



Application for funding of a DFG Humanities Centre for Advanced Studies

***Landnahme, Acceleration, Activation.*
Dynamics and (de-)stabilisation of modern growth societies**

Contents:

- 1 General information
 - 1.1 Topic
 - 1.2 Applicants
- 2 Summary
- 3 *Landnahme*, acceleration, activation – modes of stabilisation in crisis
 - 3.1 Context and core ideas
 - 3.2 Theoretical foundations
- 4 Research questions, fields of interest and theoretical innovations
 - 4.1 What (use) is growth?
 - 4.2 Research questions
 - 4.3 Modus operandi, research topics, theoretical innovations
 - 4.4 Meta themes
- 5 Location, organisational structure, mode of operation and fellows
 - 5.1 Location and staff
 - 5.2 Mode of operation and organisational structure of the research group

1 General information

1.1 Topic

Landnahme, Acceleration, Activation. Dynamics and (de-)stabilisation of modern growth societies.

1.2 Applicants

Klaus Dörre, Professor for the sociology of work, industry and the economy at the FSU Jena (contact person).

e-mail: Klaus.Doerre@uni-jena.de

Stephan Lessenich, Professor for comparative sociology at the FSU Jena.

e-mail: Stephan.Lessenich@uni-jena.de

Hartmut Rosa, Professor for general and theoretical sociology at the FSU Jena.

e-mail: Hartmut.Rosa@uni-jena.de

2 Abstract

Modern societies are dynamic growth societies. Irrespective of their capitalist or socialist origins, their relative stability throughout various periods of crisis has rested and continues to rest on their capacity to increase economic and technical efficiency and material wealth. The current economic and ecological double crisis, however, appears to signify a rupture of this continuity. Increases in wealth have become decoupled from welfare gains, and technologically based economic growth has in itself become a driver of the crisis. For sociology, this entails the need to pose anew the question of how forms of dynamic self-stabilisation and the legitimising principles of modern societies are interrelated. Our assumption is that the logic of incessant *Landnahme*, acceleration and activation may have surpassed a critical threshold beyond which the dynamisation imperatives of capitalist modernity are themselves called into question. Currently, the processes of crisis and change that this has caused seem to challenge the viability of conventional growth regimes. Therefore, the problem of economic growth will be at the centre of attention of the research group we propose. With our object of study in flux, we propose a dialogical approach guided by the principle of constructive controversy. Such a mode of operation will enable us to tackle processes of social change that are as yet undetermined and open through systematic thought experiments and discursive approaches. A Humanities Centre for Advanced Studies would be the ideal environment for pursuing such an experimental approach to the social sciences. The applicants wish to use the research centre as a laboratory for analytical assessment and critical observation of the transformation of capitalist growth regimes. In doing so, we pursue three goals: in a dialogue with internationally renowned sociologists, outstanding junior researchers and selected experts from fields of practice we will (1) analyse the growth problem of modern societies by applying the concepts of *Landnahme*, acceleration and activation. This requires (2) developing the innovative theoretical potential of these concepts of dynamisation. And finally, as an internationally visible forum, the research group will (3) offer a space for debate about the possibilities and limitations of transformation in the direction of non-growth societies. Following the research conducted in SFB 580 and other previous work undertaken by the applicants, the research group proposed here aims to bring sociological expertise to a large-scale societal controversy that will influence public opinion in European countries and elsewhere for years to come.

3 *Landnahme*, acceleration, activation – modes of stabilisation in crisis

3.1 Context and core ideas

The project proposed rests on the assumption that behind the newly intensified controversy about conventional economic growth lies a more deeply-rooted set of problems. It is rooted in the fact that modern societies can only stabilise and reproduce themselves dynamically. Yet, in our understanding, this very principle of dynamic stabilisation is now itself called into question. So far, modern (and for the present that means: capitalist) societies have always needed different sources of growth to ensure their reproduction and stability. But since the onset of the current economic and ecological double crisis (Altwater 2010; Dörre 2010a), limits to conventional growth are becoming increasingly more obvious, because the incessant dynamic of continuous escalation is no longer suited to permanently overcome structural scarcity of resources and other crisis phenomena (Rosa 2005). Unlike former

crises, the 2008/2009 economic crisis has not left the western centres untouched (Sorkin 2009; Galbraith 2009). Instead, every political intervention aimed at stemming the crisis has tended to create new problems. By a conservative estimate, the global crisis-related losses in wealth amounted to 15 trillion US dollars as early as 2009, and the measures aimed at stabilising the banking sector in the 10 most important industrialised countries are estimated to have cost about 5 trillion euro (Steinbrück 2010: 187). In order to come up with these enormous sums, states have no choice but to risk facing a debt overload. As a result, the global economic crisis has been followed by a crisis in state finances (Streeck 2010), a crisis of the global monetary system and a crisis of the established hegemonic regime in international relations (Boris and Schmalz 2011). The social consequences of this constellation are obvious. first and foremost in the anglophone and southern European capitalisms as well as in some developing countries, unemployment, poverty and precarious employment have aggravated considerably (ILO 2008). Even in countries like Germany, where the motor of economic growth has restarted and official unemployment rates are decreasing, low-pay and insecure employment is on the rise. Moreover, economic recovery and widening labour market participation coincide with marked and growing vertical and horizontal inequalities (Statistisches Bundesamt 2009; Vogel 2009; Grabka *et al.* 2010; Weinkopf 2010). Intensified distributional conflicts are a logical consequence. In the Scandinavian countries and in Germany the majority of these conflicts are confined to established institutional arenas. But in states such as France, Spain, China and most recently in the Maghreb and in Egypt, they have occasionally turned into violent revolt (Wacquant 2008; Waddington *et al.* 2009; Roth 2010; Hardt and Negri 2010).

But what is most apparent is that precisely those strategies that were aimed at overcoming the *economic* crisis tend to aggravate the *ecological* crisis. A mere revival of conventional economic growth or of the recent fervid expansion in the BRIC countries is unlikely to be particularly successful, as resource depletion, pollution and the negative effects of climate change (Stern 2007, 2009) tend to be reinforced by such strategies (Welzer 2008; Müller 2009; Grober 2010). The well-known irreversibility of the production of ecological risks (Beck 1986, 1988) is forcing states – primarily those of the western centres – to act within a very short time-frame. For example, in order to reach just the most crucial climate goals, CO₂ emissions in the industrialised nations would have to be cut by 30% by 2020. In actual fact, since the beginning of the 1990s the EU has only achieved a reduction of 1.5%. As social scientists and practitioners conscious of these problems argue, even getting close to these climate goals would require the “most serious structural changes ever faced by an economy” (Machnig 2007: 14f.; Leggewie and Welzer 2009). If the countries of the Global South are to have even the most basic prospects of economic growth, the developed countries will have to quickly renounce conventional growth patterns (Jackson 2009; Galbraith 2009).

Faced with this problem, we believe that any answer to the pressing questions of possibilities, costs and limits to a policy of continuous growth is premised on an understanding of the dynamic character of modern capitalist societies. Independent from each other, the applicants have developed three concepts for the analysis of basic contemporary dynamisation principles. These concepts suggest that the relative stability of capitalist societies (in spite of all the differences between them) rests on permanent processes of (socio-economic) *Landnahme*, (cultural) acceleration and (politically directed) activation. The complementarity of these logics of dynamisation has been outlined and discussed in a

first joint study (Dörre, Lessenich and Rosa 2009). So far, however, fundamental questions such as those concerning the functional interrelatedness of these principles or the limits of social dynamisation remain unaddressed. Most importantly, though, the concepts of dynamisation have not yet been systematically linked to the societal problem of growth and related structural problems. The task of the proposed research group will be to systematically close these gaps and, in the course of an ongoing dialogue with international experts, to condense the results into analytical, diagnostic and socio-political innovations.

