

KraftWerk1: An Approach to a Civilisation beyond Work

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The planetary 'rustbelt': liability and potential

100 years of extensive industrialisation have left vast urban wastelands and abandoned buildings. This 'rustbelt' stretches from the West Coast of the USA to Detroit, from Pennsylvania to New England, from Liverpool across Middle Europe right through the old USSR to Vladivostock and parts of China and Japan. The development of the patriarchal work-machine has devastated large zones of the Northern Hemisphere. While some of these industrial areas are irreversibly polluted, many of them represent an opportunity for new uses, for people seeking to return to urban areas. Whether we like it or not, the 'rustbelt' is the ambiguous heritage of a cycle of development that is now definitely in crisis, be it in ex-socialist or capitalist zones.

Why not consider the re-use of these industrial areas in the context of movements and campaigns for alternative economies and lifestyles? In many urban areas such movements are looking for spaces to meet, to organise and to test new lifestyles. While there is a lack of housing for the homeless, for migrants, young people and others, vast office buildings, assembly-line halls, warehouses, storage areas, and port facilities stand empty and planners cannot offer viable proposals for their re-use.

What we propose is a world-wide movement of appropriation of these spaces as bases for a new civilisation beyond work. Some features of such a civilisation would be:

- the reintegration of most of the industrial production into a new type of extended home-economy;
- the re-creation of local communities (c. 500 people) based on autonomous definitions of their lifestyles, economic self-sufficiency, cultural values, organisational structures;
- a direct link with farmers around the urban centres for subsistence (about 90 hectares per community);
- the exchange of industrial or agricultural products between these communities and the outside economy;
- the reservation of 10% (or more) of the housing space for guests from other communities in the 'rustbelt', or individual travellers from elsewhere;
- the use and development of alternative technologies to achieve energy self-sufficiency of communities, or networks of them;
- the co-operation between communities in enterprises such as the maintenance of a public transportation system (e.g. railroad, Lisbon-Vladivostock; boat, Vladivostock-San Francisco; railroad, San Francisco-New York; boat, New York-Lisbon), and for systems of information (telecommunications), resources, food, mutual help etc.

(All these aspects of a post-capitalist/post-patriarchal society must of course be discussed in more detail.)

KraftWerk 1

The book KraftWerk 1 [1] presents ideas for a project in one of the industrial areas in the western part of the city of Zurich, Sulzer Escher-Wyss, which will soon be vacated. KraftWerk 1 is seen as a pilot-project for similar industrial areas in Switzerland or elsewhere.

The main features set out in KraftWerk 1 are:

- KraftWerk 1 will take over an available industrial site of about 20,000 sqm (or about 5 acres).
- KraftWerk 1 will provide a variety of housing (for 700 people), and jobs for c. 300. It will stimulate diverse forms of housing and employment, with membership open to individuals, co-operatives and public services.
- KraftWerk 1 will be subdivided into 30 to 40 'suites', units of 450 to 600 sqm on two floors, housing 15 to 20 people. These suites will define their own social structure, the standards of equipment, and will be self-financing.
- KraftWerk 1 will negotiate agreements with farmers of the region to stimulate a high level of self-sufficiency.
- Households, production, agriculture and culture will be combined to provide diverse ways of life, so that ecological circuits can be closed, resources used more efficiently and transportation reduced.
- KraftWerk 1 is also seen as an approach to solving the crisis of a society based on waged work which it is less and less able to provide. Between (unpaid) housework and (disappearing) waged work, new forms of making a living in a social context must be tested. Non-monetary waged work, communal services, internal exchange of services and products, create a better life with less work. KraftWerk 1 will redefine living, work and income, with the aim of providing an egalitarian distribution of work between women and men.
- Special funds will be created so that any social or ethnic group will be able to join KraftWerk 1. At least 50% of all administrative boards and committees will be made up of women.
- KraftWerk 1 is not going to be either a citadel or a ghetto. It will be a place where Zurich opens to the world.
- The total cost of Kraftwerk 1 will be about 120 million Sfr. (including the cost of the land, which is about 20 million Sfr.). KraftWerk 1 will be financed by co-operative shares and bank loans. So far, banks have shown lively interest.

