



LUNDS UNIVERSITET

Post-Growth on the Move

The Environmental Movement as Agent of Change for the Transition to a
Post-Growth Economy - Evidence from Germany

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May 16, 2011

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Lund University
International Master's Programme for Environmental Studies and Sustainability
Science (LUMES).

Abstract

This thesis explores the opportunities and constraints for the adoption of a post-growth economy as a plausible approach towards sustainability by social movements. With the transdisciplinary perspective of sustainability science, the qualitative study of social movements and post-growth found that Germany does not have a post-growth movement. Nevertheless, the environmental movement and, in particular, Friends of the Earth Germany are suitable candidates of change for post-growth. However, they have not adopted post-growth yet because of certain gaps in bridging concepts of post-growth with their own work. To fill this gap, the study recommends to operationalize post-growth in five steps: (1) to distinguish between ‘sustainable liberalism’ and ‘fair de-growth’ as two major types of post-growth, (2) to re-frame the promises of economic growth as myths, (3) to complement ‘political choice’ as means towards post-growth with ‘social choice’, (4) to identify and compile areas of a post-growth economy, and (5) to overcome the inherent power dilemma between agents of change and actors of these areas, that are required to be transformed, while forming coalitions between both. If these recommendations are taken into account by academics and activists, the environmental movement is more likely to successfully activate causal mechanisms of change for the transition to a post-growth economy. With its critique on the current comprehension of progress as economic growth, post-growth is initiating a new, more fruitful phase of the sustainability discourse.

Keywords: *post-growth economy, ecological economics, social movements, agents of change, sustainability science*

Word count: 14,981 words

Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank Turaj for being a true teacher in sustainability science to me, for his constant presence during a long process of thinking and his belief in me.

Thanks to LUCSUS and the Right Livelihood College, who supported me with the Right Livelihood Research grant in correspondence to Herman Daly, which allowed me to do inspiring and intense fieldwork at Friends of the Earth Germany's headquarters in Berlin and present my thesis at the first German de-growth conference in Berlin and at the summer school of the European Society for Ecological Economics in Istanbul. I thank Herman Daly for encouraging me to take up this challenging task of bridging ideas and movements.

I would like to express my gratitude to Friends of the Earth Germany for their trust, for their outstanding support and for fostering in me a deep hope in the impact of a social movement. In particular, I want to thank my interviewees Angelika Zahrnt and Norbert Franck, as well as Joachim Spangenberg and Robert Pörschmann. Thanks to the participants of the workshop Jochen Dallmer, Jurek Vengels, Friederike Otto, Tomas Brückmann, Reinhild Benning and Christine Wenzl. Thanks to Matthias Schmelzer for wonderful insights. Thanks to Felix Kolb for his critical and eye-opening thoughts on my thesis. Thanks to Basil Bornemann for his brilliant questions.

I deeply thank my fellow LUMES friends as well as Emma and Robin for the incredibly great experience of being together and taking care of each other in Lund. Deep thanks to Pauline, Julia and Julia. Finally, I would like to express my gratefulness to my friends at Hållbart Universitet for the most fulfilling voluntary engagement I have ever experienced.

Abbreviations

- ATTAC = Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions and for Citizens' Action
- BUND = Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland (FoE Germany)
- CASSE = Center for the Advancement of the Steady State Economy
- DNR = Deutscher Naturschutzring (German League for Nature Conservation and Environmental Protection)
- EJfA = Economic Justice for All
- FoE = Friends of the Earth Germany
- FÖS = Forum Ökologisch-Soziale Marktwirtschaft (Green Budget Germany)
- GDP = Gross Domestic Product
- HDI = Human Development Index
- HPI = Happy Planet Index
- ISEW = Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare
- NABU = Naturschutzbund Deutschland (Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union Germany)
- n.p. = no pages stated
- NWI = Nationaler Wohlfahrtsindex (National Prosperity Index)
- OECD = Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
- UNEP = United Nations Environmental Programme
- WCED = United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Leaving Sustainability's Cloudiness

1.1 Research problem, aim and questions

Almost four decades ago, “Limits to Growth” was published by the Club of Rome in 1972. This milestone of environmental history gives reason to be concerned as a student in sustainability science. Ecological economists have long argued, economic growth is doing more harm than good. Distinguished academics such as Herman Daly (1974) came up with a plausible theoretical foundation for the critique on economic growth. In order to approach sustainability, one has to acknowledge, he says, that the ecological sphere sets the limits to the economic activities. Although we have known all this for a while, humanity is still not living within the ecological boundaries. Ecological Economists have not become mainstream. Instead, the cloudy and ambivalent claims of the proponents of “sustainable development” (WCED 1987) determined the sustainability discourse. Sustainable development “still leaves us largely with the same problems as, or worse than, at the start of the (...) era” (Martínez-Alier et al. 2010, 1745). But finally, sustainable development is facing strong opposition. Since the beginning of the 21st century, one observes a renaissance of the critique of economic growth (Müller 2011, 1) building on the thick achievements of ecological economics; a debate about a post-growth economy¹ is emerging in several European countries such as France, Spain and England, in Canada and recently in Germany (Kerschner 2010, 544, Jackson 2009, Seidl/Zahrnt 2010, Victor 2008).

This thesis starts off with two preliminary assumptions. First, post-growth is a plausible approach towards sustainability. Second, social movements are major agents of change for a post-growth economy and especially the environmental movement can trigger a process towards it. Given that both statements are feasible, one would expect a social movement to take up the post-growth ideas immediately, but it does not, as this thesis will show. Thus, my research aim is to explore, in what way the fact that the German environmental movement did not adopt the cause of a post-growth economy yet requires further operationalization of post-growth theory. Furthermore, the research aim is to explore, how the German environmental movement can activate mechanisms for realizing post-growth. The project focuses on Friends of the Earth Germany (FoE) as main agent of change for post-growth within the environmental movement. Hence, I am not seeing a shortage of understanding of the problem or too few concepts for sustainability, but I largely miss the paths to get there. This argument is supported by Daly (2010), who says that “the bridge between ideas and social movements is critical – hard to understand and hard to build”.

The thesis research is guided by the following research questions:

¹Regarding the scope of this thesis, I focus on the implications of a post-growth *economy*, although I recognize that only a post-growth *society* gives a full picture of an entirely sustainable scenario (Seidl/Zahrnt 2010).

1. Are the German environmental movement and Friends of the Earth Germany, in particular, suitable candidates for establishing a post-growth economy?
2. What stops Friends of the Earth Germany from adopting a strategy for a post-growth economy?
3. How can the idea of a post-growth economy be operationalized for Friends of the Earth Germany?
4. If post-growth was operationalized, which causal mechanisms could be activated by the environmental movement to proceed towards a post-growth economy?

In a nutshell, the main result of the thesis is that FoE lacks championing post-growth because of mainly five gaps in bridging the post-growth theory with the work of the agents of change. The gaps need to be filled by academia, activists and think tanks, i.e. post-growth theory needs further operationalization, in order for the environmental movement to activate several mechanisms of change for a post-growth economy.

1.2 Methodology

1.2.1 Sustainability science approach: ontological and epistemological considerations

Localising this research project to the field of sustainability sciences, it aims to understand the added value of a transdisciplinary approach. Through the analysis of complexity, uncertainty and persistence, sustainability scientists have put one major question on their research agenda: “how to improve human well-being in ways that account for the ultimate dependence of that well-being on the natural environment?” (Clark 2009, 6) The ontology of this thesis follows the idea of strong sustainability (Ott/Döring 2004, 43), which considers the ecological boundaries as the major limiting factor for other systems. This idea is conceptualized in the ecological economics model visualizing an hierarchically structure of the ecological system, the social system and the economic system where the former sets the limitations for the latter. This is an ideal and normative model (Ott/Döring 2004, 42), which runs counter with the current priorities of these systems and opposes the three-pillar-model of sustainability (Enquete-Kommission 1998, 32 as cited in Ott/Döring 2004, 37), which does not include a prioritization and separates the three systems from each other. The ontology of my thesis opposes the concept of weak sustainability and the idea of substituting different forms of capital (Solow 1993).

Besides producing knowledge, sustainability science has been concerned with turning the knowledge into action from the beginning. Thus, this research project applies an interdisciplinary approach since it studies social movements *and* post-growth. But it goes beyond that and applies a transdisciplinary approach, that follows Max-Neef's comprehension of transdisciplinarity (2005, 15) as “more than a new discipline or super-discipline (...), actually, a different manner of seeing the world, more systemic and more holistic“. Hence, transdisciplinarity forms the epistemological view of this thesis. It is based on a societal, real-world problem and transforms disciplinary knowledge in order to approach this problem. It is not just another word for applied science since transdisciplinarity approaches to contribute to societal change. It avoids a unification of language and methods, which would face the danger of applying for example methods of biology to a societal problem. Furthermore, transdisciplinarity avoids the creation of a new discipline, but communicates among disciplines and between science and practice aiming for more than the sum of both. However, transdisciplinary research “is still in the making, thus representing an unfinished scientific programme” (ibid., 5). The theory-driven question of ‘what is to be sustained?’ gains deep relevance, if it is intrinsically tied to the action-oriented question of ‘how to get there?’. The metaphor of a bridge illustrates the multi-dimensional challenges a sustainability scientist is confronted with. First, the ability to bridge different types of communication is necessary, where agents lack a shared language. Second, bridging different norms, values and structures is required to avoid conflicts in goal formulation. Finally, a sustainability scientist's role to bridge theoretical and methodological spectra contributes to the connectivity of the results. In this thesis, the languages,

values and structures of academics and activists have to be connected with each other. Further, bridging methodological and theoretical spectra is relevant to this thesis as well, in which political sciences, i.e. social movement studies, are combined with economics, environmental studies and social sciences.

Throughout the thesis, the reader will notice the inherent ontological and epistemological tensions of the study material. These tensions are due to a struggle between approaches of critical modernity and anti-modernity of the different post-growth types, which will be further explained in chapter 2.

1.2.2 Research design of the exploratory study

The research is designed as a qualitative, theory-guided study exploring a “contemporary” phenomena (Yin 2003, 1). It is exploratory, because I had initial assumptions without knowing the outcomes of the study (Yin 2003, 15). The study is theory-guided, because the theoretical and practical results were mainly derived from the theoretical framework. The contemporary phenomena is provided by studying FoE as a candidate for being an agent of change for post-growth. Fieldwork was done at FoE’s national headquarters in Berlin. Choosing FoE as “unit of analysis” (Koopmans/Rucht 2002, 231) of the study is due to (1) their recent activities on post-growth, (2) their size and potential impact and (3) the “insider role” (Blee/Taylor 2002, 97) I had during the research process due to my working experiences on the project “Sustainable Germany in a globalized world”, a study which was published by FoE (BUND et al. 2008). Throughout the research process, my connection with FoE required me to be transparent about my research intentions (i.e. sharing my research proposal with FoE staff). This was answered with offering access, for instance, to unpublished FoE documents, and trust from all involved FoE actors. In addition to FoE, I included the organization ATTAC Germany, not with the intention of doing a comparative study, but to back up the internal information by FoE agents with external reflections on FoE’s activities by other movement actors.