As a possible objection against this project, it could be argued that the problematisation of economic and material growth is by no means a new issue in German sociology. As soon as the 1980s, the discipline experienced what could be called an ‘anti-productivist turn’ of sociological thought. The diagnosis of a ‘crisis of labour society’ (‘Krise der Arbeitsgesellschaft’) (Offe 1984: 7; for a critique see Lutz 1984) was as much an expression of this turn as the hypothesis of a ‘colonisation of the lifeworld’ (Habermas 1987: 489–547). Ulrich Beck’s theory of reflexive modernisation (Beck 1986; Beck et al. 1996; Beck, Bonß and Lau 2002) even undertook a large-scale attempt to make global ecological dangers the analytical point of departure for the construction of a ‘new modernity’. Until today, however, the controversy between ‘productivist’ and ‘anti-productivist’ approaches in sociology continues to be marked by a peculiar indeterminateness. The theory of reflexive modernisation, for example, abandons ‘grand’ sociological terms like capitalism and ‘labour society’ (Arbeitsgesellschaft) – only to then reintroduce them in modified form as ‘a new kind of capitalism, a new kind of work’ (Beck, Bonß and Lau 2002: 13). Although phrases such as ‘capitalism without work’ are portrayed as provincial and Eurocentric by other authors (Castells 2001: 282–212; Silver 2005; Harvey 2010), simply holding on to established concepts can lead to a kind of theoretical conservatism that must end up in a state of unsettling disorientation, if only because of its inability to adequately analyse the specific nature of the economic and ecological double crisis. If the problem of the theory of reflexive modernisation is that it assumes the ‘logic of risk distribution’ to be superimposing itself on or even displacing the class-bound ‘logic of wealth distribution’, then competing theoretical interpretations that continue to refer to the notion of capitalism run the risk of either remaining analytically oblivious of the problem of growth (Crouch and Streeck 1997; Hall and Soskice 2001; Windolf 2005; Streeck 2009), strongly relativising it (Bachinger and Matis 2009; Reich 2010) or reducing it to a problem of accumulation and profit (Brenner 2003; Roth 2010; for a critique see Altvater 2010).

Unlike both the ‘productivist’ and ‘anti-productivist’ positions from the *first phase* of theoretical debate, we believe that the interdependencies between growth and the dynamics of capitalist development have by no means been sufficiently explained. In the *second phase* of sociological reflection that is currently being initiated, such a process of specification becomes possible, since in the meantime major economic and political decisions are being taken that test the relationship between capitalist market economies and material growth in a very practical way. What is new is not so much the scientifically substantiated criticism of growth, but the fact that currently, in the process of struggling to find ways out of the current dilemma, possible avenues of transition towards alternative social orders are becoming visible, as well as the factors that are blocking them. But unlike during the transformation period of post-socialist societies in Eastern Europe, there is currently no ideal model of

a society that could serve as a reference point for the potential proponents and supporters of a new social order. On the contrary: with material growth itself becoming a problem, a central source of legitimacy for those welfare capitalisms that for a short historical period had become the focal point for the transformation of the former state socialist societies is in danger of eroding.

Meinhard Miegel (2010), an important exponent of German conservatism, has unsparingly addressed the problems of legitimacy faced by a capitalist system that is forced to curb material growth. The departure from the 'ideology of growth' that he demands will particularly affect the legitimacy of continental European 'social capitalism' (Sennett 2007: 27). According to Miegel, the West should not deceive itself: "It is not its system of values that has been victorious, but its material superiority. If twenty years ago people had been free but poor in the West, and politically restrained but wealthy in the East, then socialism would probably have prevailed. That it did not was not due to its lack of freedom but to its economic inefficiency. Put more precisely: if the East had been economically more efficient, it could also have accommodated more freedom..." (Miegel 2010: 59 f.). This poignant statement points to the close link between growth and institutional stability. Should it prove impossible to provide legitimacy beyond material growth, then this will inevitably affect the integrating powers of such basic social institutions as salaried work, the market economy, the welfare state and parliamentary democracy. Faced with large-scale distributional conflicts and struggling for their survival, the societies of 'actually existing capitalism' may well turn out to be open to severe cut backs on civil liberties (Wallerstein 2008; Crouch 2008).

No matter whether one is intrigued by such dramatic scenarios or not, they demonstrate the socially explosive potential inherent to the problem of growth. This is also reflected in the fact that positions critical of growth are beginning to surface across all political affiliations. It is no longer merely progressive thinkers from the Green Party who expound the problems at least of conventional growth patterns (Fücks and Steenbock 2007). In different and at times more radical forms – such as the *Décroissance* movement that started in France and receives a lot of attention there – growth criticism can be found among conservatives (Miegel 2010) as well as among social democrats (Müller and Niebert 2009; Steinbrück 2010; Scheer 2010), socialists (Kipping 2009; Sarkar 2010) and authors critical of globalisation (Paech 2005; Mahnkopf 2010).

Be this as it may, in the practice of business and government the need for and importance of growth is as yet almost unchallenged. At the same time, in business and politics (Paqué 2010) as well as in the social sciences (Hinterberger *et al.* 2009), there are serious calls for a modified and, for example, technology-oriented (Münch 2009, 2009a, 2009b) growth paradigm. The new wave of conflicts surrounding technological progress and most of all the broad support such protests receive in society – as in the dispute surrounding the new railway station in Stuttgart (Stuttgart 21) (Rucht 2010) – back our assumption that the developed capitalist societies of the North have reached a critical turning point. The mere continuation of the dynamisation spiral no longer seems to be a sufficient means for containing the new rifts running through society. Instead, the basic dynamisation principles turn out to have dysfunctional effects with regard to the socio-economic, political and cultural reproduction of capitalism. It is precisely this fact that forces sociological research to develop a modified theoretical and empirical approach to the imperatives of dynamisation of modern capitalist societies. Only in this

way can we acquire a firm basis from which to develop the instruments needed to analyse current and future social transformations.

3.2 Theoretical foundations

Possibly due to their longstanding unquestioned acceptance, the basic dynamisation principles of modernity have seldom been the subject of sociological research. This is where our project departs from. Over the past few years, the applicants – each on his own at first, then in a joint process – have developed a research programme that places these systemic imperatives of dynamisation in the centre of scientific attention. This programme, which was inspired by the research of SFB 580, focuses on current developments of the Modern era, which is now an exclusively capitalist age. *Landnahme*, *acceleration* and *activation* stand for key analytical concepts designed to capture the dynamics within capitalism independently of the specific capitalist formation in question. All known capitalisms to date could only establish themselves as relatively stable formations because they managed to integrate the systemic imperative of dynamisation into their specific 'social orders' (Streeck 2009). Capitalism, therefore, is not simply a type of society that relies on the market as a mechanism of coordination, on the self-valorisation of value or on bureaucratic rationalisation. In fact, capitalisms can only reproduce and stabilise themselves as long as they are capable of permanently renewed processes of *Landnahme* (Dörre 2009a, 2010a), of constant increases in technical, social and cultural acceleration (Rosa 2005, 2010) and of a political activation of individuals and collectives that unceasingly renews the modes in which capitalist socialisation reproduces itself (Lessenich 2008, 2011). As they are the theoretical starting point of research and discussion at the research group proposed, we want to provide a short outline of these three key analytical concepts.

(1) *Landnahme*, originally a socio-economic concept, primarily describes the spatial-temporal as well as sectoral expansion of capitalism into non-capitalist environments. According to this theorem, the valorisation of capital is always dependent on the occupation or, if necessary, the 'active creation' (Harvey 2005: 139) of a non-capitalist 'other'. *Landnahme* always implies simultaneous processes of 'land abandonment' (*Landpreisgabe*) and is therefore never to be understood as a linear, purely economic process or as a one-dimensional 'real subsumption' under capital (Lutz 1984). The reformulated concept of *Landnahme* as it is used here has been decoupled from theories of inevitable economic breakdown (Dörre 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2011a). For the post-fordist era, it diagnoses a market-driven dynamic that establishes itself (albeit filtered by institutional systems and mediated through social conflict) even *within* fully developed capitalisms (Streeck 2005). Institutions and organisational forms that previously served to contain the market are being hollowed out and remodeled, spatial and temporal fixes of capital are being broken up in order to mobilise creative destruction for a revitalisation of capitalist accumulation. Despite the predictions of classical industrial location theories, this does not lead to a harmonic equilibrium; indeed, processes of *Landnahme* are facing new limits. The revision of the concept of *Landnahme* originally focused on the *social* limits of financial capitalist expansion (Windolf 2005, Deutschmann 2006), on the explanation of historically new forms of precarity (Castel and Dörre 2009), on modified regulations of class conflict (Dörre 2010d) and on a new synthesis of sociology and social critique. Yet the predominantly 'female' face of precarisation soon showed that the analysis of *Landnahme* had to be related more comprehensively to

the question of the reproduction of capitalist societies (Jürgens 2010). As the *Landnahme* theorem is open to gender-sensitive analyses of social transformation (Dölling 2010: 42), it also offers a possibility to systematically relate the social and ecological questions to one another. It currently seems likely that the economic and ecological double crisis marks a historical turning point at which a cycle of *Landnahme* has come to an end. At this point, the historical ‘fall of man’ (Arendt 2006: 335) that is the breaking of economic laws by political action must repeat itself. Perhaps the ‘perpetuum mobile’ (Luxemburg 1975: 16) of extended capital reproduction can be temporarily reactivated by projects such as a state-driven (Schimank 2009) Green New Deal. But even in such a case the structural imperative of growth enacted by processes of capitalist *Landnahme* will probably provoke social conflicts over distribution and ecological conflicts over progress (Welzer 2008; Lipietz 2009). These in turn will then act as immanent limits of such a project.