To implement the project an association, KraftWerk 1, was founded in August 1993. There are about 150 active members and about 400 supporting members. KraftWerk 1 has had a widespread and mostly positive publicity in the Swiss press. The first large public activity of KraftWerk 1 was KraftWerkSommer in the summer of 1994. More than 60 events took place in a former factory, close to Sulzer Escher-Wyss area. KraftWerkSommer organised discussions on the KraftWerk 1 project, facilitated the exchange of international experience and encouraged the participation of local people in the planning process. A cultural programme, cafes, bars etc. made this event enjoyable and demonstrated that "life is possible after industry and on

abandoned industrial sites". In 1995 KraftWerk 1 organised a series of public discussions in the form of a 'Sofa-University' in the Shedhalle (Rote Fabrik). A co-operative was founded, which now has about 60 members. At this stage talks with owners of possible sites are positive.

KraftWerk 1 as a social project

From its inception, the project KraftWerk 1 was deliberately placed in the context of international discussions around the end of Fordism/Keynesianism and the emergence of a more globalised, neo-liberal model of capitalist expansion. In 1993 we said: "If the economy isn't interested in us any more, we must look for other ways to make a living." Mass unemployment (or the general reduction of the wage-fund) is now a permanently established phenomenon in all old industrial countries. Classical Keynesian methods of trade-cycle policy are no longer effective. Wherever industrial investment is encouraged by state subsidies, this does not create jobs, but leads to more automated and computerised production and further lay-offs. The link between the size of industrial production and the creation of waged labour has definitively been severed. At the same time, the potential for social-democratic solutions based on state intervention has dramatically shrunk. On the one hand, lower tax returns have led to budget cuts and the reduction of welfare, while regulatory measures (like a shorter working week, taxes on energy) can easily be ducked by globally mobile capital. In this situation, trust in 'big' national politics and the self-healing potential of the market economy is melting away like snow on a warm spring day.

For some years attention has been turning to (or returning to) less spectacular initiatives in the immediate 'social' sphere. 'Useful work' without any commercial considerations has been created by local groups of parents (in particular for childcare), in systems like LETS (Local Exchange Trade Systems), by collective subsistence farming in urban or suburban areas and by cultural collectives. In addition the activities of NGOs have expanded during recent years. For the US, recent figures show that 7.1 million jobs, representing 6.8 percent of the GNP, have been created in this sort of activity (cf. Revelli, p. 168). As NGO-activities are partly encouraged by state-subsidies and can be considered as a type of out-sourcing of former state functions (especially in the health and education sectors), using the cheaper work of volunteers, their role is ambiguous – a kind of indirect work-fare. The fact that work is useful and non-profit, does not necessarily imply that it increases direct control and autonomy of communities. All the same, interesting compromises between state agencies, NGOs and autonomous community initiatives are possible.

This approach to the reinvention of useful work in the social sphere can be described as a 'New Commons'. But as the authors of *Eine Kuh für Hillary* point out: "No New Commons without communities". Capital is basically powered by the co-operation and synergy of workers. To achieve this it has had to destroy existing forms of synergy in traditional communities, so that 'free' workers could be incorporated into the labour market. This distillation process of a modern proletariat was made possible by Enclosure; the appropriation of communal lands. Whereas this process is still going on in the South (e.g. New Guinea, Africa), movements to recreate a New Commons on the ruins of industrial capitalism and Fordism have begun in the North. The basis of a return to direct productivity will not be traditional communities (ethnic, religious, tribal), but voluntarily-formed communities with members that are bound together by contracts.

Ideally these new communities would develop organically out of existing neighbourhoods. In fact, there are many promising initiatives in numerous neighbourhoods or older co-operative housing projects. However there are certain constraints in existing neighbourhoods. Their social composition is very heterogeneous, with the interests of the employed, pensioners, the unemployed, and of house-owners and tenants for example, being so diverse, that co-operation is usually restricted to small groups or is short term. This makes many neighbourhood initiatives ineffective and exhausting, and there are countless stories of resigned and embittered 'neighbourhood-activists.'

To overcome this problem, KraftWerk 1 proposes the creation of a community from scratch on formerly uninhabited territory. It will be easier to test the potential of intentional communities when they can be formed by members without any former liabilities.

