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**Green Economy and Green Capitalism:
Some Theoretical Considerations¹**

The terms transition and transformation are very much in vogue in current academic and socio-political debate, at least whenever the ecological crisis and socio-ecological change are discussed. In other areas however, such as financial markets or social policy, they are much less frequently encountered.

In political science research, ‘transition’ generally refers to a change of political regimes, such as the shift away from authoritarian regimes and military dictatorships to more or less liberal-democratic political systems, as instanced in southern Europe during the 1970s, subsequently in Africa and Latin America, and then in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (Merkel 2010; O’Donnell et al. 2004). Transformation is often used to refer to the transition from the Eastern European socialist planned economy to a capitalist market economy.²

The German Federal Government’s Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU), in a recent report entitled *World in Transition – A Social Contract for Sustainability*, refers to a ‘Great Transformation’ (WBGU 2011; see below for a discussion of the different titles of this report). The point of departure is, as in many other papers, the ecological crisis, particularly climate change, which motivates a new development path, to an energy system no longer based on fossil fuels. The term ‘transformation’ is used there normatively and heuristically (*ibid.*: 81), and approaches to further such a process are identified. One such approach, in the opinion of the Council, is the emerging global transformation of values towards a sensitisation to ecological questions (*ibid.*: 67ff). In order to promote and strengthen this transformation, the report states, a new “global social contract” (*ibid.*: 8, 276ff) is needed. Central to realising the Great Trans-

formation, along with the transformation of values, is the “proactive state” (*ibid.*: 203ff), one function of which is to promote the innovations which are seen as necessary. Innovation is indeed a keyword in the studies of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP): “Resource use reductions [...] are, ultimately, what really is needed most. However, the key factor that will determine whether this happens will be the degree of investment in innovations for more sustainable use of resources. A key driver here will be whether prices of critical resources rise in response to resource depletion” (UNEP 2011a: 51).

To cite another example, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the UN (UN DESA 2011) calls for a ‘great green technological transformation’ to provide a decisive impetus for a green economy based on a new development paradigm. And in the scientific discourse, a *transition research* and *transition management line* (Rotmans et al. 2001; Shove/Walker 2007) is becoming established as a “novel mode of governance for sustainable development” (Loorbach/Rotmans 2010: 237).

It seems that an area of socio-political and academic debate has, within a very brief period, opened up around the terms transformation/transition, which, in my view, is closely *analytically* connected with the multiple crises of our time, particularly the ecological crisis, and *normatively* connected with a broadly shared sense that the material and energy resource foundations of society must be promptly and fundamentally changed. In the course of this transformation discourse, the analytical and normative dimensions keep getting mixed up.

The key point in this ever more influential perspective seems to be that the problems are assumed to be given, that they are seen as problems of humankind which can be solved by humankind and the groups of actors which provide its structures, such as policy-makers, the business community, or the consumers; occasionally, civil society is also identified. If conflicts are identified, they are most likely to be those between the prosperous global North, with its overuse of resources and sinks, and the global South, which is dynamically developing its economy, with all that that implies for the use of resources and sinks.

In recent studies, the term ‘problem’ is being replaced by that of ‘megatrend’: the WBGU (2011: 35-65) speaks of “earth systems megatrends”, on the one hand, and of “global economic and social megatrends” on the other

(while the report repeatedly refers to ‘problems’, that term has no explicit systematic position within the report).