(2) *Acceleration* is a concept inspired by cultural sociology that focuses on the temporal structure and the time regimes of modern (and currently: capitalist) societies. It postulates that capitalist formations (and modern societies in general) are characterised by the simultaneous appearance of three (logically independent) processes of acceleration that mutually reinforce each other in a self-amplifying circular movement: the intentional acceleration of goal-oriented processes (technical acceleration), the increasing rate of socio-cultural change (acceleration of social change) and finally the rising number of episodes of action and/or experience per unit of time (acceleration of [the speed] of life). The principle of acceleration is postulated as a shared essence of all capitalisms, whereby intra-capitalist changes of formation (for example to Fordism and later to post-Fordism) are reconstructed based on the logic of escalation of speed (Harvey 2010). The inherent connection between processes of growth and acceleration phenomena, which can be demonstrated to be a constraint of mandatory nature both economically (especially at the level of production and distribution) as well as culturally (for example in consumption patterns, see Rosa 2005: Chapter VII), is a theme of central importance for the research of the group whose funding we propose.. The permanent deceleration in certain functionally defined areas of society that has come to be demanded by a multitude of social actors can only be conceived of under conditions of non-growth. At the points of transition from an intergenerational to a generational, and from there finally to an intra-generational speed of social change, the theorem of acceleration identifies fundamental cultural rifts concerning subject formation and political governance. Central to this diagnosis is the dialectic of dynamisation and congealment that currently expresses itself in a widespread cultural and political perception of high-speed inertia, or ‘polar inertia’ (Virilio 1998) consisting of a tendency towards a hardening and solidification of social structures and processes that takes place behind the façade of high rates of material and substantial change and growth.

(3) *Activation*, in the way it is used here, is an analytical concept that aims at updating and extending Claus Offe’s theory of ‘late capitalism’ (Offe 2006) by integrating it with a sociology of knowledge and linking it to the research interests of Foucauldian governmentality studies (Burchell *et al.* 1991; Krasmann and Volkmer 2007; Bröckling *et al.* 2000, 2011). At the centre of this analytical perspective are the forms, mechanisms and effects of the permanent political and social intervention of welfare state institutions. Modern capitalism, with its specific constitutional and reproductive logic, can only be understood as a ‘politicised’ procedural structure, whose innate crisis-prone tendencies demand

ever new adaptations and innovations to the set of regulatory instruments available to the modern state's steering and control functions. In this sense, 'activation' not only represents the most recent stage of the metamorphoses of capitalism's regulation through the welfare state; it is a virtually transhistorical structural principle of its dynamisation. In the wake of the most recent change of formation towards 'flexible capitalism' (Sennett 1998), the intervention patterns of welfare state policies increasingly aim at the advancement of, demand for and formation of mobile and active subjects. This entails a momentous reinterpretation and relocalisation of social responsibility for the creation and safeguarding of 'the social' in (and of) capitalism: It is no longer the state (as the institutionalised general public), nor the market with its mechanisms of spontaneous coordination, that weaves the 'social bond' in which integrates flexible capitalist society. Instead, this task is politically assigned to the citizens of the 'active society' (Dean 1995; Walters 1997; Lessenich 2009a, 2011a), who are called upon as economic (directed by interests) and moral (community-oriented) actors at the same time. In this process, man, and therefore the whole of this capitalist social formation, becomes a 'perpetuum mobile': an actor who not only cares for him-/herself but also for the economic and social reproduction of the system, and who can never be sufficiently active and mobile nor ever show sufficient initiative. In this figure of the 'active citizen', the imperative of growth and expansion inherent to late capitalist modernity is effectively privatised: What, in the heyday of the 'Keynesian welfare state', had been a task of direct political intervention, is now entrusted to the subjects themselves by the 'activating welfare state'. Even though these changes may be interpreted as a 'de-politisation' of statehood, such a strategy of relieving the state of responsibilities nonetheless goes hand-in-hand with new forms of the 'politicisation' of subjectivity, which in turn are likely to generate historically new sorts of legitimisation problems for the state in the wake of the economic and ecological double crisis.

The principles of dynamisation inherent to capitalist societies analysed here encompass a multitude of mechanisms that structurally anchor the imperatives of growth in capitalist societies and thus contribute to their crisis-laden reproduction. Among these mechanism is the systemic constraint enforcing extended capital reproduction that is inherent to *Landnahme*, the generalisation of the principle of competition and the abstraction from use value that is particularly advanced in the financial sector, as well as the so-called 'four treadmills' (positional, hedonic, multi-option and time-saving devices) (Binswanger 2006), and the negative 'rebound effects' (Hinterberger 2009: 49 f.) for quality of life resulting from them, which are referred to in different ways by the acceleration and activation theorems.

4 Research questions, fields of interest and theoretical innovations

Landnahme, acceleration and activation are neither unidirectional nor linear; they periodically lead to minor or major social crises. Yet for long historical periods, material growth and the prospects of welfare gains associated with it were seen as effective means of overcoming crises. This is beginning to change, as the recourse to conventional growth patterns as a strategy for getting over economic crises now inevitably aggravates the ecological crisis, while, under current conditions, slowdowns in growth result in unemployment, poverty and precarity. Therefore there are basically only two ways to escape the economic and ecological double crisis: "One is to make growth sustainable; the other is to

make de-growth stable” (Jackson 2009: 128). Those transformations that are actually brought about within and the short to medium term, however, will most likely be located somewhere *in between* these two poles. One example may serve to illustrate how difficult it is to achieve a change of direction: In China, currently the powerhouse of the global economy, the government expects that a GDP growth rate in the order of 8% will be needed to successfully integrate migrants from the countryside into the urban labour market. Nonetheless, for as early as 2005, the Chinese Academy of Science found that there was in fact a net negative growth rate, as the losses resulting from environmental degradation were greater than the value created by the growth of the domestic product (Trattnigg 2009: 15; Schmalz 2010). For a large part of the populations of the Global South, zero growth would effectively mean remaining in poverty. Today there are over 700 million people in informal employment who earn less than 1.25 US dollars per day and therefore live in absolute poverty (ILO 2009). Such data points to the enormous difficulties confronted by any attempt to globally align diverging interests to the common goal of ecological *and* social sustainability. This is another reason why modern non-growth societies are currently just as theoretical a possibility as ecologically viable and socially sustainable growth societies. For an experimental alignment of ideas, however, both of these options may be construed as fictitious sociological ‘others’, the view from which not only allows for a critical analysis of actual social dynamics, but also opens up a means of understanding the *strategic choices* open to key actors in society.

The research group we propose aims at this kind of scientifically hazardous endeavour. With the three compatible and combinable analytical concepts of *Landnahme*, acceleration and activation, we possess a potent set of tools for reflecting on the crisis-laden dynamic of modern capitalisms in a sociological debate. In this debate, we aim to *firstly* identify concrete structurally forced growth dynamics in a manner that is both theoretically and empirically coherent, *secondly* to analyse the political, economic and cultural mechanisms through which those dynamics are enforced, and *thirdly* to identify the risks, limits and crisis-prone tendencies linked to each of these mechanisms. *Fourthly*, we will be looking at possible ways to suspend or overcome those structural dynamics. To establish such a critical sociology of the transformation of dynamic capitalist growth societies we believe it is necessary to take up a ‘complex external position’ (Boltanski 2010: 25). Only from such a position is it even possible to systematically assess the phenomena that we wish to critically interrogate. At the same time, this type of external position makes it possible to link analyses of actual developments to a hermeneutics of the everyday social critique of individuals and social groups. The research group would provide the organisational framework needed to develop the perspective of such a ‘complex outside position’ – if at first meta-theoretically. We will elaborate on this in more detail with respect to the focus on growth (4.1), to our central research questions (4.2), to the main research themes and the theoretical innovations we are aiming for (4.3), and finally to the relevant meta-issues (4.4).