KraftWerk 1 is therefore not conceived as an 'organic' community, but as a deliberate, artificial creation whose basic rules are predetermined. At this stage, a kind of covenant, or contract, is being set out in a Charter.

Kraftwerk 1 Charter

Preamble

"Share everything.

Play fair.

Don't hit people.

Put things back where you found them.

Clean up your own mess.

Don't take things that aren't yours.

Say sorry when you hurt somebody.

Wash your hands before you eat.

Flush.

Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you.

Live a balanced life – learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some.

Take a nap every afternoon.

When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands, and stick together.

Be aware of wonder. Remember the little seed in the Styrofoam cup: The roots go down and the plant goes up and nobody really knows how or why, but we all are like that.

Goldfish and hamsters and white mice and even the little seed in the Styrofoam cup – they all die. So do we.

And then remember the Dick-and-Jane books and the first word you learned – the biggest word of all – LOOK."

Robert Fulghum, All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten, 1986

Principles and guidelines

Diversity

Accepting that people have different interests, perspectives on life and values, we see diversity as a source of social wealth.

Equality

All persons and groups involved in the project will have the same rights, regardless of gender, origin or income.

Openness

KraftWerk 1 will not be an island, but a meeting place connected with the city, the country and the world.

Solidarity

Existential risks are minimised by a system of collective guarantees. Instead of preventive exclusion, new forms of mutual support are created.

Sovereignty

KraftWerk 1 attempts to provide as many of the essentials of life as possible. Local self-reliance is the basis of a better collective control over material and political conditions.

Sustainability and justice

KraftWerk 1 facilitates lifestyles that are globally sustainable and just. We will not live at the expense of other people, nature or future generations.

Synergy

Household, production, culture and recreation are combined in such a way that they support each other and produce a manifold everyday life.

Voluntarism

Participation in programs, use of facilities etc. shall be voluntary. Goals are mainly reached by incentives.

Means

Suites

KraftWerk 1 makes it possible for groups of inhabitants to rent whole suites (15 – 20 persons, c. 600 sqm, on two floors) and to set them up and run them according to their own desires. Such suite communities can constitute themselves in the form of house-associations. They make sure that manifold lifestyles and concepts of privacy and communal life (singles, couples, families, communities, communal households) can coexist.

Collective infrastructure

KraftWerk 1 provides a wide array of collective services on the premises for child raising, health, food and drink, cleaning, use of goods, hospitality, culture, repairs etc. The services can be extended according to the wishes of the inhabitants. KraftWerk 1 guarantees these services collectively. Users pay an additional share to participate in individually chosen programmes.

Social economic programmes

KraftWerk 1 provides the necessary organisation and space to implement monetary and non-monetary systems of exchange of work and services among its members.

Connection with city and countryside

As much of the food supply as possible is organised via direct delivery contracts with farms in the region. Everyday contacts with these farms are strengthened.

Sustainable lifestyles

KraftWerk 1 implements sustainable lifestyles through organisational, architectural and technical means. It focuses on social measures to reduce excessive use of resources. Technical measures are secondary.

Flexibility and subsidiarity

Regulations are minimal to allow flexibility. Sectorial organisations enjoy full self-determination. As little as possible is delegated upwards. Only the most strategic decisions are made in advance or by higher levels of organisation.

Integrative procedures of decision-making

Purely formal majority decisions are avoided by comprehensive consultations and integrative treatment of minorities. The economic situation of members is taken into consideration in the process of regulating, so that nobody is excluded from KraftWerk 1.

Transparent accounting

All costs are calculated according to the different sectors. Sufficient funds must be allocated for maintenance and the further development of KraftWerk 1. Cross subsidies are to be avoided or, if necessary, they should be clearly targeted and temporally limited.

Duties

All members of the housing co-operative who live in KraftWerk 1 are required to join the organisation of users (OU).

Financial contribution

Additionally to the rent, a certain contribution, depending on income, must be paid to support the collective infrastructure, social programmes and sectorial activities. The sums will be fixed by users, in the phase of realisation.

Temporal engagement

Every member will participate in meetings and work on committees. Members are required to donate a certain amount of time to subsidise internal collective services. Precise regulations will be made by the users in the phase of realisation.

Communication

KraftWerk 1 is based upon the readiness of its inhabitants to deal with problems and conflicts in person and openly.