The material for this thesis was collected in an “iterative process” (Blee/Taylor 2002, 110) of several stages of fieldwork. I triangulated (Bryman 2004, 275) the methods of semi-structured interviewing and a focus group workshop with desk studies on primary documents and secondary literature. To begin with, I did personal, informal background interviews to identify a sample of five key informants. I conducted qualitative, semi-structured interviews for one hour with each of the informants. The flexible interview guide, either applied personally or via telephone, provided rich and detailed answers (Bryman 2004, 320-321). Three interviewees were key initiators of the German post-growth debate either from FoE or ATTAC Germany. Four hold a leading position in FoE. During an advanced stage of research, I held a focus group workshop with employed experts from FoE’s national headquarters. While Gramson used the method of focus group interviewing “for studying the cultural outcomes of social movements, such as how people understand and incorporate the ideas, goals, practices, and identities of protest groups” (Gramson 1992 as interpreted by Blee/Taylor 2002, 108), my purpose was to confront the eight focus group participants, who were explicitly not experts in post-growth, with the preliminary findings gained from the interviews to reflect not on post-growth outcomes, but on the integration of post-growth into the participants’ work for FoE. The focus group covers an interdisciplinary field of political, sociological, psychological, communication and natural science perspectives. The participants have very different positions within the organization working with climate change, chemistry, agriculture, biodiversity, sustainability, youths or public relations. Although the focus group could not provide more than “fragments” (Blee/Taylor 2002, 108), the method gave insights into the barriers and opportunities of operationalizing post-growth. A feedback interview with one of the formal interviewees provided further reflections on the focus group results (Zahrnt 2011b, interview). A primary document analysis of internal articles, protocols and discussion papers as well as a literature analysis complemented the data collection. The main document for the primary document analysis is the unpublished discussion paper (BUND 2011) representing the results of the internal discussion on post-growth within FoE and now is a formal foundation for the further procedure on the issue within the organization.

The data was analysed by identifying common themes, comparing statements, identifying agree-

ments and disagreements and their interpretation. The themes were reciprocally generated from the theoretical framework (deduction) as well as from the empirical material (induction, both Bryman 2004, 9-10). Appendix A provides a list of interviewees (A.1), a catalogue of interview questions (A.2) and the structure and main themes of the focus group workshop (A.3).

1.3 Limitations of the study

The decision to limit the unit of analysis to mainly one social movement organization reduces the explanatory value of the study. A comparison of different relevant movement organizations could give a more complete answer on the research topic. Furthermore, with only six interviews on five interviewees and one focus group workshop, I cannot generalize the results to the whole organization of concern and even less for the environmental movement in Germany. The study faces the danger of being biased by the author's insider role within the analyzed organization. I attempted to mitigate the bias by basing statements by FoE on secondary material, where possible, and tried to have a critical, questioning attitude while collecting the material and analyzing it. Since the material of the study was provided in German and needed to be translated, slight changes of wordings could not be avoided. German expressions, that do not exist in English, had to be further explained. To reduce this limitation the translated quotations were reviewed by the interviewees, again. Due to the interdisciplinarity of this project, the language of this report is partly condensed and more addressed towards the disciplinary experts than towards more general sustainability scientists.

1.4 Report structure

The report unfolds its theoretical framework for post-growth in chapter 2 and for social movements in chapter 3, where I explain the two preliminary assumptions on the plausibility of post-growth and the suitability of social movements as agents of change. The study's results are presented and analyzed in chapter 4. Here, I identify the major gaps in bridging post-growth theory with the agents of change, which currently restrict FoE to develop a post-growth strategy (4.1). Furthermore, I withdraw certain recommendations to dismantle these gaps (4.1.2). This is necessary for the environmental movement in Germany to activate certain mechanisms of change, which I analyze here (4.2), too. Chapter 5 draws an overall conclusion and indicates suggestions for further research and practice.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework I: Approaching Sustainability by a Post-Growth Economy

The idea of a post-growth economy fundamentally challenges the dominant economic paradigm and the role of economic growth in society. Although it is hard to sum up what a post-growth economy is, at least we can say it does *not* imply to be the “exact opposite of economic growth” (Martínez-Alier et al. 2010, 1742). The post-growth vision is one of “an equitable and democratic transition to a smaller economy with less production and consumption” (Martínez-Alier et al. 2010, 1741). However post-growth is neither a concept, nor a goal in itself (Kerschner 2010, 549). Explaining my first preliminary assumption, this chapter shows how post-growth draws the path towards sustainability.

2.1 A short story of modernity, the sustainability discourse and their relation to economic growth

Identifying and resolving the inherent tensions between economic growth, social justice and environmental protection, that the project of “sustainable development” (WCED 1987) is facing today, has been a major contribution of the post-growth debate (Kerschner 2010, 548). The post-growth idea reduces the arbitrary usage of the term sustainability and distinguishes *sustainability* from *sustainable development*. Post-growth economists argue that the “main problem with the idea of sustainable development is not with the idea of sustainability but with that of development itself” (Martínez-Alier et al. 2010, 1743). A closer look into social theory will enlighten the reasons for this failure. I thus refer to the three attitudes of the “development of social theory” according to the Habermasian model (Callinicos 1999, 56); first, with the purpose to comprehend the rise and fall of economic growth as the leading parameter of society (see section 2.1 and 2.2) and second, to understand the differing attitudes of post-growth agents towards economic growth (see section 2.3).

During the emergence of the European Enlightenment the concept of reason became the central claim of the modernity project. The overall goal of modernity and the measurement of progress has since then been to “realize individual freedom” (Callinicos 1999, 56). The proponents of *uncritical modernity* believe in Smith’s ‘invisible hand of the market’ and business-us-usual scenarios to approach freedom. Differing from the proponents of modernity, the proponents of *critical modernity* develop a “complex awareness of the tensions and dangers of modernity” (ibid.) and demand a radical improvement of the “unfinished project of modernity” (Habermas 1997, 38). The advocates of critical modernity do not trust the market alone, but demand intervention to regulate markets through reforms. In opposition of the latter, the proponents of *anti-modernity* claim a “radical rejection of

modernity” (Callinicos 1999, 56) questioning modernity’s major concept: “Reason is nothing else than power, than the will to power, which it so radiantly conceals”, as Habermas (1987 interpreted by Callinicos 1999, 55) critically commented. Thus, the anti-modern actors go beyond freedom and the market searching for alternatives.

In line with the project of modernity, freedom was meant to be achieved through progress. Later on progress was more closely understood as economic growth incorporated in the rise of the British political economy by Adam Smith (Victor 2008, 7). Within a couple of decades, (faster) economic growth became the “overarching policy objective of governments in developed countries” in the 20th century (ibid., 14). Economic growth became instead of a means to freedom an end in itself. This optimism towards economic growth has been carried into the 21st century almost unquestioned (ibid., 9). In the early 1970s, environmentalists – mostly non-economists – critiqued progress as economic growth and followed a “claim of antagonism” between economic growth and environmental protection (Rochon 1998, 56). Among them were pioneers such as Meadows et al. (1972). But, with the rise of sustainable development, a “new era of economic growth” (WCED 1987, 8) emerged, created by a belief in the compatibility of economic growth with environmental concerns. The antagonism transformed to a “search for complementarity” (Rochon 1998, 56). Traditionally, this is associated with the ecological modernization approach (Huber 1982 and Jänicke 1984 as cited in Andersen/Massa 2000, 338). The latest version of this compatibility is the “Green New Deal” that is incorporated in green growth strategies of the OECD (2010) and UNEP (2009), for instance. Loske (2010, 5) observes this kind of Green Keynesianism¹ emerging after the financial crisis in 2008. As a result of the dominating comprehension of sustainability as sustainable development – next to a variety of others mapped by Hopwood et al. (2005, 41) – 20 years after the Brundtland Report (WCED 1987), sustainable development “has been unable to produce the overarching policies and radical change of behaviour needed at individual and collective scales” (Martínez-Alier et al. 2010, 1741).

In sum, the compatibility of economic growth and environmental prosperity has been rebut (Huetting 2010, 528) and, thus, *sustainable development*, in particular, requires “a radical reconsideration” (Troccia 2009, 18), because *sustainability*, in general, “can only make sense if development is associated with no growth in the scale of the economy”, as Martínez-Alier et al. conclude (2010, 1743). Coming back to Habermas initial model, sustainable development can be categorized as an uncritically modern approach to sustainability due to its complementarity of ecology and economy. Uncritical modern sustainable development is achieved by continuing business-as-usual promoted by rather conservative protagonists. This allows only “minimal transformations” and not the necessary “radical changes” that challenge existing paradigms appear as a plausible comprehension of sustainability (Pissarskoi/Soete 2010, 15). Based on previous research at LUMES, hence, neither uncritically modern nor anti-modern concepts of sustainability, only critical modern approaches to sustainability fulfil the condition of the antagonism between ecology and economy (Wironen 2007, 42-43). As we will see in section 2.3, a critical attitude towards modernity is in the same way necessary for a post-growth economy as it is here for sustainability.

2.2 Myths of economic growth

The recent debate on post-growth is a necessary revitalization of the critique of economic growth as an imperative condition of the economic, political and societal systems (Speth 2008, 68). In economics, “growth” is described as as growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). More precise, in the Oxford dictionary, economic growth is defined as “persistent increase in per capita aggregate output and in the aggregate physical capital per worker at a non-diminishing rate in an economy” (Black/Hashimzade/Myles 2009, n.p.). In other words, economic growth occurs, “if the financial value

¹Keynesian economics are defined as “an economic theory based on the ideas of John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946), developed in the 1930s, that assigned an important role to the state as well as to the private sector. Central elements of this theory are the failure of prices, especially wages, to adjust to clear markets; and the effect of changes in aggregate demand on real output and employment” (Black/Hashimzade/Myles 2009, n.p.).

of all the exchanges of goods and services within it [the economy, the author] goes up” (Simms et al. 2010, 6). The absence of growth, i.e. “an overall decline in economic activity mainly observed as a slowdown in output and employment” (Black/Hashimzade/Myles 2009, n.p.) is called recession. “A prolonged period of abnormally low economic activity and abnormally high unemployment” is called depression (both Black/Hashimzade/Myles 2009, n.p.). Thus, a reduction in economic growth stands for standstill and instability (Müller 2011, 2). By uncovering the “dilemma of growth” (Jackson 2009, 7), the post-growth agents question the wide spread thought that economic growth is a “panacea” (Daly 2005, 100) and deny its initial meaning according to neoclassical economics, e.g. that it

- increases wealth, i.e. available income,
- increases employment and decreases unemployment,
- reduces conflicts of distribution,
- allows aid for developing countries,
- reduces state debt and finances social security systems, and
- increases environmental protection (all Lisbon Strategy of European Council 2000 as interpreted by Hinterberger et al. 2009, 1).

Instead of realizing the hopes to solve these diverse problems, economic growth even causes ecological problems and blocks their solution, as Seidl/Zahrnt (2010, 30-34) sum up their critique. Therefore, supporters of post-growth are motivated by the “failure of traditional economic and political systems and their associated ideologies (e.g., capitalism, socialism, social-liberalism and possibly sustainable development” (Martínez-Alier et al. 2010, 1742).

2.3 Two types of post-growth

Since post-growth is a fairly new debate, I consider it as necessary to map major types of post-growth approaches. Based on Martínez-Alier et al. (2010, 1741), type 1 represents the English speaking post-growth debate, while type 2 refers to the French, Spanish and Italian post-growth circles. For each type I found examples from the German post-growth debate, too.

2.3.1 Type 1 “sustainable liberalism”: where to grow?

According to post-growth type 1, called here “sustainable liberalism” (Zahrnt/Zahrnt 2011, 1), the idea of a post-growth economy is to aim for the transformation of areas, institutions and structures, which depend on or support economic growth, in the political, economic and societal spheres of rich, developed countries (Seidl/Zahrnt 2010, 18 and 34). Next to the aim of growth independence, which was introduced by Binswanger (2006) type 1 supporters ask for a more differentiated comprehension of economic growth. Thus, “even in a ‘post-growth society’ many things still need to grow” (Speth 2008, 16), for instance, growth would still be found in developing countries; people-centered economies; income of the poor in rich countries; new solution oriented industries, products and processes; meaningful, well-paid jobs; natural resource and energy productivity and investment in the regeneration of natural assets, social and public services (all *ibid.*, 16).

Sustainable liberalism sticks to the core of modernity and sees freedom as the highest good, including “economic freedom” under the above stated conditions of growth-independence and a differentiation in “good” and “bad” types of economic growth (Zahrnt/Zahrnt 2011, 1-2). Hence, this comprehension of liberalism is *not* motivated by economic growth, regardless of any costs, because liberalism will not be possible on a degraded planet (*ibid.*, 2-3).