4.1 What (use) is growth?

In the developed capitalisms and their (state) socialist counterparts (among others), ‘growth’ has habitually been understood to be synonymous to material growth of the economy. It was taken for granted that this kind of material growth would eventually lead to social progress and greater welfare. In reaction to the Club of Rome’s prognoses, the ‘Global 2000’ scenario, the activities of ecological

and green movements as well as the tidal wave of growth-critical literature published since the 1970s, a gradual change of mind does seem to be occurring. Nonetheless, national economies continue to measure growth – and, implicitly, welfare – in terms of GDP and GNP indicators. The strong connection between economic growth and social welfare that transnational actors such as the Beyond-GDP Initiative or the Stiglitz Commission and critical sectors of the public (such as the *Décroissance* movement and the Degrowth conferences) have repeatedly put on the agenda is now increasingly becoming the subject of critically reflection even by economic and political elites. Evidently, GDP is a very unreliable indicator of growth. For one thing, as a measured quantity it does not recognise any services rendered outside the market. For another, simply adding up the value of goods and services obscures their unequal distribution, making it practically impossible to say anything meaningful about social welfare on the basis of GDP alone. But these deficiencies reveal much more than a simple problem of measurement. Acting as the central indicators of a growth-oriented mode of social regulation (Aglietta 1979; Boyer and Durand 1997), measures like GDP and GNP have rendered invisible the costs of the extensive exploitation of natural resources and fossil fuels as well as the related pollution of the biosphere, in effect helping to cover up the amount of destruction caused by growth (Grün and Wiener 1984; Busch and Land 2009).

Regardless of the cogency of such interpretations, what is new is that even governments, economic elites and transnational institutions have begun a search for new and better indicators of welfare and growth (Hinterberger *et al.* 2009). The Stiglitz Commission convoked by the French President has called for a segregation of indicators for welfare from those for growth. It recommends focusing on income and consumption for measuring welfare, while factoring the unequal distribution of income and the value created by non-market services into growth calculations (Stiglitz *et al.* 2009). Alternative indicators aiming to measure a ‘green GDP’, such as the Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW) or the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI), refer not only to the distribution of income but also to the depletion of ‘natural capital’. In addition to this concert of actors, the German Bundestag has itself set up a fact finding commission on the controversy about growth and welfare.

This is of sociological interest, because there is much more behind the debate on alternative growth indicators than simply a ‘technical’ change in measurement. However one may view these indicators: Implementing them as basic parameters for modes of regulation and systems of governmental control would bring about far-reaching transformations that would, in one way or other, affect the fundamental institutions of capitalist societies. Yet so far, precisely this fact is still only partially present in the controversies between the elaborate advocates of growth and the no less elaborate critics of growth. Sceptics claim that the ‘ideology of growth’ must be broken, at least in the developed countries. Central to such positions is the assumption that mankind is living beyond its means in terms of resource and energy use – measured by such constructs as the ecological footprint (Wuppertaler Institut 2005; Meadows and Randers 2006). Pointing to results from happiness research (Stevenson and Wolfers 2008) and studies on the quality of life, it is claimed that a permanent increase in material progress beyond a certain point will not automatically lead to further gains in welfare and happiness. The possible consequences envisaged for the capitalist centres range from a gradual transition toward zero growth (Binswanger 2009: 224–228; Miegel 2010; Mahnkopf 2010) to positions advocating qualitative growth (Aichberger and Zednicek 2009: 134–141) or even the vision of a radical shrinking

of capitalist economies (Paech 2005, 2009: 215–223). Meanwhile, supporters of growth (Paqué 2010) argue that economic growth will be just as necessary in future as it was in the past, since it would not be possible to effectively combat inequalities without it. Not tackling social inequality, however, would mean that a transition toward sustainability will remain an utopia (Jackson 2009). Consequently (even Keynesian) supporters of growth reach an almost fatalist conclusion: “The high level of inequality makes more growth mandatory, while at the same time hindering it. Only further growth can effectively bolster the lower income groups, and less inequality will eventually reduce the need for growth. What remains unclear, though, is whether the environment can wait that long” (Sturn and van Treeck 2010: 20).

4.2 Research questions

The controversies between advocates and opponents of growth are of central importance for our research project, because they reflect that the dynamisation principles of capitalist societies are becoming the subject of scrutiny at a very basic level. Whichever way these societies may actually go, the change discussed in all possible scenarios inevitably affects their fundamental social institutions. Be it the ‘keep going’ attitude of a growth-oriented logic of escalation or an overt and conflictual departure from this dynamic – both would influence the core capitalist modernity's socialisation principles, the potential of society to provide inclusive compromises and create social cohesion. What is at stake are the – previously pivotal – media of social integration in developed capitalism: Economic prosperity, socially protected employment, welfare state regulation and the potential of democratic procedures and institutions to mitigate conflicts. For this reason, the applicants aim to assess the tension between systemic dynamisation imperatives and normatively grounded criticisms of growth by looking at four fundamental institutions of capitalist societies. Our research will focus on (1) the socialisation potential of work, employment and social conflicts of distribution, (2) the relationship between economic growth, prosperity and a ‘fulfilled life’, (3) the relationship between changes in social structure and welfare state regulation and (4) the ability of societies to settle disputes through democratic institutions, procedures and public spheres. In the context of the research group, four main questions crop up regarding these basic institutions. These are formulated here from the ‘external position’ of a non-growth society:

- (1) What does the potential transition to non-growth mean for the organisation of work in society and the function of social (class) conflicts?
- (2) Can the systemic growth imperative and social welfare be decoupled from each other? Can a society without growth improve the quality of life for a majority of its people?
- (3) What does the transition to non-growth imply for the structure of social inequality, constellations of interests in social policy and for the regulatory capacities of developed welfare states?
- (4) Can the transition to a non-growth society be democratically controlled and negotiated?

Each of these questions can also be posed from the ‘external position’ of an ecologically and socially sustainable growth society. Both perspectives allow for critical assessment of empirically measurable developments and are therefore to be represented within the research group.

4.3 Modus operandi, research topics, theoretical innovations

Departing from these research questions we can identify four fields of interest for the research group. At least for the developed capitalisms of the Global North, a transition towards non-growth societies would in actual fact require overcoming the logic of continuous escalation that is inherent in the processes of *Landnahme*, acceleration and activation. This shared assumption allows us to take up a 'complex external position' (Boltanski 2010), even if the normative foundations of such a position are still a point of contention between the applicants. While from the point of view of the *Landnahme* theorem, capital accumulation and non-growth are ultimately incompatible, its assessment of the prospects for a temporary revitalisation of capitalism that could create some leeway for sustainable qualitative growth is far more optimistic than the one that could be formulated from the perspective of the paradigm of acceleration. The theory of activation represents a third position within this field, inasmuch as it directs our attention toward the political and social constraints that a possible continuation of a growth-driven dynamic of development in capitalist societies would entail.

Modus operandi of the research group, role of the fellows

This controversy is effectively the leitmotif of the group's planned research, and it is the reason for choosing the dialogical method that is to be its modus operandi. Our underlying objective is to confront empirical developments within the field of study with a critical analysis undertaken from the counterfactual point of view of a society of non-growth (or a sustainable growth society). The cooperative research process will proceed according to the principle of thesis and antithesis: In each case, the thesis will be put forward from the perspective of that theorem of dynamisation that is most relevant to the respective topic. The antithesis shall be based on the paradigm whose diagnosis most strongly contrasts with the central working hypothesis. Both thesis and antithesis can be formulated doubly, that is, once for the dominant developmental trend, as well as for possible alternative options. The research group will deploy this dialogical method for its work on the first three themes. The examination of the democratic question will then offer the applicants room for reflection and synthesis, since it is the democratic principle that in the end will provide the measure of quality of the anticipated societal change. In addition to the applicants, *fellows* will play an essential role in the cooperative research process. Their task will be to act as *stimulators* and *innovators*. It is they who are to prevent the group's discussions from becoming entrenched in a controversy between three individuals. Fellows shall intervene in the debate by providing their own contributions and publications, adding to the visibility of the research centre on an international scale. A special task for some of the fellows (including Fraser, Jaeggi and Mahnkopf) will be to devote special attention to the *gendered* dimension of social transformations – a concern that according to experience requires some 'external' support, considering that this proposal is filed by three men.

In addition, the fellowships particularly meant to encourage debate on the *transnational* dimension of the growth problem. Particular attention will be devoted to intellectual exchange with researchers from both North and South America as well as to cooperation with research institutions in Russia (Moscow Higher School of Economics), and Southeast Asia (National University of Singapore). While the intensity and scope of the fellows' tasks will vary according to the length of their fellowships, the

periods of their residency will be determined depending on their respective role in connection to the main research topics. These topics will also be points of departure for the theoretical innovations to be developed in a collective process together with the fellows.

