and inequality:** raises income of the poorest (often unemployed or underemployed) and provide a minimum wage above the poverty threshold.
- **Inclusion:** give everyone a chance to contribute to society.
- **Maintain or increase human capital:** increase capabilities by offering training, skills, and work experience
- **Boost economic growth:** increase productive capacity and consumer spending for private-sector goods.
- **Price and economic stability:** acts as an automatic stabiliser by hiring during economic downturns and freely allowing workers to return to the private sector after the economy recovers.
- **Improve work standards:** provide a minimum level of wage and benefits and increase the bargaining power of private workers for better working conditions.
- **Democracy:** gives a wider range of stakeholder the ability to define what work should be considered socially useful and under which conditions such work should be performed.
- **Fulfil unmet needs:** provision communities with goods and services not produced by the private sector.

Controversies

Detractors of the proposal point to a number of potential risks having to do with the cost of the programme and its governance, the types of jobs it would create, its interaction with the private labour market, its influence on productivity, and the risk of inflation.

- **Inflationary:** Without the risk of unemployment, workers would bargain up their wages leading to inflation.
- **Unaffordable:** the government could not afford it.
- **Unmanageable:** the size of the programme would require a problematic government bureaucracy.
- **Inefficient:** being guaranteed a job whatever happens, participants would have no incentives to work hard.
- **Polarising:** participants would be stigmatised as lesser workers.

- **Nationalising:** it is a hidden government takeover.
- **Crowding out:** it would displace workers from the private to the public sector.
- **Skill problem:** the community work that is most needed requires skills that unemployed people do not currently have.
- **Job fluctuations:** its cyclical nature (expand in recessions and shrink in expansions) restrains the type of jobs that can be offered.
- **Make-work:** participants are being paid to perform useless work.

(# One short concluding paragraph about pros and cons; with a narrow literature review of the few modelling exercise/empirical cases.)

3. Critical issues from a degrowth perspective

At first sight, it is not clear whether or not a JG is compatible with degrowth. On the one hand, it addresses poverty and exclusion; on the other, it could lead to further production and consumption, as well as reinforce the work ethic and economism in general. My argument in this section is that whether or not a JG is compatible with degrowth depends on its design and implementation. For example, I show that the French TZCLD is closer to the degrowth vision than the American PSE and NIEC, or even further to the Argentinian and Indian schemes. In the end, I propose a design that I consider to be fully compatible with degrowth.

From commodified labour to autonomous work

Under a decentralised JG scheme, it is not the State or the market that decides what tasks deserve to be remunerated, but the community itself. Tasks are not set in advance but selected in a bottom-up manner by all stakeholders in a democratic manner. Instead of a commodity that is bought and sold on a market with both buyers and sellers pursuing economic interests, work becomes political in that social and moral incentives take precedence over pecuniary ones (one could also say that use value becomes more important than exchange value). Work is made political again for that people autonomously decide how to allocate their time without the imperative of market profitability and State legitimacy.

This goes against the current trend of privatisation of work where employment is often experienced and imagined not as a social institution, but as a personal relationship between employees and employers (Weeks, 2011). Under a decentralised JG, communities (under the legal framing of the State) manages work in a commoning process where the resource is time and skills; it promotes work *in* the community (local), *for* the community (socially useful), and *by* the community (self-managed and participatory). In that sense, it does not only address poverty, but exclusion.¹² In that sense, one could, following Illich (1973) call this work “convivial” for that it is decentralised, democratically controllable, and subordinated to the values and ends commonly negotiated.

One could imagine a digital platform with all members of a community crowdsourcing a number of tasks they want to see performed divided in several categories (economic, social, ecological, cultural, political, religion, scientific) and ranked in importance.¹³ On the other hand, the unemployed could themselves go through a similar process, this time perhaps with the help of trained counsellors, to

¹² The argument seems overly naïve when made at the scale of a nation, but think of a smaller community, let us say a family preparing a meal together. It would seem natural that for the sake of inclusion, that everybody is presented with the possibility to contribute, even though certain individuals may slow down the process (e.g. children or people used to a culturally different way of cooking). In such situation, the fairness goal (inclusion) overrides the efficiency goal (fast production of food). Why would such logic cease to apply at the level of the neighbourhood, city, or even country?

¹³ In their Public Service Employment scheme, Wray et al. (2018: 36) proposes to create a “Community Jobs Bank” to serve as a repository of various employment opportunities.

translate their skills and aspirations into actual tasks. The final matching process could then occur in community council where decision would be taken following the principles of participatory democracy.

Jobs should not be determined in advance. They cannot be pre-determined if they are to be fitted to the abilities and aspirations of participants, an absolute requirement to avoid creating “bullshit jobs” (Graeber, 2018). Instead of the current unemployment assistance that tries to fit workers to already existing jobs, a JG would directly fit jobs to the already existing seekers. Besides, local actors know best what is needed in their community, which legitimates granting them funded work time for what they will. Of course, the government can still impose general requirements (e.g. not-for-profit, legal activities), especially in a phase of transition from unsustainable to sustainable production.