“The liberalism claims, that humans have to have the real chance to live an individual and good life as long as others are not restricted in their individuality. Where restrictions are necessary, they have to be just and appropriate. According to liberalism, nobody can expect to live a luxury life” (ibid., 2).

Thus, the first type of post-growth is compatible with a critically modern approach to post-growth which to some extent trust in technology and market forces, but with necessary corrections through political choice implemented by bureaucrats as “juridically trained, specialized officials” (Habermas 1987, 308). According to type 1, efficiency strategies and dematerialization cannot fix the problem to a sufficient extent without becoming too much top-down centered (Loske 2010, 11). This means that “sustainable liberalism” follows a green Keynesianism, but recognizes absolute ecological limits in contrast to the Green New Deal Keynesianism. Typical advocates of this type are the think tank “Denkwerk Zukunft” (Miegel 2010) and the scientist Peach (2009) on the conservative, bureaucratic end of the scale. With a more critical perspective on modernity and closer to movement circles, Speth (2008) and Seidl/Zahrnt (2010) can be found on the other, more alternative end.

2.3.1.1 Theoretical foundations: ecological economics and steady-state economy

Sustainable liberalism has strong roots in the theory of ecological economics and Daly’s steady state economy (1974) as one of their pioneers challenging the “growth imperative” (Jackson 2009, 6) with an alternative macroeconomic concept (Kerschner 2010, 544). Forty years ago, Boulding, Schumacher and other ecological economists picked up an early and famous approach to overcome the imperative of economic growth stated by the classical economist John Stuart Mill in 1848. He supported the idea of a “stationary state” as a “‘normative’ (i.e. desirable) steady-state”, opposing Smith’s and Malthus’ “pessimistic vision (...) regarding stationarity” (ibid., 545).

Daly’s concept assumes that the ecological system sets the boundaries for the economic system. It is based on the assumption that sustaining natural capital means restricting economic growth when it goes beyond the inherent biophysical limits (Daly 2005, 100). Following the “strong sustainability” approach, natural capital is complementary with man-made capital and cannot be substituted with capital produced by humans (ibid., 103). This stands in harsh contrast to the “weak sustainability” approach by the “orthodox, neoclassical economists” Solow and Stiglitz allowing the substitution between different forms of capital (Kerschner 2010, 546). Against many concerns, such a zero-growth economy, as suggested by Daly, does not lack at all in development: progress is re-defined as “qualitative development but not aggregate quantitative growth” (Daly 2008, 1). This differs fundamentally from Smith’s progress as economic growth.

“Once we pass the optimal scale, growth becomes stupid in the short run and impossible to maintain in the long run” leading to “an ecological catastrophe that would sharply lower living standards” (both Daly 2005, 100). There is evidence, that economic growth has already achieved the saturation limit at least in rich countries and now depends on political push effects, as Seidl/Zahrnt (2010, 33) interpret what Daly calls “uneconomic growth” (Daly 2005, 103). The concept of post-growth type 1 maintains that the marginal benefit above a certain level of income is at least not positively or even negatively related to an increase in happiness (Loske 2010, 9).

2.3.2 Type 2 fair de-growth: how to de-grow?

The second post-growth type, fair de-growth, can be defined as a socially fair decrease of production and consumption in order to enhance a good life for all humans and improve locally and globally ecological conditions in the short and long run (Schneider, Sekulova and Rijnhout 2010, 37). For Serge Latouche, who initiated the fair de-growth debate in 2003 in France, the aim of de-growth is to abandon “economic reductionism”, i.e. the “target of growth for the sake of growth” (both Latouche 2010, 519) and to “oppose the uni-dimensional man, homo economicus” (Latouche 2010, 520). But de-growth is for him “not negative growth, a paradoxical expression and absurdity which represent the domination of our imagination by growth” (ibid., 521). Fair de-growth demands instead “decolonizing minds from

economism” (Latouche 2006 as quoted in Martínez-Alier et al. 2010, 1744). This acknowledges that the “concept of growth is in itself vague” passing some of ambiguity on to the idea of de-growth as Martínez-Alier et al. (2010, 1746) criticize.

The de-growth approach is based on Georgescu-Roegen’s “categorical rejection of a steady-state economy” (Kerschner 2010, 544). Georgescu-Roegen is considered to be the “father of de-growth” (Clémentin and Cheynet 2003, 11 as quoted in Martínez-Alier et al. 2010, 1742). He “insisted that only a declining state was both feasible and desirable” due to thermodynamic laws and the inability of complete recycling. Even more than in type 1, an increase in resource and energy efficiency is not seen as sufficient, attributed to the “Jevons paradox”, i.e. the rebound-effect, which compensates efficiency improvements with economic growth through additional usage, new features, increase of size, etc. of products (Foster 2010, n.p.). Instead of finding “good” types of growth, such as the first type claims, fair de-growth calls for “voluntary simplicity” (Latouche 2006, 101 as quoted in Martínez-Alier et al. 2010, 1743) and “re-localise” economic activities (Latouche, 2004, 3). In contrast of applying political instruments such as type 1, typical means of type 2 are broad societal debates with a strong foundation in grassroots activities (Schneider, Sekulova and Rijnhout 2010, 37). In general, this post-growth type represents the “more radical” parts of the post-growth literature (Kerschner 2010, 546) and is expressed as a social movement rather than an academic discourse (Martínez-Alier et al. 2010, 1743).

Supporters of fair de-growth leave the market economy, according to Schneider/Sekulova/Rijnhout (2010, 37), and some of their protagonists “become atheists of growth and the economy” (Latouche 2010, 522). This is where type 2 of post-growth economy is at the edge of critical modernity and becomes partly anti-modern, when it rejects the concept of reason (Latouche 2010, 521). This causes the inherent eclecticism of fair de-growth. Due to this inherent theoretical inconsistency, I have chosen to explain one relevant example for fair de-growth more in detail than elaborating on the theoretical foundation of fair de-growth.

2.3.2.1 A German example for fair de-growth

The approach of a “solidarity-based de-growth economy” is an example for fair de-growth in the German speaking region. The approach considers “freedom as solidarity” (Passadakis/Schmelzer 2011, 3) and was recently developed in the circles of ATTAC Germany, a global justice network (Passadakis/Schmelzer 2010a, 5). This variation of the second type criticises the first type’s social coldness and reacts with the integration of a strong thought of redistribution since a decrease in the use of material goods means even stronger social conflicts than today. In particular, in this example of post-growth, the question is not “to grow or not to grow” (Speth 2008, 166), but the development of an alternative way of thinking about production and consumption: “There is no good growth, only a good life!” (Passadakis/Schmelzer 2010a, 2). This exemplifies the anti-modern parts of fair de-growth. It claims a conversion of values in the sense of a “re-categorization” and “confrontation with existing ways of thinking” (Rochon 1998, 55). But instead of leaving the path of modernity completely, this example favors a critically modern attitude, too:

“But even if we abandon growth – farewell, farewell! – we will continue to claim the modern concepts of human rights and democracy, which have been the fruits of struggles for emancipation. De-growth does not mean abandoning the idea of the possibility for progress – instead it means liberating the idea of progress from the belief in piling up goods and economic growth. Thus, de-growth does not mean returning to tradition, to the stone age, or giving into an anything-goes post-modernism.” (Passadakis/Schmelzer 2010a, 4)

The example illustrates the eclecticism of fair de-growth approaches between critically modern and anti-modern claims.

2.4 Post-growth’s plausibility for approaching sustainability

Both types, sustainable liberalism and fair de-growth, represent the diversity of the debate on a post-growth economy as summed up in Table 1. However, their weaknesses are barriers for achieving a post-growth economy: fair de-growth tends to lack feasible means to a strong end, while sustainable liberalism misses to include a sufficient rationale for justice. Latouche’s fair de-growth has been criticized from an eco-socialist perspective for not being precise enough in the relationship between de-growth and its implications on capitalism (Foster 2010, n.p.) and its lacking foundation in economic theory (Kerschner 2010, 544). Sustainable liberalism, on the other hand, has been criticized for being not appropriate in terms of the urgency and depth of the problem: Passadakis/Schmelzer (2011, 1) assume that Zahrnt/Zahrnt underestimate the consequences of having the real chance to live a good life. For the example of policy instruments, this means that the internalization of externalities will not be feasible, because the price for internalized goods would be too high to be paid under the economic circumstances (Passadakis/Schmelzer 2011, 2). Beyond that, post-growth in general suffers from the impersonality of the post-growth advantages, a too vague definition of a comprehension of progress in the sense of post-growth and the “the unappealing sound of ‘standstill’” (Kerschner 2010, 549).

| | Sustainable Liberalism (Type 1) | Fair De-growth (Type 2) |
|-------------------------------|---|--|
| Aim | Independence from economic growth, differentiated economic growth | ‘Decolonization’ from economic growth, solidarity |
| Means/ Instruments | Political choice and social choice | Discursive |
| Theoretical Foundation | Daly’s steady-state economy | Georgescu-Roegen’s thermodynamic necessity for de-growth |
| Direction of Action | Top-down | Bottom-up |
| Attitude to Modernity | Critically modern | Critically modern and anti-modern |

Table 1: Sustainable Liberalism and Fair De-growth (own figure).

Against the apparent contradicting positions between the advocates of sustainable liberalism and fair de-growth, Martínez-Alier et al. (2010, 1744) see them as “compatible and complementary”. In opposition, I consider critical and anti-modern post-growth types *not* as compatible, but acknowledge their common themes. While the camp of sustainable liberalism certainly is critically modern, fair de-growth has to overcome its eclecticism first. But instead of arguing about details in post-growth scenarios, we can take critical modern post-growth as a plausible point of departure to approach sustainability and focus on the path to achieve it, because next to their theoretical deficits, the ambassadors of both post-growth camps lack a model of change, which is “convincing” or even “inspiring” (Loske 2010, 18).

Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework II: Social Movements as Agents of Change for Sustainability

According to my second preliminary assumption, social movements are the major agents of change in the post-growth project. Supported by a Habermasian argumentation, I explain, *why* social movements are such “key actors” (Rochon 1998, 51) in fundamental change processes. Further, I borrow from Kolb’s theory (2007) to explain, *how* social movements bring about change. While Habermas emphasizes “the agent-based nature”, Kolb’s approach stresses “the structural nature” of the change process (Avelino/Rotmans 2009, 546). Digging deeper into the dichotomy of agency and structure goes beyond the scope of this thesis.¹ Kolb’s theory intends to mitigate the wide spread problem of change models lacking a theoretical foundation, as Raskin et al. (2002) exemplify.

Following della Porta/Diani (2006, 20), I define a social movement as “a distinct social process, consisting of the mechanisms through which actors engaged in collective action:

- are involved in conflictual relations with clearly identified opponents,
- are linked by dense informal networks,
- share a distinct collective identity”.

Using the term “social movement organization” (McCarthy/Zald 1977, 1212) instead of the broader terms of non-governmental organization and non-profit organization, distinguishes it from lobby groups, political parties or religious associations (della Porta/Diani 2006, 26).

Economic growth has deeply entered almost all societal, economic and political processes. This development indicates how fundamental the change towards a post-growth economy might be. Against an “accelerated version of gradual change” (Rochon 1998, 12) by “epistemic communities” (ibid., 24) or bureaucrats, interest groups, political parties and other agents of governance, who aim to achieve “innovation within political institutions” (ibid., 6), a post-growth economy demands another type of change: “rapid change” (ibid., 6) is required, aiming for both “political and social transformation” (ibid., 8). With Avelino and Rotmans (2009, 543) we can further define rapid change as “non-linear processes of social change in which a societal system is structurally transformed”. The process of change starts by raising “a value to the status of controversy” (Rochon 1998, 17) and is only finished when new values are “no longer a matter of contention, or even necessarily of conscious awareness” (Rochon 1998, 18).