For each of the topics we will now outline: a) its focus and content; b) the theoretical innovations we aim to develop; and c) the constellation of the persons to be involved, including the central role of the senior fellows (who will be in residency for up to 12 months).

(1) Growth, work and social conflict

(a) *Focus:* Despite Marx's predictions, (socially protected) wage labour has proven to be an immense machine for promoting social integration for many decades throughout the era of prosperous welfare capitalism. In turn, this has enabled a 'pacification' of class conflict (Müller-Jentsch 2008). Yet with the onset of market-driven *Landnahme* and the decline of "capitalism without a reserve army" (Lutz 1984: 186), these developments have come to a halt, the grave consequences of which have only become obvious within the past decade. Although, throughout the world, more people than ever depend on paid employment; socially protected wage labour is no longer the norm even in the capitalist centres (ILO 2008). Instead, the increasingly precarious and casual nature of employment is reducing the socially integrative potential of dependent employment. The 'feminisation' of labour is closely linked to a proliferation of more insecure ways of life (Aulenbacher 2009; Castel and Dörre 2009; Manske and Pühl 2010). At the same time, social conflict exerts a fragmenting effect: Spheres in which normed types of conflict regulation had been established are shrinking, whereas non-normed conflicts – labour unrest, revolts, uprisings and violent protest – are returning even to the developed capitalisms (Silver 2005; Brinkmann *et al.* 2008). From the perspective of the *Landnahme* theorem, these developments can be interpreted as expressions of a functional change both of wage labour and social (class) conflict (Dörre 2010d, 2011b). Currently, there is little evidence supporting the thesis that labour society is coming to an end, since "work has never been of more central importance to the process of value creation" (Castells 2001: 319). However, at least in many parts of the Global South, employees have never been "as vulnerable as they are in the present, regardless of what qualifications they may have" (*ibid.*). The theorem of *Landnahme* suggests that a transition to non-growth would not necessarily question the centrality of work and of distributional conflicts. Instead, in the future, the limits to material growth might actually contribute to an aggravation of labour disputes. A gradual departure from conventional forms of mass production and consumerism, which is being debated as a possible solution, would only restore integrative function of wage labour with respect to its qualitative dimensions (job content, social relations). This has led a number of authors to call for a return to a concept of work based on preindustrial notions of craftsmanship (Sennett 2008; Miegel 2010). Dörre, who will be the protagonist in this field, sees a more realistic alternative in proposals such as those found in feminist discourse that aim to restore the social character of wage labour through *Landpreisgabe* (an abandonment of territories) that could once again link it up with other (reproductive) activities (Dölling 2010: 31–46; Aulenbacher 2010: 75–101; or classically: Arendt 2010: 161 ff.). In contrast, the 'anti-productivist' *activation theorem* foregrounds the liberation from forced wage labour and the extension of legitimate status positions within the system of the social

division of labour as elements of alternate options for social development (Lessenich 2009d, 2009e, 2011b).

(b) *Theoretical innovation: The theory of capitalist Landnahme as a multi-level concept*

So far, a sociological theory of capitalist *Landnahme*, which could explain the functional changes of (salaried) work and social conflict, exists only in fragments. Drawing on the New Economic Sociology, Dörre explains the dynamic of *Landnahme* processes as resulting from the tension between the market as a principle of social organisation and the political-institutional formation of markets, which itself largely rests on the cooperation and solidarity inherent to processes of work. Whereas institutionalist economic sociology is primarily interested in how the process of market formation is politically and institutionally stabilised (Fligstein 2001), the concept of *Landnahme* implies that dominant capitalist players (companies, property owners and managers) periodically exhibit an interest in circumventing social rules as 'first movers' in order to make extra profit (Streeck 2009: 241). They can achieve this through the occupation, or even the active creation, of 'external markets', in which the capitalist rationale of equivalent exchange is no longer (or only partially) valid. Such markets – 'external' to capitalism because their practices and concrete shape are not dictated by the capitalist principle – exist in multiple forms, such as unemployed workers, regions lying waste or public goods that have been de-commodified within nation-states. From a *Landnahme* perspective, the use of 'external' markets in conjunction with either the destruction of market-forming institutions, opportunist attempts to bend social rules or the establishment and intensification of 'secondary exploitation' (by using mechanisms of patriarchal oppression or constructing a transitory status for migrants; Dörre 2010c) can be interpreted as a variant of regressive modernisation.

However, in this case as in any other it should be kept in mind that capitalist *Landnahme* is always a set of contingent multi-level processes. While, since Marx (1867/1973), theoretical concepts have primarily argued from the macro perspective, the new version of the *Landnahme* concept in its current state (Dörre 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2010a, 2010b, 2010d) is primarily an empirical finding. Research into corporate governance (Dörre and Holst 2009), precarisation (Brinkmann *et al.* 2006; Holst *et al.* 2009), the reorganisation of universities (Dörre and Neis 2010), industrial policy networks (Dörre and Röttger 2006) and labour market regimes (Bescherer *et al.* 2009) has identified transfer mechanisms at the meso and micro level, which could then be condensed into the potentially explanatory concept of a *new Landnahme*. Exactly how the interrelationships between macro-level restructuring on the one hand and social fields and specific rules (Bourdieu 1993) at the meso and micro level on the other play out has yet to be explained and is therefore in need of both methodological and theoretical reflection (Esser 1999, 2000; Schimank 2009). As the example of financial market-oriented corporate governance demonstrates (Dörre and Brinkmann 2005; Dörre and Holst 2009; Dörre *et al.* 2011), there is usually a first step of installing general principles, which then trigger field-specific processes of *Landnahme*. These, however, always encounter stubborn, unwieldy practical rationalities and wayward actors. This results in changes that, often occurring within the confines of seemingly intact institutions, can signal more than just gradual change in the long term, but are constantly being affected by counter-movements 'from below'. We intend to exemplarily study this by focusing on the functional changes in wage labour and social (distributional) conflicts. Taking, for example,

transnational value chains as a guideline, these processes of change will be analysed in a transnational and gender-differentiated perspective. The starting point of the analysis is the assumption that contemporary modes of the valorisation of work are increasingly reliant on functionalising reproductive activities. This process of *Landnahme*, often described as a blurring of the boundaries ('Entgrenzung') of employment (Sauer 2005), dramatically weakens the cohesive effects of wage labour and organised labour relations and produces new social actors and conflicts. As of yet, there is no substantive theory of this process (Aulenbacher and Wetterer 2009; Böhle *et al.* 2010). Consequently, the theoretical innovation in this field will consist of merging approaches taken from New Political Economy (Bieling 2007) and economic sociology (Maurer 2007), which pay little attention to 'work', with approaches from the sociology of work and from inequality research that often only take account of society as a 'context'. This theoretical hybridisation, undertaken from the growth-critical 'external position', is to enable a new kind of multi-level perspective.

(c) *Cast*: Klaus Dörre (protagonist), Stephan Lessenich (antagonist), Hartmut Rosa (moderator). We plan to include Birgit Mahnkopf (Berlin), Robert Castel (Paris), Luc Boltanski (Paris) and possibly Loïc Wacquant (Berkeley) as senior fellows. Birgit Mahnkopf is qualified in the sociology of work and has recently taken up an exposed and elaborate critical stance on growth. She represents a transnational analytical perspective and provides considerable scientific competence in the field of labour relations, social movements and labour conflicts. The French sociologists would be an intellectual enrichment to any research context in the social sciences. Robert Castel is a prominent driving force in the international debate on precarity; Loïc Wacquant can contribute his expertise on non-normed social conflicts; and Luc Boltanski embodies the highest levels of competence in theories of capitalism and the sociology of work.

(2) *Growth and prosperity*

(a) *Focus*: In the debate between the critics and supporters of growth, the possibility of a de-coupling of prosperity from economic growth provides a common point of reference. Yet actually reaching this point in social reality would require halting the dynamic of social *acceleration*. From the perspective of the acceleration theorem, developed societies have long passed the turning point beyond which material growth no longer adds to the wealth of the majority of the population. On the contrary, the continuation of the dynamic of growth and acceleration apparently considerably limits the chances for an autonomously led, fulfilled life. Accordingly, critiques of growth need a normative foundation from which normative orientations can be condensed into conceptions of what a 'fulfilled life' could be.. Breaking the dynamic of growth and acceleration seems possible by way of putting an end to a kind of alienation that is interpreted to be independent from any specific capitalist formation and hidden behind the surface of class-based and distributional conflicts (Rosa 2009a, 2009c). This diagnosis, presented by Rosa as this field's protagonist, is also controversially debated among the applicants. Rosa has analysed acceleration and growth as universal escalatory phenomena, from which there is no escape within capitalist society. As far as the problem of alienation hidden behind this is universal, alternative concepts will require a new enlightenment, which starts out among the elites. The antithesis is formulated from the perspective of the theory of *Landnahme*. It states that even the developed societies of the Global North will, at least for a transitory period, need a qualitative, social type of

growth, driven primarily by an expansion in social services. Even this, however, could only be achieved through social struggle and by way of overcoming the asymmetrical distribution of power.