Here is one advantage that the JG has in comparison to a Universal Basic Income (UBI): it institutes a constant reflection over what should be considered work, which tasks should be performed, by whom, and how.¹⁴ Whereas a UBI enables *individual* autonomy (I decide to remunerate myself with the income for the task I consider useful), a JG deals with *collective* autonomy (only collectively can we agree to remunerate such and such task). For example, nobody can prevent me from using my basic income to remunerate myself to memorise digits of Pi. In a JG situation, however, all the actors involved in the scheme would need to be convinced that memorising digits of Pi is a worthwhile thing to do, both for me and for the community. Certain jobs that are considered socially or ecologically useful today may cease to be tomorrow and so the JG is an institution that generates a constant democratic discussion over what people of the community spend their time doing.

What about the work ethic?

At first sight, the JG can be criticised for reinforcing the problematic work ethic that sees work as a social duty and employment as a goal in itself. And indeed, that imaginary is present in most current proposals. The idea of a JG, however, does not necessarily reinforce the primacy of paid labour over alternative uses of time; in fact, it could even be a means to weaken the hegemony of the particular wage-labour relation that degrowth criticises.

First, the fact that tasks are collectively agreed upon based on their social usefulness goes against the logic of work for work’s sake. And this is the key difference between wage-labour and the paid community work performed under a JG: in the former people work to get a wage (earning a living) whereas in the latter they get a wage so they can work (living on earnings). People do not work to earn a living but are rather remunerated so that they can start or continue taking care of the community.¹⁵ In a way, the wage becomes peripheral to employment because it ceases to be a measure of social utility.

There is no risk for the JG to push people into wage-labour because it remains voluntary. Besides, one should not romanticise unemployment: low-wage, low-skill workers being trapped into involuntary joblessness should not be considered a proud and conscious resistance against the work-centred society, but rather an evidence of the maldistribution of work and of broader social inequalities. In fact, this existence of such reserve army functions as a key incentive for people to perform what they would have otherwise not performed – if you are not willing to put in 50-hour weeks with low pay and no benefits, then someone will. Prestige is attributed to work because it is scarce. If everybody is guaranteed access to employment, there is little pride to derive from the mere fact of having a job.¹⁶

¹⁴ My point in comparing JG to the UBI is not to suggest that one is superior to the other, like this is often done in the literature – e.g. Standing (2013) vs. Tcherneva (2013), Harvey (2013) vs. Noguchi (2013), or Tcherneva (2007) and Lewis (2013).

¹⁵ This idea of receiving a wage to be able to work (and not the opposite) resonates with my current situation as a researcher. I consider my monthly salary a stipend allowing me to attend to my basic need while being able to conduct my research. I do not read and write books to earn a living; my living is paid for so that I can spend my time reading and writing books.

¹⁶ A valid concern is that the polarisation between employed and unemployed will then be replaced by one between public jobs versus private jobs, or even between public workers and volunteers. Such polarisation might be less as the ratio of public to private jobs balances itself.

Sustainable production and work time reduction

Current JG proposals can be criticised for their emphasis on increasing productive capacity and maintaining consumer spending, which would then increase the biophysical throughput that degrowth aspires to reduce. Degrowth supports a shortening of working time that is not only *relative* (less work for the overworked, more work for the rest) but also *absolute* (less production and less consumption, and so less throughput, and more free time¹⁷). Although a JG addresses the first concern, it seems in opposition to the second one for that it employs people who were previously jobless, therefore increasing the aggregate number of hours worked (production-side) and purchasing power (consumption-side).

On the production side, one should remember that all community work has a social and/or ecological mission. Slowing down the provision of socially deemed useful community goods and services is not likely to translate into decreased throughput because these tasks are labour-intensive while requiring little natural resources. It is desirable to increase productive capacity in renewable energies harvesting, agroecological foods, care and repair services; those are the so called “green jobs” that are wished for.¹⁸ The logic is different from productivism as usual because the productivity of public employment is measured, not indirectly in terms of profits, but directly by the fulfilling of social and/or ecological goals.

Besides, a degrowth JG must be thought within an exodus of workers from environment-intensive forms of production to labour-intensive ones, the latter often being the one with a lesser footprint. It is often argued that the State should tax – as well as divest from – problematic sectors (e.g. fossil fuels, weapons and chemical industries, advertising) and subsidise the socially and ecologically beneficial initiatives that are financially struggling. One way of doing that is to provide them with labour free of charge. In that sense, the JG is effectively a subsidy of paid labour time to activities that the market does not consider to be valuable although the broader community does so. These are usually the activities degrowth argues should expand.