¹For a discussion see Callinicos (2009).

3.1 Resisting the “colonization” of the lifeworld: Habermasian argumentation for social movements as agents of change

In this part of my thesis I refer to previous research at LUMES, i.e. Trocchia’s analysis of Habermas’ argumentation for social movements as agents of change. Trocchia (2009, 1) found the “Habermasian approach fruitful for both environmental activists and scholars of sustainability science”. Habermas has developed the “Theory of Communicative Action” aiming:

1. “to develop a concept of rationality that is no longer tied to, and limited by, the subjectivistic and individualistic premises of modern philosophy and social theory;
2. to construct a two-level concept of society that integrates the lifeworld and system paradigms; and, finally
3. to sketch out, against this background, a critical theory of modernity which analyzes and accounts for its pathologies in a way that suggests a redirection rather than an abandonment of the project of the enlightenment” (McCarthy 1984, vi in Habermas 1984).

Habermas distinguishes between “instrumental reason” (Habermas 1987, 333) and “communicative rationality” (Habermas 1984, 390), which results in two spheres of society: system and lifeworld, as illustrated in figure 1. The distinction leads over to Habermas problem perception, in which the system “colonizes” the lifeworld (Habermas 1987, 355). The colonization happens through an exchange between the private and public sphere and between the economic and the state spheres through the media of money and power (Habermas 1981, 36). This colonization is expressed by a decline of the public sphere, e.g. by citizens who are reduced to passive consumers and by the dominance of private concerns over common good and democratic concerns (Kellner 2000, 264 as interpreted by Trocchia 2009, 15). This conflict “at the seam between system and lifeworld” (Habermas 1981, 36) is of particular interest in this thesis, because this is where new social movements, such as the environmental, the feminist and the peace movements occur. They are unified by the critique of economic growth (ibid., 34) expressed “as resistance to tendencies to colonize the lifeworld” (ibid., 35). The resistance incorporates that “the public sphere (lifeworld) must be radicalized so as to decolonize itself (awake the ‘sleeping gallery’) from the dominance of the system media (money, power), which threaten its independence and vitality” (Wironen 2007, 37). The process of resisting the colonization “cannot be reduced only to formal mechanisms of participation, e.g. party politics and voting”, but needs to be complemented by informal mechanisms activated by new social movements as “fundamental actors of political change” (Trocchia 2009, 22). The role of new social movements can be specified as “fostering (...) the process of opinion- and will-formation in the informal civil society” (ibid., 22). In contrast to new social movements, old social movements are organized around the conflict between capital and labour (ibid., 20).

With Trocchia’s interpretation of Habermas’ critically modern theory, we can identify new social movements² as main agents of change “creating an autonomous public sphere” (Trocchia 2009, 33) by means of collective action.

3.2 Kolb’s framework of modelling change by social movements

The thesis is using Kolb’s “Partial Theory of Social Movements” (2007, 19), in which he explores a model for successful change through social movements. With his theory, Kolb recognizes and approaches a deficit of movement research by theorizing causal mechanisms of social movements in order to comprehend their political outcomes. Focusing on a social movement’s mechanisms allows to strengthen the movement’s capacity for transformational change in terms of contributing to a post-growth economy.

²In the following, I will refer to ‘new social movements’ as ‘social movements’.

The overview of this theory given here will be complemented throughout the analysis part (chapter 4), but still requires the lecture of the book to fully grasp the complexity and ingenuity of Kolb's theory.

His basic assumption is that "in order to achieve their political ends, social movements must activate one or several of five different causal mechanisms of political change" (Kolb 2007, 274). The concept of causal mechanisms of political change "should help us to understand why, under certain political conditions, mobilization and the use of specific movement tactics are likely to cause political change" (ibid., 72). Those five mechanisms are the disruptive mechanism, the public preference mechanism, the political access mechanism, the judicial mechanism and the international politics mechanism (ibid., 73). With the concept of causal mechanisms Kolb builds on an argument developed by McAdam/Tarrow/Tilly (2001, 70) of the non-linear, indirect dynamics in movements incorporated in the concept of "trajectories of contention". A successful activation of the causal mechanisms depends on (a) the strength of the movement, (b) its strategy (use of certain tactics to pursue specific political goals) and (c) on the cultural, the economic and particularly the political context, and these three internal or external conditions result either in opportunities or constraints (Kolb 2007, 274-275). Kolb defines a social movement's political ends as outcomes, consequences or impacts and avoids speaking of success and failure, since those terms are less neutral and more vague than the former (ibid., 22). Critically, Giugni (1998, 383) adds to this that despite the fact that "social movements are rational efforts to bring about change, many of their consequences are unintended and often unrelated to their claims".

One has to consider that the concept of strategy as well as its relation to outcomes "is one of the most under-theorized topics in social movement theory" (Kolb 2007, 45, who is supported by Ganz 2000, 1008 and 1009). Nevertheless, Raschke/Tils (2007, 127) define political strategy as success-oriented construct based on goal-means-environment calculations. They draw the "picture of a hierarchical structured collective actor", as Stöss (2008, 26) criticizes. This picture seems not to fit with social movement realities. Apparently there is a difference in strategic understanding:

"because social movements are dynamic, participatory, and organized primarily to celebrate collective identity and assert public voice, their structures of participation, decision making, and accountability are more like those of other civic associations that celebrate collective identity (churches, for example) or assert public voice (advocacy groups) than of those that produce goods or services." (Ganz 2008, 2)

The differentiation correlates with Troccia's interpretation of Habermas, that a strategy "can be an effective and justifiable means to resist colonization", if it "rel[ies] on dialogue as medium of persuasion" (Troccia 2009, 32). Under the condition of an ideal consensus as a feature of communicative rationality (Troccia 2009, 32) the term strategy is not contradicting with Habermas' request for communicative action. Here, I differ from a largely used concept of strategy (see for example Raschke/Tils 2007) that is defined by the feature of instrumental rationality (Troccia 2009, 32). Additionally, the concept of causal mechanisms acknowledges the limitations of the concept of strategy and the limitations of reconstructing the causality between the social movements and the political response (Kolb 2007, 23). In particular it acknowledges that tracing successful outcomes back to one single organization is "virtually impossible" (Kolb 2007, 24) partly because movements are "not homogeneous entities, but a variety of organizations" (Giugni 1999, xx as quoted in Kolb 2007, 24). The "time-lag between the mobilization of a social movement and the occurrence of such political outcomes" (Kolb 2007, 22) further limits the causality.

Three considerations limit the application of Kolb's approach in this thesis or require to go beyond it:

1. Instead of looking retrospectively at a movement (in Kolb's case the US-American civil rights movement and the anti-nuclear movement), I am analysing a movement that does barely exist yet – a potential post-growth movement. Hence, there are no outcomes to be analysed at present. Instead, I apply the post-growth theory to Kolb's explanatory theory with focus on the three conditions, on which the activation of the mechanisms depends. His theory has not been applied by other scholars yet.

2. Instead of looking at a whole movement, the scope of this thesis and the limited expansion of the objective allow only to analyze one social movement organisation as part of a potential post-growth movement. I choose the environmental movement organization FoE and its strategy. In contrast of Kolb's approach, I apply a "combined approach" of social movement studies and organization analysis, as suggested by Davis/Zald (2005, 350), facing the danger of losing the *dynamic* of Kolb's model and falling back into a *static* analysis looking at only one organization (Tilly 2000, 15).
3. In terms of outcomes, Kolb focuses on the political ones. The post-growth project, however, will have cultural outcomes, as Giugni (1998, 388) suggests to look at, and economic outcomes, so that I judge it necessary to include a broader understanding of outcomes. This requires to develop additional mechanisms of economic and cultural change, but such an extension of Kolb's theoretical framework goes beyond the scope of my thesis. Consequently, I assume, that focusing on mechanisms of political change offers not a complete, but a sufficient framework for my analysis.

3.3 Model of change: collective agency for structural change

Generally speaking, social movements remove structural barriers of change. This function distinguishes a social movement, for instance, from critical consumers, whose ability for structural changes is limited since they focus on their private sphere. Additionally, structural changes realized by social movement can affect other change agents and improve their potential for change. One has to consider, however, that agents of change face a dilemma between illusion and euphoria of managing change (Kristof 2010, 21). Figure 1 illustrates the model of structural change driven by collective agency as it was developed throughout this chapter.

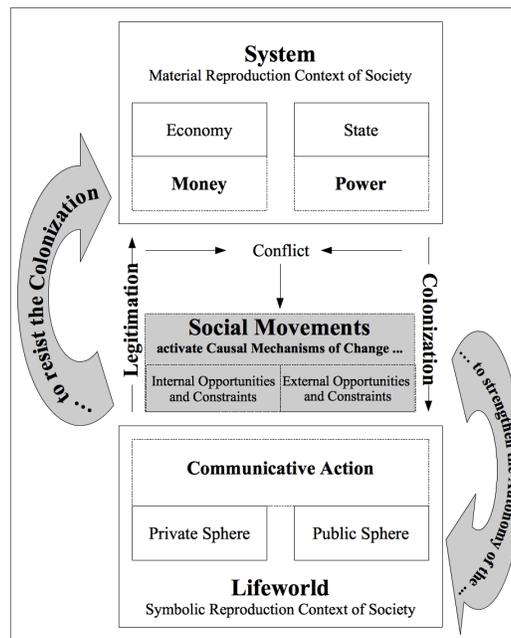


Figure 1: Social Movements as Agents of Change in a Habermasian Model of Communicative Action (Source: Conducted by the author from Habermas 1984 and 1987, Kolb 2007 and Troccia 2009).

Chapter 4

Results and Analysis: Towards the Environmental Movement's Adoption of Post-Growth

This chapter presents and analyzes the results of my study, in which I was interviewing five key informants, was holding a focus group workshop with eight participants (Focus group 2011) and did a primary document analysis (BUND 2011). Here, I apply Kolb's theory of social movements to the German environmental movement and, in particular, FoE to comprehend their opportunities and constraints for adopting post-growth.¹

I come up with four *main findings*: first, the study showed that a German post-growth movement is not to be expected, but can be compensated by the environmental movement and FoE's qualification for post-growth (section 4.1.1). Second, it showed that FoE lacks championing post-growth because of a gap in bridging post-growth theory with its own work (section 4.1.2). The gap can be filled through operationalizing post-growth. Therefore, I suggest five recommendations to the major gaps (section 4.1.2). Third, the study showed also, that the political, economic and cultural context in Germany largely inhibits proceeding towards a post-growth economy, nevertheless some promising opportunities could be identified (section 4.1.3). Last but not least, the study found that the environmental movement in Germany can activate certain mechanisms of change, if post-growth can be operationalized (section 4.2).

4.1 Conditions of change for a post-growth economy: opportunities and constraints

In this section I refer to the three conditions Kolb (2007, 274-275) developed in his theory: movement agents, strategy and context.

4.1.1 Movement agency: From multiple identities to a post-growth movement?

This part is looking for particular social movements and parts of them as agents of change towards a post-growth economy. This follows from my research question 1, which is asking, if the German environmental movement and FoE are suitable candidates for a post-growth economy? For now we just look at the movement itself and assume that "movements can impact policy making with their

¹The procedure of conducting the exploratory study on FoE are further explained in Appendix A.

own forces, without external support”, which is expressed in the “direct-effect model” (both Kolb 2007, 39). We will see later on, that this link is “incomplete” (ibid., 43).