Disruptive societal dynamics, particularly the globalisation of the Western mode of living, are noted, but not analysed as such. The dominant tone is a kind of naturalistic truth regime: the natural sciences describe the character of the crisis to us (prominently, Rockström et al. 2009). It is particularly the policy-makers who are to initiate and promote processes of transition and/or transformation. Options and potentials are primarily seen in terms of technology, particularly in the remarkable increase in efficiency, and innovations such as production methods and the strengthening of circular economies, or in such societal developments as the transformation of values towards post-material value systems, or in signs of self-limitation (efficiency). In transition research, the term ‘innovation’ is a key category. However, there is an increasing recognition of the fact that gains in efficiency alone, as the neo-classicists promise with their terms ‘substitution’ and ‘technological progress’, will not suffice (UNEP 2011a). This is true not only due to the so-called rebound effects, i.e. the fact that efficiency gains in the use of natural resources do not reduce resource use, since the products manufactured, such as automobiles or computer monitors, thus tend to become cheaper to produce, which gives rise to larger batches, for instance of autos or of monitors, to be consumed. An additional factor is the enormous dynamics of development in some regions of the world.

In the following, I would like to more precisely define the terms ‘transition’ and ‘transformation’. On this basis, the introduced distinction will be explained with reference to the current debates and possible developments in the context of a proposed ‘green economy’ and ‘green capitalism’.

I. Clarification of terminology

First of all, I would like to introduce what I see as an analytically and socio-politically helpful distinction, in order to operationalise it for a critical analytical perspective on transformation. Based on the distinction I have offered between the concepts ‘transition’ and ‘transformation’, I would first of all like to facilitate an assessment of the analytical range – or, as it were, the depth of intervention – of various diagnoses and proposals for handling the crisis.

The use of the terms ‘transition’ and ‘transformation’ is fairly fuzzy, the reasons for which are first of all etymological.³ The core meaning of *transire* is ‘to cross over’; that of *transformare* is ‘to reshape, change’. Unsurprisingly, these terms are often used synonymously. The WBGU (2011) report referred to above shows this in its title: the original German title is *Welt im Wandel – Gesellschaftsvertrag für eine Große Transformation*, while the English version of the report is called *World in Transition – A Social Contract for Sustainability*. To cite another example, Raskin et al. (2010) refer in their scenario analyses (see below) to ‘transition’ and to ‘transformation’ with no distinction whatever.

I would like to argue in favour of a terminological distinction, so as to highlight important differences: I see ‘transition’ as a process of politically intentional control, i.e. a planned intervention in development paths and logics, structures and relations of forces mediated by state policy, in order to steer dominant developments in a different direction. A large part of the studies on a green economy and on socio-ecological transformation argue along this line – even if they often refer to societal dimensions, such as a shift of values, or to technological developments which are already in progress.

In contrast, ‘transformation’ should be understood as a comprehensive socio-economic, political and socio-cultural process of change which incorporates controls and strategies, but is not reducible to them. The term is used analytically, and is not reducible to a normative, well-founded position of changes towards a sustainable society of solidarity.

In so doing, I am referring to the best-known use of the term to date, by Karl Polanyi, almost 70 years ago. In his work *The Great Transformation* (1990 [1944]), he described how emerging capitalism destroyed or threatened to destroy the existing feudalistic social relationships and the social and natural environments of people, and how violent this process of ‘disembedding’ was. On this point, he certainly showed parallels with the process of ‘primitive accumulation’ described by Marx (1887): the capitalist economy is not the result of any quasi-natural evolution or modernisation process, but rather one in which the organizational principles were established by force and implemented against manifold resistance. Starting in England in the 1830s, the Great Transformation was a process in which capitalism created new markets, and based itself on their unregulated character, including on the free markets of labour, soil and money, all

of which were treated as commodities. The latter are, according to Polanyi, ‘fictitious commodities’, i.e., their character as commodities has systemic limits; nonetheless, in liberal capitalism, or in the “self-regulating market system”, they are treated as commodities. For several decades, price mechanisms and profit orientation operated unhampered; thus, during this unregulated phase, the creation of markets preceded unhampered by the state or any other force. Market processes had previously been comprehensively embedded in societal relationships; now, this relationship was reversed. This “utopian experiment”, as Polanyi (1990: 60) called it, led to a “self-regulating market”: “For once the economic system is organized in separate institutions, based on specific motives and conferring a special status, society must be shaped in such a manner as to allow that system to function according to its own laws.” Polanyi emphasises that the separation of the political and economic spheres, and, at the same time, their continued reference to one another, is the essential characteristic for this breakthrough. “Economic history reveals that the emergence of national markets was in no way the result of the gradual and spontaneous emancipation of the economics sphere from governmental control. On the contrary, the market has been the result of a conscious and often violent intervention on the part of the government” (*ibid.*: 258).