As for the increase in purchasing power and its effect on material consumption, it is unavoidable but not undesirable. Morally, the consumption side of the issue should not be considered a problem for that the additional income will be spent by the poorest, the ones who actually need to consume more. This does not mean that consumerism and materialism should be encouraged; of course, all the other changes advocated by degrowth (e.g. advertisement bans, downshifting, full-cost pricing) should come to make sure that this extra income is spent in a sustainable manner.

As for the goal of liberating free time from paid labour, a JG can be used as a strategy to incentivise work time reduction in the whole economy. With a public employment scheme in place, private workers who are dissatisfied with their working conditions always have the possibility to quit their private jobs and accept a community one instead (this is the “improving work conditions” point of the justifications).¹⁹ To retain workers, one may expect firms to provide working conditions that are at least as good as the public ones. Following Kallis et al. (2013), let us say that community workers get their Friday off without a change in wages, one might then expect a matching reduction in working time in the private sector. With a sufficiently large community sector, the JG could set a new standard of slow, decent, and sustainable work.

This indirect way to reduce working time should not substitute traditional labour regulations. Even without intervening on quantity of work, the State already has a duty to safeguard its quality (e.g.

¹⁷ Following the precepts of voluntary simplicity, this leisure time should be liberated from consumerist and materialist aspirations.

¹⁸ An additional benefit of a community-managed employment programme is that it creates jobs for people where they are, avoiding long commutes and their deleterious environmental impact.

¹⁹ Usually, the “improving working conditions” argument is used only for wages and benefits. In degrowth, however, decreasing working time with an unchanged wage is privileged over a pay raise with unchanged working time.

safe and equitable working conditions, decent working hours, benefits). Furthermore, ecologically unsustainable production should be directly acted upon, for example with the introduction of emission caps. But in times where governments shy away from labour regulations, offering more options to workers might be a politically more feasible strategy than having to face private firms directly.

A proposal for an activity allowance

The first thing degrowth should change about the job guarantee is its name. The term “job” reinforces the idea that work is a private matter and that labour is a neatly delimited act that one *has* or that one is *given*. It also invites to think of work as a quantity, which as such can potentially be scarce. As for “guarantee,” this is what makes the proposal attractive in a work-centred society: it promises that scarce thing one wants at all time. A name more fitting to the ideals of postwork could be an *activity allowance*. “Activity” detaches work from wage-labour broadening the concept of work to include whatever tasks is considered worthy of one’s individual and collective time. “Allowance” reflects the political aspect of the scheme, namely that it is the community that *allows* its individuals to perform such and such task. Another option would be to call it CARE for Community Allowance for Resilient Economies, with “resilient” indicating the idea of sustainable self-management or the ability for a local economy to take *care* of itself (self-sufficiency).

A degrowth job guarantee would conserve most of the features already present in the French and American proposals in being.

- *universal* (open to everyone),
- *voluntary* (work is a right but not a duty),²⁰
- *permanent*,
- *targeted* (fulfilling an individual, social, and/or ecological mission),
- *democratic* (participation of all stakeholders),
- *restricted* to non-profit and not-for-profit organisations
- providing a *decent wage* allowing to live a frugal life,²¹

It would then go further on a number of points in aiming to be:

- *sufficiently large* (community work should become a proper sector).
- (# add the remaining features).

Examples of activities could include farming and gardening, running associations (e.g. local currency or time bank, Community Supported Agriculture, repair café and second-hand shops, maker space); local journalism and update of Wikipedia pages; accompanying children to school in walking buses; commoning activities (e.g. management of local resources); unemployed graduates could run population education course instead of being forced into unpaid, bullshit internships).

(# concluding paragraph on degrowth and the JG).

²⁰ Making employment a right does not make it a duty. Many people find meaningful ways to contribute to their community via wage labour or volunteering, and so for them the JG will be of no use. The JG is an institution to help those who do not manage to find meaning in their current activities and want to change that.

²¹ As the scheme develops, some of the JG wage could be given in local currency and vouchers, which would reduce the financing cost (and therefore) dependence on the State.

Conclusions

In this paper, I have made the case that the job guarantee was a step in the right direction for the achievement of postwork. By looking at the difference between different existing experiments and proposals, I have shown that the design of scheme is of great importance.

In an economy where most production relies on an overuse of natural resources and ecosystems, employment is as much a problem as unemployment, and so the provision of paid labour must be considered in a broader social ecological frame. The JG can be used as an institution to secure inclusion while conducting structural reforms involving large shifts of workers in between different sectors.

The JG should create a specific type of employment, which I defined as autonomous work, namely activities that increase individual's capabilities while benefiting both the local community, society, and the environment. This category being contextual it is of utmost importance that what is to be considered to be "work" is regularly re-evaluated and discussed in local councils following the precepts of participatory democracy and in accordance to national labour law.

In the end, the job guarantee is no panacea and cannot be expected to achieve multiple social, ecological, and economic objectives all at once. In my proposal, I have certainly accentuated several potential benefits, but the JG should be understood as one policy among the many other changes that will be necessary for a degrowth transition.

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