The “concept of collective action”, which determines the analysis of a potential post-growth movement in Germany, recognizes that it would not be rational for individual actors to support the production of collective goods, as central to post-growth, “if they had to bear all the costs of failure, but could enjoy all the fruits of success without having contributed directly to the production of the good” (della Porta/Diani 2006, 101). The problem with post-growth though is, that it has no immediate beneficiaries. Those who benefit from it – the same as for most sustainability conflicts – are nature, today’s poor and future generations. Thus, the post-growth project requires collective advocates among today’s generation, including today’s poor. One can derive from the post-growth typology, that both types are compatible with social movements as collective agents of change. Fair de-growth and sustainable liberalism do not believe in bureaucrats (alone) fixing the problem.

4.1.1.1 Desperately seeking a German post-growth movement

In Germany, unlike other European countries such as France, Spain and Italy (Kerschner 2010, 544), we currently see the development of a *critical community*, but not a post-growth *movement*. “Critical communities” refer to a concept that frames “the originators of new values perspectives” (Rochon 1998, 22). Neither do these critical thinkers “necessarily belong to a formally constituted organization” (ibid., 22), nor do they “seek specific outcomes so much as they attempt to influence the conceptual framework” (ibid., 23). Among the critical post-growth communities in Germany, we find “substantial differences” (ibid., 23), which are typical within critical communities. Four major sources of dissent were identified and can also be found in Germany: (1) post-growth agents, who oppose economic growth and those who develop alternatives, (2) those agents who focus on global approaches versus those focusing on local approaches, (3) those, who demand fundamental institutional changes and those who are fine with minor adaptations of institutional structures, and (4) those agents, who prefer a theoretical analysis versus those who prefer grassroots and policy strategies (Schneider/Sekulova/Rijnhout 2010, 38). These variations occur within and between organizations, groups and among individuals (della Porta/Diani 2006, 99). The “heterogeneity” (Zahrnt 2011a, interview) of post-growth communities result in “multiple identities” with strong “tensions among various types of identification” (both della Porta/Diani 2006, 98). The question is now, if the critical post-growth communities turn into a social movement “as the source of pressure that brings these ideas to the attention of social and political institutions” (Rochon 1998, 22)?

Despite the fact that a movement “does not always presuppose a strong ‘collective we’” (della Porta/Diani 2006, 98), the interviewees agreed on the claim, that currently we do not have a post-growth movement in Germany due to the observed heterogeneity (Zahrnt 2011a, interview, Schmelzer 2011, interview). Although “conflictual relations” between growth-supporting and growth-opposing agents are given, the post-growth activities in Germany can not be called a “distinct, social process” of “dense informal networks”, according to the definition of social movements (della Porta/Diani 2006, 20). But while Schmelzer (2011, interview) sees reason to develop post-growth as a crucial issue in social movements in Germany, Zahrnt (2011a, interview) opposes this. Enhancing a German post-growth movement would risk losing the currently heterogeneous agents, in particular the more conservative ones, in favor of “building an interesting movement of a relatively homogeneous political spectrum” (Zahrnt 2011a, interview). A post-growth movement faces the danger of only representing a niche of views, while a post-growth economy requires “a broad majority for change” (Zahrnt 2011a, interview). In sum, the heterogeneity of the agents is a barrier for the development of a post-growth movement in Germany, but at the same time a chance for a broad debate on the issue.

4.1.1.2 Post-growth related movements

Although in Germany the emergence of a post-growth movement is unlikely, “the critique of economic growth is placed in other existing movements” (Zahrnt 2011a, interview). Post-growth related move-

ments, which carry out parts of the ideas of a post-growth economy, are, for instance, the long existing and growing solidarity economy initiatives, the non-commercial agriculture movement, the eco-village movement, the anti-globalization movement and the more recent slow food movement (Focus group 2011). Particularly often drawn is the relation to the transition town initiatives (Jackson 2009, 105). The movement's founder refuses a direct critique of economic growth, but sees the end of economic growth as inevitable due to the end of fossil fuels (Hopkins 2011, interview).

These critiques of the contemporary economic system lack an obvious claim of post-growth and differ from the “partisans” of de-growth or the “objectors to growth” themselves (Latouche 2010, 521). The post-growth related movements “do not have their origins in the critique on growth” and do not prioritize to replace growth (Zahrnt 2011a, interview). The workshop participants (Focus group 2011) support Zahrnt's critical appraisal that these related movements do not attempt to change politics on a national level, which is required for a post-growth economy. Since they are “too specific” and “narrow” to promote the entire concept of post-growth, related movements are “not expected to become the engines” of a post-growth economy, but certainly they are “practical examples” of post-growth communities since they are better established and developed than the German post-growth communities (Zahrnt 2011b, interview).

4.1.1.3 The German environmental movement and FoE as post-growth agency

An adequate social movement agency can be found among already existing movements, which are qualified, i.e. well-established and broad enough, to carry the idea of a post-growth economy. In particular, the environmental movement fulfils these criteria and is likely to be a driver (Speth 2008, 315, 337): its broad integration in society and its expertise grown over decades explains its general function for post-growth (Zahrnt 2011a, interview, Zahrnt 2011b, interview). Essential for contributing to a post-growth economy is the fact that it “includes social justice as well as environmental concerns” since less used material goods can exacerbate conflicts of distribution (Speth 2008, 338). For a long time, the German environmental movement has integrated sustainability's major thought of conceptualizing together the social and ecological question on different political levels, which now becomes central to post-growth. Two examples for this argument are the studies “Sustainable Germany” (BUND/Miserior 1996) and “Sustainable Germany in a globalized world” (BUND et al. 2008), mainly initiated by FoE.

Next to other major environmental movement organizations such as German League for Nature Conservation and Environmental Protection (DNR), Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union (NABU) and Greenpeace, FoE has been contributing for at least two decades to the establishment of the environmental movement in the sustainability discourse. The organization goes beyond nature conservation approaches and is “giving environmental concerns a societal frame”, too (Spangenberg 2011, interview). Already in the early 1980s, FoE published a book on employment without environmental damage (original title: Arbeit ohne Umweltzerstörung, Binswanger/Frisch/Nutzinger 1983) and developed positions on the critique of GDP, the ecological tax reform and an ecological-social market economy (BUND 2011, 1). According to their guiding principles, the organization aims for the following: “We are an association for environmental protection and nature conservation aimed at bringing about sustainable development on a local, regional, national and international level” (BUND 2004, 1). With 480,000 members, FoE is itself broadly established in the societal mainstream and seen by a majority of Germans “as legitimized organ of their interests” (Spangenberg 2011, interview). Due to their character as a large, pluralistic “mass protest organization”, they combine “participatory democracy” with formal policy work (both della Porta/Diani 2006, 147). Additionally, Zahrnt (2011a, interview) is expressing FoE's strong motivation for post-growth: “FoE has the best conditions among the environmental movement organizations to become not only a sustainability organization, but also a post-growth organization.”

4.1.2 Movement organization strategy: operationalizing post-growth

This part analyzes the strategy of the social movement organization FoE based on research question 2 and 3: what stops FoE from adopting a strategy for a post-growth economy and how can the idea of a post-growth economy be operationalized for FoE? To fulfil Kolb's second condition, FoE is required to develop a strategy as the way the organization "pursues its political goals with certain tactics" (Kolb 2007, 45-46). The following analysis explains that the reason for FoE's restraint in championing post-growth is neither their inability to deal with large-scale issues, nor a deficit in academic concepts of post-growth, but a missing bridge between post-growth theory and FoE's work. FoE is restricted because of these gaps, but does not cause them itself. Certainly, FoE is not the only post-growth agent with "contradicting arguments" (Schmelzer 2011, interview).

The study found, firstly, that these gaps in the strategy need to be filled to be able to activate causal mechanisms of change and implement post-growth by social movement organizations. This is why I state in this section five recommendations for the operationalization of post-growth. I address them to those actors who are concerned with a consistent theoretical framework for post-growth, i.e. to academia, to FoE and a few other actors, as will be clarified below. The academic findings on post-growth need to be popularized and translated for social movement organizations in order to have an impact for a post-growth economy. Vice versa, social movements and their organizations need to address their challenges towards academia.

But even if FoE had a consistent strategy on post-growth, the organization would still face a tripled organizational dilemma between mobilizing people or resources, hierarchical or horizontal structures, and being challengers or "service providers", as the study found secondly (della Porta/Diani 2006, 141-143). Where post-growth claims do not correlate with the motives of voluntary engagement, interest of media audience and donators, it is likely that the latter will get priority (Franck 2011, interview). This dilemma indicates a "democratic ambivalence" (Raschke/Tils 2007, 42) between democratic processes and power structures in social movements (Stöss 2008, 26). Due to this "dual nature of movements" (Rochon 1998, 53), we can state a "strategic paradoxon" for the key agent of change, FoE (Machnig 2008, 37). This fundamental limitation of a movement organization strategy causes the necessity for activating broader mechanisms by the agents of change (see section 4.2).

4.1.2.1 Missing bridge I: vague post-growth goals

Goal 1: Due to FoE's recent forswearing of economic growth, which has not been expressed as obvious in the past as now, the organization is part of the post-growth debate: FoE formulates a "strong critique of the Green New Deal" and distances itself from those representatives of the environmental movement, who believe in "sustainable growth" (both BUND 2011, 22). In its recent discussion, FoE goes beyond the critique of economic growth and criticizes the "growing economic logic of life", indicated by viewing things as products and by the dominance of the ownership concept (ibid., 23). The suggested alternative is a "sufficient, resource-light lifestyle, which implicates no decrease in life quality, but – if material conditions and a change in thinking happened – allows the increase of happiness" (ibid., 23) and adds a strong positive notion to economic de-growth to overcome the danger of "standstill" (ibid., 34). However, Zahrnt (2011b, interview) clearly states, that "it is necessary to inform about the fact that people will have less money and can spend less on material goods than now". Thus, the "liberation from economic growth" is the main goal of the strategy (Metzges 2010, 3).

Recommendation 1: Re-framing the promises of economic growth as myths. Post-growth arguments need to be clearly distinguished from those of ecological modernization and sustainable development (Hueting 2010, 529). Therefore, ecological economics offer a macroeconomic model for a post-growth economy. When post-growth actors systematical re-frame the promises of economic growth as myths accessible for all societal milieus, as its main contribution, they can mark the beginning of a new phase of the sustainability discourse.

Goal 2: FoE strives for freedom and welfare in the Global North and South, and follows the ideals of the “market economy” and “democracy” (BUND 2011, 34, 35), but recognizes that “economic growth is not the ideal path to get there” (ibid., 21). Thus, FoE does not view development as economic growth. A newspaper article by Zahrnt/Zahrnt (2011, 1) indicates the awareness of single movement actors about the different moments of modernity. Zahrnt, as a key actor in FoE, locates herself within the article in “sustainable liberalism” (ibid.). In sum, FoE’s position is less radical than post-growth type 2 and is not judged as anti-modern, but critically modern.

Recommendation 2: Locating post-growth as critical modern. The previous analysis on sustainability (see chapter 2.1) showed that only critically modern post-growth approaches are compatible with sustainability, as it is understood in this thesis; neither uncritical, nor anti-modern approaches of post-growth are suitable. There is an academic need to clearly position post-growth goals within one of the three attitudes of modernity and narrow down the concepts of progress and development for post-growth, as exemplified for the case of property (van Griethuysen 2010, 594). To overcome the existing eclecticism within post-growth type 2 and, hence, between the two types leaving “Georgescu-Roegen’s growthmania and Latouche’s tyranny of growth” (Kerschner 2010, 549) is required.

4.1.2.2 Missing bridge II: vague post-growth tactics

Tactic 1: The workshop participants raised questions regarding the means of addressing “uneconomic growth” (Daly 2005, 103) adequately (Focus group 2011). The study identified efficiency as one contradictorily framed means in FoE’s position. On the one hand, efficiency strategies are seen as an “indispensable part of a modern sustainability strategy” (BUND 2011, 18), as indicated by FoE’s engagement in energy efficiency campaigns (ibid., 17). Whereas, on the other hand, FoE states that “even an efficiency revolution is not enough” (ibid. 17), when considering that “only efficiency rates that are higher than the rate of economic growth have positive effects on the environment” (ibid., 17). For FoE efficiency is even positively correlated with economic growth (ibid. 18).