(b) Theoretical innovation: A critical sociology of our relation to the world

One of our central research interests is directed at how the threefold, closely interwoven escalatory logic of growth, acceleration, and the intensification of innovation affects the way culture relates to the world as well as subject–world relations. In the developed industrial nations the future is increasingly perceived as bleak (Nassehi 1993), further growth, acceleration and innovation are no longer linked to hopes for progress – in the sense of an increased quality of life or well-being – and political reform is no longer justified by the prospect of improving the ‘human condition’, but by the threat of decline and defeat in the race for permanent escalation. These observations are the starting point from which, as a fundamentally new element, we wish to launch an enquiry into the sources, manifestations and consequences of disruptions to the relationship between subjects and the world. To this end we intend to deploy the concept of alienation which has recently been revived by Rahel Jaeggi (2005) and others. In the present context, alienation is not to be interpreted as referring to situations that run afoul of human nature conceived in substantialist or even essentialist terms. Instead, it designates a disruption in the capacity to actively appropriate or assimilate things, activities and people, or in relations to space, time, society and one's own body (Rosa 2009b). In order to make such a notion of alienation analytically selective and empirically fruitful, we need to systematically develop a positive counter-concept of a fulfilled, non-alienated relation to the world. As such a concept, the notion of resonance relation is to be established and explored. It is based on the assumption that subjects experience the world, their life, actions and social relations as fulfilling when they experience resonance. The concept of resonance can be understood as a fundamental modification and extension of the concept of recognition as introduced by Honneth, Taylor and others. According to Honneth, social struggles, subjective aspirations and moments of fulfilment can all be traced back to the experience of social recognition. Taylor also views identity and recognition as correlative. Yet a crucial problem of this approach seems to be that its conceptual framework cannot capture a large number of experiences of happiness, fulfilment and succeeding relations to the world that are phenomenologically very important, including experiences of nature, aesthetics and religion. Indeed it seems as though these domains are paradigmatic surfaces of resonance for modern subjects: nature (as in moments of ‘harmony’ on mountain summits or beaches); aesthetics (especially musical experiences) and religion. In such experiences, subjects attempt to assure themselves of being ‘in tune’ or in ‘harmony’ with themselves and ‘the world’. Consequently, the concept of resonance seems to be more extensive than the concept of recognition insofar as it provides a theoretical strategy for integrating these types of fulfilling or disrupted world relations. At the same time, resonance also seems a promising means of developing a new interpretation of social interaction: In referring to the concept of resonance, it is not only possible to informatively reconstruct the constitution of subjectivity from inter-subjectivity, which has been the subject of sociological debates since G. H. Mead’s influential work, but also to explain why ignoring a person or treating them with indifference generally leads to more serious consequences than downright condemnation or denigration. In light of this assumption, experiences of alienation can be interpreted as the consequence of ‘mute’, non-resonating relations; they can occur despite or even as a consequence of successful instrumental relations to things, people, spaces etc. This use of conceptual pair ‘resonance’ and ‘alienation’ establishes a normatively substantial,

theoretically sound and empirically adaptable instrument for diagnosing disruptions in modern subjects' relations to the world. In bringing it to bear for empirical research, we hope to gain a new indicator for quality of life and human well-being. This could make it possible to separate the high hopes for progress that have been a constitutive feature of modernity since the Enlightenment from the dynamisation principles inherent to modernity, so that human well-being would not only remain a political and developmental goal, but could potentially even be used to *confront* the systemic and capitalist imperatives of escalation or, at the very least, call them into question.

(c) *Cast*: Hartmut Rosa (protagonist), Klaus Dörre (antagonist), Stephan Lessenich (moderator). Senior Fellows Charles Taylor (Montreal) and Rahel Jaeggi (Berlin) will act as stimulators. Rahel Jaeggi's influential study (2005) has provided a philosophical formalisation and reconstruction of the concept of alienation – formerly utterly disreputed in critical theory – as a disruption in the appropriation of the outside world, and thus once again made it relevant to sociology. Charles Taylor is not only one of the most important exponents of the theory of recognition, but can actually be understood as the key protagonist of a social theory of resonance (Rosa 2011).

(3) *Growth, socio-political interests and welfare state regulation*

(a) *Focus*: This third research question is directly linked to the last theme. In what ways does the large-scale economic and ecological societal conflict affect social structure and the formation of interests in developed capitalisms? And what are the implications of the potential transition to non-growth societies on the welfare state's regulatory capacity? Both of these questions are closely linked, considering that it was exactly this regulatory capacity of the welfare state – expanding in line with material growth – that had played a pivotal role in politicising social inequalities (Offe 2006), evening out overt everyday expressions of class antagonism (Mooser 1984; Berger 1986), releasing women from archaic patriarchal gender relations (Fraser 2001, 2009) as well as in enabling the individualisation and pluralisation of different ways of life (Beck 1983, 1986). In the wake of shrinking margins for distribution (Streeck 2010), the 'crude' social differences have become more visible again, while the regulatory capacity of the welfare state is reaching its limits. How these developments are to be interpreted and assessed is a matter of intense dispute in inequality research (Berger and Weiß 2008; Vogel 2009; Rössel 2009). This renewed interest the classical paradigms of inequality research is indicative of a productive uneasiness (Klinger *et al.* 2008; Solga *et al.* 2009). The same holds true for the applicants: While Rosa's diagnosis situates the problem of alienation at the level of mankind as a species, thereby tending to view social hierarchies and conflicts of interest as secondary, Stephan Lessenich (the protagonist in this field) stresses the socio-political conflict over the distribution of absolute and relative losses in wealth, calling it the 'new social question' (Lessenich and Nullmeier 2006; Lessenich 2009b, 2009c). In contrast to both of these positions, Dörre (2010b) once again points to the new, financially driven *Landnahme*, to which he attributes the potential to create new social classes. However, he also emphasizes that class formation must be understood as a process, that there is a plurality of mechanisms of exploitation, and that 'class struggle' can also occur both within and between subaltern groups. Until now, none of the applicants has systematically investigated the meta-question as to how the economic and ecological societal conflict affects the structure of inequality and social-structural lines of conflict in developed capitalisms. In this field of

research, the thesis is formulated from the point of view of the *activation theorem*. From this perspective, there is reason to assume that the unequal distribution of activity and mobility resources is establishing new – at least temporarily stable – lines of social division, along which processes such as the closure of spaces for solidarity, the (non-)recognition of certain conducts of life and the culturalisation of social conflict manifest themselves (Lessenich 2009d). It is becoming apparent today that these processes cut across the structural cleavages of capitalist growth-oriented societies – from the ‘worker question’ to gender conflicts and ethnic divisions –, leading to a reformulation on a broader basis of the question of ‘intersectionality’ of different forms and dynamics of social inequality. The antithesis will be based on the perspective of social *acceleration*, calling into question the assumption that the constant pendular motion of ‘late capitalist’ welfare states, swinging back and forth between the need for increased economic accumulation and democratic legitimacy, can actually be sustained in the long term, as under conditions of non-growth, distributional conflicts and contrasting interests will have to be resolved ‘from the substance’ (Lutz 1984: 235).

