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Beyond globalization – the legacy of Richard Douthwaite (1942 – 2011) for a degrowth economy

Third Contribution: Local renewable energy systems in the Czech republic – the case of the Centre for Application of Renewable Energy (CARE) in Vilémov

For Richard Douthwaite, one of the main areas of analysis has been the energy system of a society, especially in its spatial dimension. A central hypothesis in many of his studies was the conviction that no stable and sustainable local economy can exist without a secure, renewable supply of energy at a more or less steady price: „the only way that both security and price stability can be guaranteed is by having energy sources within community boundaries and under community control“ (Douthwaite, Short Circuit, 1996, p. 182). Therefore, a first consideration must go to the question whether energy self sufficiency will be – in the long run – feasible for a given community, and what it would mean to design a path leading to this type of energy transition. Would such an energy transition carry heavy cost penalty, and would it impede a community's efforts to produce a much wider range of goods and services for itself at prices that would at least match those from outside? It had been a firm belief of Richard Douthwaite that he had deduced from his studies that moderately higher local energy prices would be unlikely to create competitiveness problems because the production techniques and the lifestyles in a community oriented degrowth economy would generally require much less energy than those in the traditional industrial system. And, of course, the creation of economic value remains within the community, so that energy consumption does not lead to a steady flow of financial assets to the „outside world“. The third contribution in the special session on the legacy of Richard Douthwaite will try to apply his findings to the development of the general energy situation in the Czech Republic within the last twenty five years. It will be argued that the transformation of the Czech economy and society since 1989 included developments that, to our opinion, crave for an adjustment by the make-up of strong local economic structures, especially in the field of energy production. We see this as a necessity because the established Czech development, especially in the last years, is not moving into a sustainable direction of energy production and consumption, promoting even an increasingly negative image of renewable energy production. Therefore, it seems to be a rewarding strategy to combine both elements: relying on a system of local economic structures and, within these, building up components of a renewable energy production system. Especially in less developed regions in the countryside, this strategy can contribute to the spin off towards a self-reliant development, creating different forms of formal and informal local employment. The third contribution on the legacy of Richard Douthwaite will focus on reporting the development of the centre of application of renewable energy in the area of Vilémov and its surroundings, as an educational centre for the local use of renewable energies – one practical attempt to create a nucleus and a demonstration project for such an alternative type of energy system. The Orthodox Academy Vilémov (OAV) was registered as non-governmental organization in the year 1995. In the year 2000, the Academy established its own Centre for Application of Renewable Energy (CARE) which focuses on environmental education and consultancy and implementation of renewable energy technologies.

The examples of environmental programmes are as follows:

one-day excursion programmes for secondary schools (approximately 300 students a year), lectures on environmental issues (cca 100 participants yearly), exhibitions & events related to energy and climate change (100 visitors yearly). Environmental consulting is provided approximately to 5-10 organisations per year. A number of programmes has been realized in cooperation with international partners (Germany, Austria, the Netherlands).

As regards for the demonstration of renewable energy technologies, the CARE has installed quite many different types of renewable energy production: solar technologies (thermal of 500 & 1000 litres and photovoltaics of 115 Wp off-grid & 1200 Wp on-grid), a wind turbine (100 kW), small hydro power plant (40,5 kW), biomass (for heating (25 kW) & a biomass powered car. In addition to that, a historical windmill has been restored and put again into operation. The contribution will analyse the work and the future prospects of the Vilémov Centre for Application of Renewable Energy, also discussion possibilities to use it as a „blueprint“ for other centres following the ideas of local and renewable energy production.

The NGO is to a certain extent linked to The Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, however, we honour civic principles.

Respect and love for nature connect us all.