Recommendation 3: Going beyond political choice as means towards post-growth. Efficiency and decoupling are critically discussed instruments of political choice (Alcott 2010, 558-559). Favored among post-growth type 1 advocates are, instead, the development of a commons sector, the ecological tax reform, greenhouse gas or land trade permissions, a reform of national accounts, a reform of the bank and financial system, the limitation of advertisement and the shortage of the working day, week and year (CASSE 2011a, n.p.). A few of these have been implemented in Germany, but with only minor positive effects. Increasingly, these instruments developed by academics such as Daly, Jackson, Speth and Korten (CASSE 2011a, n.p.) are translated into practical policies by think tanks such as CASSE (2011a) or FÖS (2011), for instance. Nevertheless, their hesitant realization raises the question, if political instruments sufficiently address the problem of uneconomic growth or not. If not, what would be the alternative means? The further procedure of going beyond political choice depends on the underlying post-growth type: according to critically modern “sustainable liberalism”, against the decline of values in the current system of uncritical modernity, values need to be restored for post-growth, in order to finish the project of modernity (Habermas 1997, 38). In line with Sen (1999), one main value, development, is understood as “freedom” and social choice would then be the mean to achieve it. The concept of social choice (Sen 1999, 76-81, Habermas 1987, 100, Habermas 1984, 286-287), understood as participatory and inter-subjectively agreed social capabilities, can complement political choice. Here, a broader understanding of Daly’s steady-state economy is needed going beyond strong sustainability in the classical, rather economic sense.

Meanwhile, fair de-growth advocates, such as Latouche (2004), do not believe in any form of economic growth and see modernity itself as the problem. The approach of those anti-modern actors would be a discursive change of culture, in which values such as regionalism or solidarity would be defined (Shiva 2009, Passadakis/Schmelzer 2011, 1). Thus, the means advocated by type 2 are more radical in going beyond the concept of political choice. Such means face problems associated with leaving the market system without offering a plausible alternative.

Tactic 2: The study could prove, that economic growth as well as post-growth are “too abstract” to justify to be translated into a campaign (Zahrnt 2011a, interview, also Spangenberg 2011, interview). Growth as well as post-growth lack the participatory character, that is essential for campaigning, “offered through such political institutions and processes as elections, referenda, legislative and regulatory gearings, and informal negotiations with governmental officials” (Rochon 1998, 209). “Whereas it is hardly possible to organize campaigns against growth, it is well possible to do (and it is done) on various aspects of growth politics” (Spangenberg 2011, interview). Thus, it is important to distinguish between “growth as an abstract concept and growth politics as a series of projects and decisions to promote growth” (Spangenberg 2011, interview). Today, “most of FoE’s projects run indirectly against growth politics”, although they are not explicit about it (Spangenberg 2011, interview). A holistic post-growth approach is a “challenge” for the organization, and this suggests to focus on a few major topics of post-growth, that are already part of FoE’s broad engagement (Zahrnt 2011a, interview). As one communicative tool, a “happiness calculator” similar to the existing ecological footprint calculator has been suggested by the workshop participants (Focus group 2011).

Recommendation 4: Identifying and compiling post-growth areas. As a result of FoE’s request for viewing post-growth as an integral topic, the core areas of a post-growth economy have to be defined. In particular, this has been done by Seidl/Zahrnt (2010) for the following areas: pension system, health system, education, labor market, consumption, redistribution and social justice, resource efficiency, companies, financial markets and bank system, tax policy, state finances as well as democracy, citizenship and participation (see for further details Appendix B). The next step is now to develop and narrow down these areas for the organization’s departments, projects and positions. Once the dependencies of economic growth in current FoE projects are analyzed, their potential for including post-growth messages offering new approaches to go beyond just criticizing economic growth need to be examined. How can an environmental organization such as FoE contribute to a post-growth health system? Which department in FoE would be responsible for post-growth companies? The study shows that the core themes of post-growth can be integrated into FoE’s departments, such as biodiversity, climate change and energy politics, nature conservation, agriculture and mobility. Post-growth think tanks such as CASSE/EJfA (2010), the Post-Growth Institute (2011) and Denkwirk Zukunft (2011) could fill this gap through close cooperation between academia and social movement organizations. Partially, they are working already on the areas (CASSE 2011b), but the bridge to social movement organizations is still missing. Think tanks could also develop personalized versions of alternative indicators of prosperity (see section 4.1.3) to operationalize the idea of a “happiness indicator” for FoE.

Tactic 3: Establishing a coalition with unions was recommended several times (Schmelzer 2011, interview, Zahrnt 2011a, interview, Focus group 2011). Unions have a potential “key role” in the debate, although “they will not be a driver for of a post-growth movement” (Schmelzer 2011, interview). Until now, the debate develops “independently from unions” (Schmelzer 2011, interview). The study provides reason for a strong skeptical attitude of the post-growth community towards unions: they are seen as one major driver for the system obsessed with economic growth (Schmelzer 2011, interview, Focus group 2011), although unions have promoted the idea of shorter working weeks and the redistribution of work hours in the 1990s (Müller 2011, 2). Unless they are not convinced, it will be unlikely to establish an alternative model for labor work with reduced working hours and the reevaluation of other forms of work: care work, household work, social and community engagement. The re-integration of *old* social movements such as the labor movement and, in particular, labor unions play a significant role in the post-growth project, despite the fact that their motivation for resistance differs from *new* social movements, as Habermas showed earlier. The plausibility of the re-integration of old and new social movements in a post-growth movement strategy has to be tested by social movement scientists (Kriesi et al. 1995, 80-81).

Recommendation 5: Forming coalitions with actors of post-growth areas. In general, a post-growth strategy has to overcome the motivational dilemma that currently blocks the formation of coalitions between FoE and actors of post-growth areas. The study found that “mostly environmentalists, but not those experts of core post-growth themes” are concerned with post-growth (Zahrnt 2011a,

interview). But FoE and the environmental movement alone, do not have the power and connections to drive this change alone. Instead those experts from the post-growth areas have the ability and influence to develop and implement post-growth. They can take responsibility for the deficits of their approaches and change or even replace them with alternatives. Subsequently, the environmental movement in Germany and FoE, in particular, require a coalition with actors from post-growth areas, who are currently drivers of economic growth, but essential for a post-growth economy. These actors have to be identified and involved. Forming coalitions would be important for both types of post-growth, although it was easier for those who are closer to the conservative fraction of type 1 than for the radical fraction of type 2 since the connectivity is more likely in the first case. Through “the support of leading social institutions and actors, and on access to the mass media” (Rochon 1998, 210), FoE can “create and make visible widespread social concern about a general issue area” (ibid., 210). Here, the most effort needs to be invested by social movements, in particular, by the identified candidate FoE.

To proceed from here, I assume that these gaps can be filled in the future by social movement organizations, academia, think tanks and other bridging actors.

4.1.3 Movement’s environment: political, economic and cultural context for post-growth in Germany

Regarding the growing number of newspaper articles, scientific conferences and governmental commissions on post-growth, one could question whether initiating a societal debate on post-growth is “overdue” as the head of FoE wrote recently (Weiger 2010, n.p.). Actually, it is “already ongoing” (Spangenberg 2011, interview). There are even “signals for a decline in the debate”, as the sociologist Schor (interpreted by Zahrt 2011a, interview) assumes. Indeed, next to the movement itself, the external “ever-changing” environment (Ganz 2000, 1011)² interacts with the movement. Thus, it either blocks or supports the activation of mechanisms towards a post-growth economy by the German environmental movement and is necessary to be analyzed before answering research question four in chapter 4.2. The assumption is based on the “joint-effect model” and the “indirect-effect model” (Kolb 2007, 52-53), which refuse a linear influence of the movement towards its political outcomes.

The major barrier is the lack of challenging the consensus of economic growth among political elites in Germany and therewith, the absence of an elite conflict about post-growth. Other constraints in the political, economic and cultural context are the following:

- The partisanship through the German government is missing. Instead, it celebrates economic growth as panacea in their initial declaration: “Creating growth is the aim of our government. (...) Without growth no investment, without growth no employment, without growth no money for education, without growth no aid for the poor. However, growth creates investment, employment, money for education, aid for the poor and – most important – trust of the people.” (Merkel 2009, n.p.).
- GDP as a foundation for most policy decisions beyond its original conceptualization is dominating; also, broadly establishing the critique of GDP, meaning that GDP calculations are reductionist in the sense that they under-price natural capital and are blind to social capital, struggles (Johnson 2010, 26-27, Liedtke 2010, 30).
- Alternative indicators, such as the Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW) and the German National Prosperity Index (NWI), are almost redundant for political decisions (Gladiator 2010, 71). Although Germany’s GDP increased since 2000 continuously, the NWI decreased because of increased social and ecological costs (ibid., 71). Additionally, the New Economy Foundation and Friends of the Earth UK developed the Happy Planet Index (HPI), in which

²The categories describing the external opportunities and constraints, which are structuring the analysis, are taken from Kolb’s model (2007, 53-70).

happiness and the ecological footprint are more central than the ecological dimension into monetary accounting (ibid., 71).

- The Bertelsmann Foundation (2010, 2) found an inherent contradiction in public opinion demanding economic growth for the sake of society, but denying its relevance for their personal happiness.

But the analysis shows also a change of the external environment, which creates opportunities to activate the causal mechanisms. Instances are

- at least slowly changing public preferences (Bertelsmann Foundation 2010, 1),
- some political leaders advocating for post-growth (Müller 2010, Loske 2010),
- instances of mass disruption indicating a “new willingness to protest” (Habermas 2011, 10),
- a few foundations for a legal challenge of economic growth (Bundesgesetzblatt 2009, n.p., Merkel 2009), and
- potential windows of reform for post-growth around Rio+20 in 2012, as it has been the financial crisis for post-growth in 2008 (Pörschmann 2011, interview, Schmelzer 2011, interview, Spangenberg 2011, interview, Zahrnt 2011a, interview).

4.2 Causal mechanisms of change towards a post-growth economy

It follows from the analysis of the three conditions, i.e. the movement agents, their strategy and the context, that the political impact of a social movement depends on internal and external variables. Given this, the German environmental movement and FoE can (co-)activate several causal mechanisms to proceed towards a post-growth economy. However, it depends on the type of post-growth which mechanisms will be activated. While the public preferences mechanism, the political access mechanism and the disruption mechanism are likely to be activated for post-growth, the judicial mechanism and the international politics mechanism are not. Now, I explore these different possibilities to use the power of the environmental movement for political change towards post-growth one by one.

To some extent the findings in this section are based on my own observation referring to the theoretical framework since little data is available on the mechanisms applied for the case of post-growth. I intend to give a tentative orientation for further elaboration.

4.2.1 Public preferences mechanism: a societal capability for post-growth

Large parts of society are required to question economic growth in order to make the idea of post-growth “gesellschaftsfähig” (Franck 2011, interview) and create a “social opportunity structure” for post-growth (Rochon 1998, 200). The German word stands for being able to be carried into the mainstream of society and is here translated as “societally capable”. Building a societal capability for post-growth on a large scale can make use of the fact, that 61 percent of society question already the usefulness of economic growth for their *individual* happiness (Bertelsmann Foundation 2010, 2). On a second stage, economic growth need to be questioned on a *societal* level, where it is still broadly accepted by 93 percent of the public (Bertelsmann Foundation 2010, 2).

The study showed that the public preferences mechanism contains two dimensions. On the one hand, mainstreaming of the post-growth idea is required, indicated by statements from the focus group (2011) such as “placing post-growth in the middle of society”, “developing and communicating positive visions” and using the “back door of hedonism”. If it was broadly communicated by mass media or in public events, it would be likely to support the polarization of political elites and expand the conflict

on post-growth (Kolb 2002, 55) to make the government concerned about the decreasing support of unlimited economic growth as aim of their politics.