(b) Theoretical innovation: A sociology of knowledge of changes in social formation

Empirically guided research in this field is aimed at leading to a theoretical innovation that builds on earlier research into the political sociology of ‘activation’ to develop a sociology of knowledge of the (dynamically stable) reproduction of modern, democratic capitalist societies (Lessenich 2003). Departing from the results of ongoing empirical research into the subjective acceptance, interpretation and reinterpretation of activation programs in social policy, the questions pertaining to the sociology of knowledge that are inherent to Lessenich's previous work are to be systematically treated, amounting to the question as to how social orders of knowledge are constituted, reproduced and transformed. The intention here would be to explore the interplay of institutional structure formation, societal stocks of knowledge and everyday social practices, using the example of ‘activation’ as a contemporary mode of political control mediated by the restructuring of the welfare state. This way, the self-description of the late capitalist social formation as a dynamic growth nexus – in this case: of a social order based around the permanent mobilisation of both others and oneself – advances to the centre of extensive investigation. The prime theoretical objective is to find out what social mechanisms the knowledge order of ‘flexible capitalism’ relies on for constituting and reproducing itself, which intended and unintended social potentials for dynamisation are inherent to this order – and what structurally contradictory political and social constellations of a potentially self-transcending (and thus: transformative) nature they produce. In this respect, this theoretical ambition is not only linked to recent approaches from the sociology of culture and from practice theory that study the mechanisms of the reproduction of social ‘order’ (Kertschner and Mersch 2003; Reckwitz 2003; Hörning 2004), but also to the research group's four meta-themes. In addition, the group's institutional framework would provide a good opportunity for opening up the highly national perspective of the research hitherto conducted in this field to questions of asynchronicities, interdependencies and the stabilisation of boundaries of (welfare) state intervention that are of increasing relevance in the context of world society. The current constellation of global capitalist socialisation is characterised by the co-existence of ‘multiple capitalisms’ at different stages of development with respect to modes of state intervention. Whereas each variety of late industrial capitalism has its own specific type of ‘activating’ policies, in the economies of the BRIC states as well as those of various other newly industrialised countries, exhibit classical forms of politically mediated (‘primitive’) proletarianisation and (more or less)

rudimentary welfare-state regulation. The aim of further research will be to analyse the dynamising effects of this (globally) asynchronous capitalist development, which result from processes like international competition, institutional diffusion, transnationalised politics and global migration.

(c) Cast: Stephan Lessenich (protagonist), Hartmut Rosa (antagonist), Klaus Dörre (moderator). Senior fellows Claus Offe (Berlin) and Beverly Silver (Baltimore) will provide inspiration. Claus Offe's work in political sociology and the theory of the state has been a central point of reference for the protagonist's research in this field. Offe's recent work on the scope of action available to democratic institutions and the preconditions of progressive politics will provide inspiring impulses, while his own theoretical work could benefit by way of adopting ideas from the sociology of knowledge and practice theory. Beverly Silver, whose work is characterised by its historical and sociological focus on social resources of power, class conflicts and questions of the political economy of globalisation, will help open the debates and theoretical innovations in this field to a perspective that is grounded in world systems theory while at the same time stressing the importance of social actors.

(4) Growth and the degeneration or transformation of democracy

(a) Focus: When the integrative power of material growth, wage labour and welfare state regulation dwindles, this is bound to raise the question of how stable democratic institutions and procedures will prove to be and of whether their problem-solving capacities can be preserved. Currently, supporters of growth from the elites in the Global North are openly admiring the centralist authoritarian mode of crisis intervention practised by states such as the PRC. Even scientific onlookers critical of the new authoritarianism (Wallerstein 2008) are expressing doubt concerning the sustainability of parliamentary democracies, speaking of a post-democratic condition (Crouch 2008; Deppe 2010). The majority of these scenarios share the diagnosis that social and cultural conflicts are undergoing a far-reaching change of meaning, losing their cohesive force that formerly served to stabilise democratic institutions (Silver 2003; Wacquant 2009). In contemporary societies, the socially integrative effects of contention, which Simmel saw at work even in certain forms of war, seems to fade in a peculiar way. Given the irritation this causes, it is hardly surprising that there are sources of considerable friction between the positions that the applicants take up regarding this field. Rosa is particularly sceptical: In his view, social acceleration creates an unassailable de-synchronisation between the economy and democracy that causes democratic institutions and processes to be stripped of their legitimacy. In contrast, Dörre draws attention to heterodox currents and forces that could constitute the starting point for a renewal of concepts for a democratic restructuring that would extend to the economic realm. Lessenich, in turn, derives an agenda for the democratisation of the (now indispensable) welfare state from the conflicts surrounding it. A central question, however, has yet to be asked in this controversy: How does the renewed structural transformation of the public sphere (commercialisation of the media sector, precarisation of employment relations, fragmentation into particular publics, scandalisation as a mode of communication) affect democratic institutions and processes? Furthermore, how does this structural transformation relate to the basic logics of dynamisation inherent to developed capitalisms?

(b) *Theoretical innovation*: In this field, the working hypotheses that will guide the search for answers will not be put forward by one of the applicants, but by Nancy Fraser, one of the senior fellows that have already confirmed their commitment to the project. The analytical point of departure will be the ongoing structural transformation of democratic public spheres (Fraser 2010). From here, analytical attention can be directed at democratic processes and institutions. It would be important to investigate whether social conflicts over the escalatory logic of capitalist socialisation can set the stage for the emergence of counter-publics and movements that could become catalysts of a new social order and possibly even a more far-reaching democratisation of social relations (Chavel 2006). The role of the critical antagonist in this field will be taken up by William E. Scheuerman, whose work, informed by the history of ideas and the history of law, explores the possibilities and limits of democracy and democratisation, with a particular focus on the acceleration theorem (Scheuerman 2004; Rosa and Scheuerman 2009).

(c) *Cast*: Nancy Fraser (protagonist; New York), William E. Scheuerman (antagonist; Bloomington). The three applicants will take on the role of moderator.

4.4 Meta-themes

The four fields outlined above are linked to one another via the inner connection between the three principles of escalation that are at the centre of our research strategy. They address basic institutions of capitalist socialisation, all of which remain in tense relations to the principles of dynamisation. In addition to these fields, the research group will also devote attention to four meta-themes that overlap with all four fields: (1) the justification and legitimation of a *sociology of critique*; (2) an analysis and discussion of the *varieties of capitalism*; (3) the attempt to counter the hitherto rather structuralist inclination of dynamisation analyses by grounding them in a *theory of action*; and (4) the development of a more precise analytical focus on *strategic choice* and *alternative options for development*. Each of these meta-themes is an ongoing task that applies to all of the four fields set out above. The core responsibility for treatment of the meta-themes rests with the academic staff of the research group, along with the applicants and selected fellows. The researchers will ensure commitment to the meta-themes, which are also thematically linked to one another.

(1) *Sociology of critique*: This meta-theme can draw on the profound and elaborate debate on the possibilities and limits of sociological critique (Celikates 2009; Forst *et al.* 2009; Jaeggi and Wesche 2009; Basaure *et al.* 2009; Lessenich 2009a; Vobruba 2009; Rosa 2010). The aim of this is to consciously reflect on the normative foundations of critical sociology and its possible connection to the everyday critiques of capitalism practised by individuals and social groups (Saar 2009: 564 ff.; Boltanski 2010). In doing so, we wish to test the proposition – contested among the applicants – that the erosion of the resources used to legitimise the capitalist dynamic of growth is in fact more advanced (and this is particularly true in the case of Germany) than the relatively conflict-free management of the economic crisis might suggest (Dörre *et al.* 2009; critique: Lessenich 2009b; Rosa 2009b). In turn, understanding the locus and the possibilities of sociological critique is something of a meta-theoretical prerequisite for entering into a controversy with other theories of capitalism, for instance of the institutionalist variety.

(2) *Varieties of capitalism*: The global dimension of the economic and ecological double crisis points to a set of problems that is not specific to a certain type of social formation, but concerns all capitalist (and some other) societies (Streeck 2009; Beyer 2010). Nevertheless, evidence strongly suggests that institutions still predetermine divergent strategies that actors will follow in dealing with the problem of growth (Hall and Soskice 2001; Fligstein and Cho 2006; Hancké 2009). So far, the applicants have intentionally neglected the institutional differences between national models of capitalism in their debates. However, there can be little doubt that destabilisation will take on different forms and that potentials for overcoming the crisis will be differently distributed in and between the various models of capitalism. This point is to be further elaborated upon with respect to the tension between the dynamisation imperatives and the limits of growth. The same applies to system comparison with (former) state bureaucratic socialism. The emphasis on institutional divergence derives its particular analytical charm from the implicit question for the political leeway afforded by different institutional constellations. In order to fully explore this, analyses of dynamisation will need a foundation in the theory of action.

(3) *Political sociology/theory of action*: The escalatory spiral of capitalist *Landnahme*, acceleration and activation does not impact societal subsystems impersonally, just as setting a course for alternative modes of societal integration is inconceivable without active subjects. That said, we must self-critically admit that our three theorems of dynamisation do not yet possess a satisfactory foundation in action theory. Seen in this light, *Landnahme*, acceleration and activation could be interpreted as functionalist logics that marginalise the importance of active intervention by social actors. Clearly, such a reading runs counter to our actual intentions. It is therefore essential to develop a theory of the actions of dominant and heterodox capitalist actors that can be applied to various social fields, simultaneously taking account of counter-hegemonic powers and movements. In this context, it could prove fruitful to interpret strategies of crisis management as forms of ‘creative action’ (Joas 1992) – which, however, always needs to unfold and prove its worth within structured social fields, each of which has its own sets of rules and relations of power (Bourdieu 1993: 107–114). In the context of the New Political Economy, Streeck and Thelen (2005) have developed a model of action that could be critically taken up, especially from the perspective of the *Landnahme* theorem. Some other useful references for such a substantiation are approaches from practice theory (Reckwitz 2006), post-structuralist discourse and hegemony theory (Laclau and Mouffe 2006), or materialist theories of the state (Jessop 2008). However, the effort to extend our analytical perspective with reference to theories of action should not be considered an end in itself. It should serve to identify social forces that might either promote or block the transition towards socially and ecologically sustainable (non-)growth societies.