Rights and entitlements for inhabitants

Rights of use

KraftWerk 1 will endeavour to guarantee a life-long right of lodging for its inhabitants. The infrastructure is at the disposal of all inhabitants according to their individual wishes.

Social assistance

KraftWerk 1 will endeavour to guarantee social security for its inhabitants with social programmes and special funds. It prevents involuntary social isolation through communications initiatives and in its very nature it brings people together.

Democratic participation

KraftWerk 1 members are assured secure democratic participation through its decision-making structures and discussion meetings. It actively encourages participation with translation and advisory services, informal preparation meetings etc.

Information

KraftWerk 1 shall guarantee transparency in every respect. It maintains a big bulletin board, publishes news letters and holds public hearings on demand.

The Organisation of Users (OU)

All boards or committees contain the same number of men and women; if this is not possible, the corresponding seats remain vacant.

There are two separate organisations within KraftWerk 1: one is the (already operating) Building and Housing Co-operative KraftWerk 1 (BHC), and the other is the Organisation of Users of KraftWerk 1 (OU), that will be established after the beginning of construction work. The BHC is responsible for the financing and building of the structures of KraftWerk 1 and its real estate administration. The OU

guarantees the full participation of all users on the premises and organises social and other activities. In some aspects it resembles a tenants-association. This separation of functions and organisation seems useful as it gives the OU more freedom to take risks without endangering the overall existence of the project.

Users

Users are members of the Building and Housing Co-operative, owners of permanent enterprises, long-term workers of these enterprises, inhabitants or inmates and caretakers of associated institutions on the premises, other persons linked to KraftWerk 1 directly and on a long-term basis, and permanent guests. There is a slightly adapted Charter concerning the duties and rights of enterprises and their employees, and for external institutions collaborating with KraftWerk 1.

Sector groups

Users can organise themselves in different sectors or fields of interest (e.g. housing, workshops, culture, work and services exchange, child care), whose goals and organisation must be compatible with those of this Charter. Sectors are acknowledged by the plenary assembly that also lays down the number of their delegates in the KraftWerk 1 council.

Plenary assembly

The plenary assembly includes all users of KraftWerk 1. It decides on modifications of the Charter, the acknowledgement of sector groups and the exclusion of members. It elects the OU board, the controllers and the members of the mediation committee. A plenary assembly can be called by at least 10% of the members, by the KraftWerk 1 council or by the OU board. It is held at least once annually.

KraftWerk 1 Council

The Council consists of the delegates of sector groups and the members of the OU-council. As the heart of KraftWerk 1, it secures communication between the different sectors and manages the whole project. It formulates motions for the plenary assembly and assigns tasks to the OU board. It devises regulations for all sectors or adapts them to changing circumstances.

OU board

It is an executive board, elected by the plenary assembly. One member must also be a member of the executive board of the Building and Housing Co-operative. The OU board is part of the KraftWerk 1-council ex officio. It takes care of current affairs, and administration, accepts members formally and represents the OU officially.

Mediation committee

This intervenes in conflicts that are not resolved between the parties. Mutual agreements are preferred, but if these are not possible, the following sanctions can be taken: publication of the facts and seeking the mediation committee's opinion and the obligation of reparation of damages. The exclusion from the OU for a certain

period of time is the ultimo ratio. Only the plenary assembly can exclude a member, and needs a majority of at least 75%.

Modification of Charter

The Charter can be modified by the plenary assembly with a majority of at least 75%, unless otherwise decided by the BHC.

Implementation

After the beginning of construction work and as soon as the number of prospective users is sufficient, the OU and its organs are constituted. The decision is taken by the board of the Building and Housing Co-operative, which nominates a founding committee. The first plenary assembly will decide on the legal form of the OU and will adapt the Charter and the statute accordingly.

(This Charter has been approved provisionally by a plenary assembly of the KraftWerk 1 association.)

Endnote

[1] The book KraftWerk 1 was published in July 1993 by the authors Martin Blum (artist), Andreas Hofer (architect) and P.M. (writer). It is available at Paranoia City, Bäckerstrasse 9, CH-8004 Zürich, Switzerland; Phone/Fax ++41-1-241 37 05 (100 pages, illustrations; Sfr. 20.- plus postage).

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