On the other hand, the analysis of the workshop showed, that successfully activating the public preferences mechanism goes beyond a “themization” (della Porta/Diani 2006, 232) or “signaling” of post-growth towards politicians (Kolb 2002, 55), and includes “value creation” (Rochon 1998, 54), too. It requires a shift of values, if economic growth is not any more the means to freedom as the end or even the end itself, as shown in recommendation 2. While in the current value system de-growth is seen as standstill or even instability, in a post-growth world a regulated and actively approached version of de-growth has a positive meaning. This is reflected by the focus group (2011) as “reducing the fears of society towards post-growth” and change the negative associations with “standstill”. Crompton (2010, 11) emphasizes that social movement organizations need to address specific values in a transparent, non-manipulative way to challenge the judgement of the people in order to move them or at least to avoid their resistance towards changing them.

4.2.2 Policy access mechanism: winning political parties as speaking tubes for post-growth

To have a chance to overcome the “resistance in politics” against the critique of economic growth, as Zahrnt (2011a, interview) recognises, the agents of the environmental movement need to get access to the policy cycle. Post-growth is about “a (re)politicization of the economy” for which movement agents are central (Fournier 2008, 532). In “politicizing” post-growth (Focus group 2011), social movements may not be as successful as in awareness raising, as della Porta/Diani (2006, 232) notice, although it is even more important to them (Focus group 2011). Currently, in particular the Green Party’s policy on green growth similar to OECD and UNEP restricts activating the policy access mechanism (Schmelzer 2011, interview, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen 2010, n.p.). The few political elites opposing economic growth are broadly ignored. Nevertheless, as a political speaking tube of the unions, who are a part of old social movements, the left-wing party and to some extent the Social Democrats are promising in facilitating access to the political process for post-growth as a new social movement, as follows from the study (see tactic 3) and is generally supported by Kriesi et al. (1995, 68).

Furthermore, the recently initiated commission of the German Federal Parliament “Growth, welfare and well-being – paths towards a sustainable economy and societal progress in the social market economy” (Kolbe 2011, n.p.) offers a structure to gain access to the political debate despite the low expectations towards its output (Schmelzer 2011, interview, Spangenberg 2011, interview). Unlike the initiatives of several other governments such as the Sen-Stiglitz-Fitoussi commission, initiated by the French government in 2008 (Stiglitz/Sen/Fitoussi 2009), the German committee was introduced by request from the Social Democrats, the Green Party and the Left Party in January 2011, and the “final report will be voted upon by the legislation” (Spangenberg 2011, interview). The members of the commission are nominated by the parties based on their strength in parliament and thus are “as conservative as the political spectrum” (Spangenberg 2011, interview).

The environmental movement can access the political process on several levels aiming to have an “agenda impact”, an “alternatives impact” on the content of policy proposals, a “policy impact”, an “implementation impact” of public policies, or even a “goods impact” referring “to the degree to which social movements influence the provision of collective or public goods” (all Kolb 2007, 28). Yet, this is not done, because the agents of the environmental movement themselves have not questioned that economic growth as “central resource of political feasibility” cannot be overcome (Metzges 2010, 2).

4.2.3 Disruption mechanism: benefiting from German mass protest mood

The disruption mechanism aims to “overcome ‘the problem of the powerless’” (Wilson 1961 interpreted by Kolb 2007, 73) and “stems from its ability to destroy the normal functioning of institutions” (Kolb 2007, 74). To activate it, it is useful, that parts of German society are familiar with mass protest and

other tactics of direct action, indicated by the broad resistance against Stuttgart 21, a large rail way project, and the ongoing resistance against nuclear power (Habermas 2011, 10).

The disruption mechanism is consistent with fair de-growth and emphasizes the far reaching claims of a post-growth economy. Some of the fair de-growth advocates have their “origins in the critique of capitalism” located in the World Social Forum milieus of the anti-globalization movement associated with practicing tactics of disruption (Spangenberg 2011, interview, also Schmelzer 2011, interview). Hence, activating the disruption mechanism for post-growth may require the revitalisation of this declining movement.

But I want to underline Tarrow’s general reservation against disruption: “although disruption may help to unleash a reform process, it is not sufficient to produce significant reforms; rather, ‘they also require the presence and entrepreneurship of well-placed reformists who can turn the impetus for change into concrete proposals and pilot them through the political process’” (Tarrow 1998, 50 interpreted by Kolb 2007, 76). One could even go beyond and say that disruption contradicts mainstreaming post-growth and establishing it in conservative political elites. Thus, disruption is essential, but not the only mechanism that should be activated by the environmental movement. It will only succeed, if an elite conflict on post-growth and electoral instability occur (Kolb 2007, 83). For both conditions sufficient evidence is lacking.

4.2.4 Judicial mechanism: a legal foundation for post-growth?

The judicial mechanism, which allows social movements to make use of the “political power of the courts of their behalf” (Kolb 2007, 86), is difficult in the case of post-growth, because a legal foundation for a post-growth economy is missing. Kolb observes that a social movement’s influence through legislation is most “under-theorized” in the literature (*ibid.*, 86). Nevertheless, post-growth fulfils the conditions for activating the judicial mechanism: there is lack of a “legal precedent” and the access to politics is restricted (*ibid.*, 94). Additionally, the German courts are strong and relatively political independent (*ibid.*, 94). In particular, the “growth-enhancement-law” (Wachstumsbeschleunigungsgesetz, Bundesgesetzblatt 2009) and the initial statement of the German government (Merkel 2009) could be challenged by courts through environmental movement agents. Since a deep split in political elites is necessary for the activation (Kolb 2007, 241), but only little support by elites such as outstanding politicians such as Loske (2010) for the Green Party and Müller (2010) for the Social Democrats is given, the judicial mechanism might have not more than a supporting, indirect impact.

4.2.5 International politics mechanism: beyond national economies

One major barrier for a post-growth economy is that no single state pioneers for it. Activating the international politics mechanism could shift the scale of the debate, though, from national to international politics (Kolb 2007, 89), where the environmental movement can “target international organizations”, “boycott global markets” and initiate an “international normative discourse” (*ibid.*, 90-91). In reverse, international post-growth activities could support the national ones especially in countries as Germany with a relatively open “political institutional structure” (*ibid.*, 273). The post-growth theory demands an international debate about the re-regulation of international commerce, downsizing the World Trade Organization and the World Bank and limiting the range of inequality for income distribution (Daly 2008 as interpreted by CASSE 2011a). But in contrast to national debates, an international debate on post-growth has not been initiated yet, partly because many post-growth areas are national issues. A global post-growth movement is missing. It is not sure, whether the fractionated regional and national post-growth initiatives will be united in a common movement. Furthermore, international organizations, who criticize growth and, thus, open the avenue to challenge international politics in their belief in economic growth, are absent, too. For now, the international politics mechanism does not appear as feasible for post-growth.

Chapter 5

Conclusion: Post-Growth on the Move

5.1 Summarizing statements

The study has shown that post-growth is a plausible approach for sustainability under the condition, that it takes a critically modern approach to either sustainable liberalism or fair de-growth, which I have described as the two major types of post-growth. Critically modern post-growth approaches do not question freedom as the end of modernity, but question progress as economic growth. The dichotomy of ‘progress as development’ and ‘progress as growth’, thus, becomes central to the logic of the post-growth debate. Where sustainable liberalism and fair de-growth are critically modern, they have the chance to use each others strengths and compensate each others limitations: Under the condition that fair de-growth overcomes its eclecticism, they are in combination most compatible with the urgency of the problem while still being feasible.

This study sees social movements as major agents of change for the transition to a post-growth economy caused by their ability to resist the “colonization of the lifeworld by the system” (Habermas 1987, 355). It could show that one needs not necessarily a post-growth movement itself to bring about a post-growth economy through social movements. Instead, the German environmental movement and, in particular, FoE are suitable candidates for post-growth due to their broadly established status in society, their driving participation in the sustainability discourse over decades and their motivation for the issue of post-growth. This leads to the approval of research question 1.

Neither a lack in FoE dealing with large-scale issues, nor a deficit in academic concepts of post-growth, but the missing bridge between both causes that FoE is currently not championing post-growth. This answers research question 2. FoE’s impact on the post-growth debate depends especially on the communication between academics and activists. The idea of a post-growth economy can be operationalized through popularizing academic findings and translating them for social movement organizations. In particular, ecological economists and sustainability scientists bear responsibility to operationalize post-growth. Sustainability Science can strengthen the bridge between academia, movements and other actors, but will not be able to achieve sustainability by itself. This is why also think tanks and experts in the post-growth areas are recommended to turn the academic knowledge into practical scenarios for each area. I suggested the following recommendations for FoE’s adoption of a post-growth economy and therewith, I answer research question 3:

1. Post-growth approaches have to be clearly distinguished from approaches of ecological modernization and sustainable development. In contrast to the latter, post-growth would re-frame the promises of economic growth as myths.
2. If post-growth is located as critically modern, the concepts of progress and development for a post-growth economy need further examination.
3. Political and social choice are plausible means towards a post-growth economy. We can borrow

from sustainable liberalism's suggestion for political choice and combine rather technocratic, market-centered policy instruments with social choice as bottom-up debates and activities of the fair de-growth advocates.

4. Areas of a post-growth economy, such as the health system, the tax system, the bank system, the pension system, the labor market, state finances, education and companies, need to be identified and complied to narrow post-growth down and reduce its current abstractness.
5. An inherent power dilemma between the agents of change and the actors of the areas, which are required to be transformed towards post-growth, has to be overcome while forming coalitions between both actors.

Under the condition of having an operationalized post-growth strategy with specific aims and tactics, appropriate candidates as well as having a sufficiently supporting political, economic and cultural context, the environmental movement can activate in particular two causal mechanisms in order to have a positive impact on a post-growth economy (research question 4): both is needed, a "transformation of consciousness" through activating the public preference mechanism and a "transformation of politics" through the activation of the political access mechanism (both Speth 2008, 293). Both are heavily restricted by the absence of a deep conflict of political and public elites about a sustainable economic system. The disruption mechanism is promising in the German context since mass protest is becoming a cultural activity among large parts of the German population. The activation of the juridical mechanism appears as not more than a supporting mechanism, if at all, since the legal foundation for a post-growth economy is missing. The international politics mechanism is, due to a lack of international post-growth institutions, unrealistic to be activated.

5.2 Outlook: future research and practice

Going beyond the scope of this thesis, a team of scientists may identify other social movements relevant to post-growth. For instance, a closer look at the labor movement and the anti-globalization movement could be fruitful in identifying further agents of change for post-growth. Interdisciplinary research could address the causal mechanisms of change in more detail and do empirical work to apply those for post-growth. Theoretical work could be done to apply more mechanisms on Kolb's model by social movement scientists. They could identify mechanisms for economic and cultural change in addition to the mechanisms for political change, that have been examined in Kolb's model so far, to pave the way to a more holistic comprehension of change. Looking into practice, FoE is well posed to be a leading organization for post-growth beyond the environmental movement, if they can come up with a coherent strategy for post-growth. This includes an internal post-growth check to identify the potential of the organization in existing projects, departments and positions. Speaking about transdisciplinary bridges, future work is required to overcome the outsider role of those activists who join academic conferences and - vice versa - the outsider role of academics who step into the activists' field. The role of these current outsiders is underestimated and requires more focus and emphasis.

5.3 Concluding remarks

Until now I left out one major issue: the question, whether a capitalist system may be sustainable without growth or not. Latouche, Daly and many ecological economists did not put capitalism on their agenda either. One could guess, there is a systematic avoidance or even fear among those who deal with the ecological limits within the economic system, although the question raises a number of interesting points. In this thesis, I consciously do not point towards capitalism for two reasons: first, I keep in mind former black-white-discussions on capitalism and intend to avoid those, because I assume it is not a yes-or-no-capitalism-answer that a post-growth society is required to give. Second, I question that a clear position towards a capitalistic system is helpful to establish a post-growth economy. Capitalism

has many aspects and has taken many different shapes. Too many to give an adequate answer within the frame of this thesis. This is why I stay indifferent towards a post-growth capitalism.