(4) *Social agents and 'target audiences' of a sociology of critique*: This raises the question of the opportunities and limits to 'strategic choice'. It is important to explore the possibilities and limitations to the emergence and success of social movements in order to gain some stable ground for discussing the question of the ‘political subject’ of prospective change. In posing this question, we return to the first meta-theme: the construction of a critical ‘external position’, because – and we agree with Luc Boltanski on this point – “the idea of a critical theory [...] that is not based on the experience of a

collective would be anchorless” (2010: 21). We believe that one mode in which sociological critique can legitimise itself is by enabling “empathy with the suffering of others” (ibid.: 29) – but avoiding immediate, distanceless identification with such suffering – and, in doing this, looking for links between everyday social critique and theoretically founded ‘grand critique’. It is only in this way that we can develop the tools needed to analyse the potential for alternative social developments.

The four meta-themes will not be treated as independent units, but will continuously be present as an important element in the work of the group as well as in debates with selected fellows. However, each of the meta-themes will be studied primarily (albeit not conclusively) in combination with one of the content fields set out above (sociology of critique: field 2; varieties of capitalism: field 1; action theory: field 4; social agents of critique: field 3). At the same time, the meta-themes will provide a formal framework for the standards that the applicants intend hold each other accountable to with respect to the theoretical innovations each of them aspires to.

5 Location, organisational structure, mode of operation and fellows

We are well aware that the thematic units sketched out above are of enormous dimensions. However, we believe that our previous work has provided us with an analytical framework whose deployment enable us to ‘think big’ and (re)integrate this thinking properly into sociological research. Since we all agree that developing ‘grand’ theory has successively become a collective effort, we view the proposed research group as a truly unique opportunity to go on with the dialogical approach we have already deployed, and doing this on an improved, extended and systematised basis. The research group would provide fellows and applicants alike with an intellectual environment that would minimise the risk of self-reference and redundancy that is a constant treat to academic debates. At the same time, concentrating the debate at a visible location will improve the chances of attracting increased attention to it at the international level. On necessary condition for this is that the research group will act as a forum both for well-established, internationally recognised researchers and young, aspiring scientists, allowing them to develop innovative contributions, enter into critical exchange with practitioners, and so intervene in the debate on the capitalist principles of dynamisation and their ecological and social limits. To ensure this, the research group would need a prominent location with a pleasant atmosphere that encourages cooperative work and intellectual exchange (5.1); a dialogical mode of operation (5.2), as well as internationally renowned fellows who are interested in mutual exchange and a jointly organised research process (5.3).

5.1 Location and staff

In order to ensure the visibility of the group and promote cooperation, the university has provided us with a prestigious building, the premises of which provide the appropriate environment for intensive research, informal exchange and structured debate. Jena, with its grand traditions in the social sciences and humanities, offers an outstanding setting for our research. A representative, centrally located building in Humboldtstraße 34 has been made available. Yet this alone will not enable the group to work properly and secure a continuous exchange of ideas. In order to guarantee this, it is absolutely necessary to build an infrastructure and secure a staff base that will provide the group with its own

'identity'. This infrastructure must be created by academic staff that is continually present at the site, hosts and assists the fellows, organises discussions, helps with publishing results, and runs the necessary press and public relations work.

For these tasks, four posts for researchers and a further post for the complex administrative work and public relations duties need to be created. The research posts, which represent the 'heart' of the research group, will be advertised internationally. For each post we will be looking for a researcher with proven qualifications in one of the four meta-themes. The selected researchers will work 'on site' and be subjected to strict presence requirements. These individuals will also be responsible for providing support to the fellows and maintaining a stable organisational foundation for the group. At any given time, presence requirement will apply to one of the applicants, who will get a leave in order to be able to integrate the majority of his efforts into the group.

5.2 Mode of operation and organisational structure of the research group

Alongside the staff directly assigned to the group, its *members* will be: the *applicants*, *fellows* of varying status, the *scientific advisory board*, members of the *internal working group* (consisting of researchers from the Institute of Sociology) as well as *participants* from different areas of practice, including a number of selected journalists. Their knowledge, skills and competences are to be made productive by deploying a dialogical mode of operation.

(1) *Dialogical mode of operation*: In the work of the research group, we intend to establish a dialogical method of cooperation. The applicants define such a dialogical approach as a procedure that relies on earlier research as a basis, departing from which synthesising categories and concepts can be developed by way of mutual critique. In so doing, the positions, the differences between them, debates, controversies and their results are to be presented in a way that will ensure their transparency and comprehensibility to outsiders. Much of this may seem to go without saying; however, experience shows that for cooperative scientific research it cannot be taken for granted, but is indeed quite demanding. The kind of procedure we envision requires that the researchers taking part in it mutually respect each others' approaches and are prepared to face harsh, but sincere criticism and learn from it. The applicants have tested this procedure over the past few years – a test they believe to have been successful.¹ Now, the goal will be to implement the same procedure in a newly assembled and considerably extended institutionalised group, integrating renowned researchers who have developed highly individual styles of working in the course of their careers.

Our dialogical methodology rests upon four principles: (a) *Controversy as a basic principle*: Texts and research results are internally debated within the tested framework of weekly research colloquia and

¹ The work we conducted on our volume *Soziologie – Kapitalismus – Kritik. Eine Debatte* was undertaken in a number of steps. First of all, the various concepts and relevant critiques were presented and intensively discussed with young researchers and students as part of a research colloquium. The second step involved drafting the basic texts, which the authors then discussed with younger researchers as part of a week-long seminar. One year later, the mutual critiques and corresponding replies were and the authors' joint conclusions were again discussed with the young academics. Texts written by these young researchers, which critically addressed the topics of our debates, were the main subject of the following week-long seminar. These texts have now also been published (Becker et al. 2010).

yearly held, week-long research seminars. The entire group will be involved in the yearly seminars, including both the fellows and the younger researchers. In addition, workshops, text workshops and seminars on special themes with the fellows will be held as necessary; (b) *Securing results*: Each fourth year will be devoted to jointly discussing and producing a preliminary summary of the work undertaken until that point and its conclusions. This task will be undertaken by the applicants. Consequently, for every fourth year covered by the application periods of leave would be required for all three applicants; (c) *Synthesis*: In treating each of the themes, researchers can exemplarily draw on the results of their own earlier research, which may be supplemented and extended by literature reviews and secondary statistical analyses. However, the main aim is to discuss the analytical capacity of the concepts of dynamisation and to build on them by developing new and innovative theorems and systematically relating these to each other; (d) *Transfer*: The aim of the group is to provide sociology with a voice in the many-voiced concert of growth advocates and critics – and, if possible, one that is internationally audible. Consequently, high-quality publications and the transfer of research results must enjoy the highest priority.

(2) *Prepared dialogue*: During the proposed funding period (8 years), the applicants will each take on a special role within every field: either that of the *protagonist* (who drafts the working hypotheses as well as a paper setting out the fundamentals); the *antagonist* (taking up a contrary position and providing critical commentary); or the *moderator*. Each of these roles is taken on for one field, that is, for a period of two years. During the first year, the work of the protagonist is at the centre of the collective effort. He will organise an initial workshop and produce a paper that will be the basis of the group's debates. The third semester will be dominated by the antagonist, who will organise critical feedback. In the fourth semester, the moderator will bring together the various strands of research and discussion within the group and organise the main conference on the respective field. The protagonist (first and second semester), antagonist (third semester) and the moderator (fourth semester) will be relieved of their teaching duties during the periods in which their work is focused at the research group. In order to fill the gap, replacement professorships will be financed from the research centre's funds, which would also enable younger researchers to take the next step in their academic careers. The basis of the group's work on each theme will be the paper prepared by the protagonist, a first version of which is to be discussed with the other applicants no later than at the end of the first three months. A second, more elaborate version will be discussed with the entire group after a further six months at the latest. In the course of this process, the core of the group will be extended to include between two and four senior fellows.