Instead of touching upon capitalism in more detail, this thesis finishes with stating that the idea of post-growth implies mainly a thicker conceptualization of value. Growth has become a value not only in the economic system, but far beyond. The idea of growing has become inherent in social systems and in particular in our “mental infrastructures” (Welzer 2011). A very narrow, limiting and even understanding of growth has colonized most parts of human life. I claim a need for an intra- and inter-systemic pluralism of values rejecting reductionist explanations as universal truths. In particular, the economic system requires a re-diversification. Different purposes of economies require to be led by different logics and not just one in order to be sustainable.

Suddenly, a sharp critique on economic growth fuels the discourse on sustainability. After four decades, a long, tiring journey from the *Limits to Growth* over *Our Common Future* to *Prosperity without Growth* accelerates speed by academics, who are almost done with drawing the road map for a sustainable economy and by social movements who are ready to bring about change. In this thesis project, both met on an imaginary crossing with the motivation to raise the interest on each others business. Their alliance is the key to get post-growth on the move.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Data collection

A.1 Interviewees

For the data collection of this thesis five semi-structured interviews have been done. Additionally, I included a part of an interview with Rob Hopkins, who was interviewed by Tina Nyfors. The reference Zahrnt 2011b refers to the feedback interview that was done after the focus group workshop.

Franck, Norbert (2011), officer for public relations at Friends of the Earth Germany. Interviewed via telephone at February 24, 2011 by the author.

Hopkins, Rob (2011), founder of the transition town movement. Interviewed via telephone at April 5, 2011 by Tina Nyfors.

Pörschmann, Robert (2011), spokes person for the department for climate and economy at Friends of the Earth Germany. Personally interviewed at January 24, 11 by the author.

Schmelzer, Matthias (2011), co-founder of the blog “Post-Wachstum in Bewegung” (Post-growth in movement, Passadakis/Schmelzer 2010b) and co-initiator of the ATTAC-conference “Jenseits des Wachstums” (Beyond growth) in May 2011, Berlin. Personally interviewed at January 24, 2011 by the author.

Spangenberg, Joachim (2011), spokes person of the working group “Economy and Finances” in Friends of the Earth Germany. Interviewed via telephone at January 18, 2011 by the author.

Zahrnt, Angelika (2011a), honorary chair person of Friends of the Earth Germany. Interviewed via telephone at January 26, 2011 by the author.

Zahrnt, Angelika (2011b), honorary chair person of Friends of the Earth Germany. Interviewed via telephone at April 4, 2011 by the author.

A.2 Catalogue of interview questions

The following questionnaire contains the major questions for the semi-structured interviews. Except of the Interview with Rob Hopkins, they were originally done in German.

Post-growth movements and the political, economic and cultural context

1. Is there a post-growth movement in Germany?
2. Which political and economic variables support the post-growth debate? Which ones constrain it?
3. How would you describe the willingness to change towards a post-growth economy in Germany?

4. What role do social movements have in the post-growth debate?
5. Is FoE able to influence external conditions (political, economic and cultural)?
6. Does your organization influence the nomination of candidates for the commission of the German government “Economic Growth, Welfare and life quality”? What do you expect from the commission’s work?
7. Do you see a relation between sustainable development and a post-growth society?
8. Why has critique on economic growth been mostly unsuccessful until now?
9. What can be learnt from the experiences of the anti-globalization movement?

Post-growth in FoE

10. Where in FoE’s work can one find a critique on economic growth today?
11. What is FoE’s comprehension of post-growth? Do you have different attitudes towards post-growth within the organization?
12. According to your impression, what is FoE’s (potential) role within the post-growth debate?
13. What is FoE’s intention for their involvement in the post-growth debate? What are substantial and institutional aims?
14. Can you imagine initiating a post-growth campaign? What would it look like?
15. What are appropriate strategies for FoE to communicate post-growth alternatives?
16. In what way would such a strategy have to go beyond initiating a debate on post-growth?
17. Who in your organization are the agents of change?
18. Who could be reached with post-growth activities by FoE? Who else needs to be targeted?
19. What legitimizes FoE to participate in the post-growth debate? Where is FoE gaining its credibility?
20. What is FoE missing in order to participate in the post-growth debate? What are constraints FoE in confronted with in their post-growth activities?

Outcomes, impact, mechanisms and change

21. What may be the outcomes of a post-growth debate? What does a post-growth economy look like?
22. Where do you see coalitions between FoE and other organizations in order to have a post-growth impact?
23. Do you know of any good examples for a post-growth economy from other movements?
24. How can a change towards a post-growth economy be activated?
25. Do you have to be an economist to be able to understand and influence the debate on post-growth?

Additional questions on the strategic ability of FoE (only Norbert Franck)

26. What are indicators of success for FoE?
27. What are typical steps towards a successful project of FoE?
28. Is strategy relevant for your work in FoE? When is strategy building relevant?
29. How do you define strategy?
30. What is special about FoE’s comprehension of strategy?
31. Which time dimension does a strategy have?
32. What are the advantages of a strategy?
33. Who are the strategists in FoE?
34. Is there anything you dislike in terms of working with strategy in social movement organizations? Does the concept of strategy fit with social movement organizations? What are the weaknesses of the concept of strategy?
35. What practical barriers do you see for strategy building in FoE?
36. What external factors are constraining strategy building of FoE?

37. How do you see the relation between strategy and participation?
38. What role does addressing values have for FoE's work? Which values do you address?
39. Do you translate FoE's strategies into a communication concept?
40. Assuming, a social movement organization does not contribute alone to social change: how could FoE at least contribute? Which causal mechanisms could FoE co-activate in order to have an impact?

Additional question about transition towns (only Rob Hobkins)

41. What is the relation between the transition town movement and the de-growth movement?

A.3 Focus group workshop

Focus Group (2011), employees of FoE and Young Friends of the Earth Germany. The focus group workshop was held at March 24, 2011 in Berlin.

The workshop was divided into two parts. In an impulse presentation, I presented my preliminary findings, i.e. the two types of post-growth, a Habermasian justification for social movements as agents of change in the post-growth project and a presentation of my analysis of the "post-growth movement", issues on a post-growth strategy and on the external context. In the second part, the presentation was reflected in a discussion facilitated by a moderator (Norbert Franck). The discussion was guided by three major questions:

- What are FoE's opportunities to make the idea of a post-growth economy "gesellschaftsfähig"?
- What constraints are limiting FoE's impact on a post-growth economy?
- How could these barriers be overcome by FoE and social movements in general?

The workshop output can be summed up in the following themes and statements:

- **Historical development and barriers of post-growth:** The focus group indicated resignation and confusion on the following question: why are we still so far away from a post-growth economy although the debate was initiated by "Limits to Growth" 40 years ago?
- **Myths of economic growth:** The workshop participants noticed, that the belief in the promises of economic growth is almost unquestioned by society. The analysis and communication of the myths of economic growth through FoE should be one of FoE's major contributions to the debate.
- **Mainstreaming versus politicization of post-growth:** Carrying post-growth into the mainstream of society is seen as FoE's main function in the debate. But changes on the individual level will never change societal structures, which can only be achieved by a politicization of the issue. But are political instruments such as the ecological tax reform, trade permissions etc. enough? FoE fears a politicization since it can bring them into a conflict with their participative structure (membership association) and necessary media resonance.
- **Agents of a post-growth economy:** The participants found, that there is no agent advocating for the post-growth hypothesis. Who benefits from post-growth? Who are the agents, that mainstream and politicize post-growth? At least in Germany, there is no sign for the development of a post-growth movement. Instead many related movements carry at least partly post-growth ideas – although economic de-growth is usually not explicitly criticized. In contrast to other European countries, where post-growth merges more into its own movement, the German environmental movement appears to be ideally positioned to be a central driver of the post-growth economy.
- **Post-growth as integral task:** The integration of the post-growth arguments in the different departments of FoE seems reasonable and feasible. For each department, it is necessary to develop its own post-growth approach including involved agents and growth-dependencies.

- **Alternative indicator for wealth and well-being:** The focus group found that FoE should play a central role in the development and communication of an alternative indicator for welfare. The indicator debate is a good carrier of the post-growth idea, but does not cover all aspects of the post-growth economy.
- **FoE's qualification as post-growth agent:** In particular the post-growth experts and sustainability experts in FoE view their organization as particularly qualified to lead the post-growth debate in Germany, facilitated by their holistic approach and expertise in solving problems.

Appendix B: Areas of reform for a post-growth society

The following overview sums up the the main areas of reform for a post-growth society (Seidl/Zahrnt 2010). I have translated it from the German original because of its value for the debate beyond the German speaking circles.

1. Pension system. The current pension system is based on a monetary contract between the generations. In a post-growth society it has to be complemented by a non-monetary social contract between the generations. (Höpfinger in Seidl/Zahrnt 2010, 239)
2. Health system. The health system is one of the last still growing markets. A post-growth health system is based on self-responsibility in a cost-efficient, social system. (Studer in Seidl/Zahrnt 2010, 239)
3. Education. Education is at the same time condition and end of a post-growth society. Education is wealth beyond resource exploitation and status symbols. Education in a post-growth society is more than knowledge, it includes skills and creativity for having a good life. (Ax in Seidl/Zahrnt 2010, 239)
4. Labor market. In every highly developed industrial country, the decrease of GDP is a long-term effect caused by a decreasing industrial sector and an increasing service sector. Decrease of working hours and the creation of state-based services is essential for a post-growth society. (Reuter in Seidl/Zahrnt 2010, 239)
5. Consumption. Economic growth is driven by a growing consumption, which is caused by global inequalities, cheap resources, market economy and competition and technological change. A post-growth society must limit the consumption of material goods and social, national as well as global inequalities. (Röpke in Seidl/Zahrnt 2010, 240)
6. Redistribution and social justice. Economic growth can no be longer the means to justice and redistribution. In a post-growth society a just distribution while having low or decreasing economic growth is central. (Möhring-Hesse in Seidl/Zahrnt 2010, 240)
7. Resource efficiency. Economic growth and sustainability are only compatible with each other, if a resource goal can be established next to the climate goal and if these ecological goals have priority over economic goals. In Germany the necessary increase of recourse productivity can be achieved with information and consulting and through economic instruments. (Meyer in Seidl/Zahrnt 2010, 240)
8. Companies. The current economic system is based on the exploitation of common goods through the externalization of private costs. In a post-growth economy sustainability and not economic growth is the macro-economic goal. Hence, only companies producing within the ecological limits will grow on a micro-economic level, companies whose production is based on economic growth will decrease. (Scherhorn in Seidl/Zahrnt 2010, 241)

9. Financial markets and bank system. A post-growth society requires the prohibition of financial services which do not serve the real economy. The task of a post-growth bank is to support the social needs of the people and their needs towards the environment. (Jorberg in Seidl/Zahrnt 2010, 241)
10. Tax policy. The current tax policy does not include many aspects appropriately: the globalization of production and markets, the ageing of society, the destruction of the environment and the reduced rates of economic growth. Today's tax system assumes nationally organized economies with strong rates of economic growth. A post-growth society requires the taxation of enterprises and capital, reduced taxes on salaries and a social-ecological tax and financial reform. (Jarass in Seidl/Zahrnt 2010, 240)
11. State finances. A post-growth society may help to reorganize public budgets since it gives up the illusory hope for economic growth as solution and allows to open new alternatives. (Seidl/Zahrnt in Seidl/Zahrnt 2010, 241)
12. Democracy, citizenship and participation. Democratic deliberation and participation will lead the path towards a post-growth society. (von Braunmühl in Seidl/Zahrnt 2010, 241)