This liberal capitalism of unleashed markets represented, however, a catastrophic series of events for most people, which robbed them of their own most basic foundations of life. From the 1860s, a number of ‘counter-movements’ and ‘collectivist movements’ in the form of workers’ movements and factory and social laws, and of laws restricting commerce and imposing controls on money by the establishment of central banks, emerged in reaction to these destructive tendencies. Polanyi called these movements against the constantly expanding market, which were often expressed by means of the state and legislative measures, the “self-protection of society” (*ibid.*: 87). For this reason, he interprets the history of the 19th century as the result of a “dual movement”: he saw, on the one hand, the expansion of market organisations in relation to true commodities, and on the other, restrictions on the fictitious commodities like labour, the soil and money. The dynamics in the process of the emergence of capitalism were to a great extent due to the “conflict between the market and the elementary requirements of an organized social life” (*ibid.*: 257).

We can learn from Polanyi that the analysis of transformation processes has something to do with a focus on societal forces, interests and relations of forces, and that the state and the political sphere do not per se solve societal, including global societal, problems, but rather, in accordance with their fundamental structure, implement and secure capitalist relations of production, until a societal counter-movement emerges. On the other hand, the economy is not above history, but is rather a historically specific relation of forces. Politics and economics constitute themselves mutually – I will return to that below.

2. Uses of the transition concept

The borders between the terms ‘transition’ and ‘transformation’ are blurred, and I am aware that I am attempting to fix a definition here. However, the assumptions and expressions are of enormous implications for addressing socio-ecological problems and crises. Let me clarify my argument by means of a few examples.

The New Economics Foundation (NEF) seeks, by means of the concept of *The Great Transformation* (NEF 2010), to contribute to the debate on the necessities and possibilities for a new type of economy. For this purpose, the NEF, with its Keynesian orientation, makes very complex and insightful proposals, such as a new evaluation of prosperity, an enhanced and progressive role for the state, or the expansion of local production. In addition to indications as to how each individual can act in a more ecologically sustainable manner in the private sphere, the study is clear in its insistence that governments must demonstrate insight into the problems, and steer a new course (*ibid.*: 97-99).

A second example is the concept of ‘*just transition*’, which is increasingly being used by trade unions. For the unions, a central issue in the strategy of activating a just transition, along with education, the possibility of switching to new jobs, the participation of unions in change, and the distribution of the costs of reconstruction, is a “national framework or mechanism to ensure long-term planning and representative decision making on environmental transition” (TUC 2008: 5; similarly, CLC 2000) in order to achieve long-term and stable employment. The concept was introduced,

among others, by Argentinian, Canadian and British trade unionists, as well as environmental NGOs, as a development path toward a low-carbon economy, and was prominently mentioned at the official Climate Conference in Copenhagen in December 2009. In my view, that was no coincidence, since the political conceptions of international environmental policy, in which the ecological crisis is very much present, involve precisely an international redirection, or transition, via the creation of suitable politico-institutional frameworks and incentives (cf. on the term ‘sustainable development’, Brand 2010).

The OECD (2011) recently published its report *Towards Green Growth*. It considers appropriate basic conditions as decisive in order to move green growth and transition processes forward, and to correct the failures of the market. As it states: “Efficient resource use and management is a core goal of economic policy” (*ibid.*: 10). For this purpose, environmental and economic policies should reinforce each other. The strategy of green growth “takes into account the full value of natural capital as a factor of production and its role in growth. It focuses on cost-effective ways of attenuating environmental pressures to effect a transition towards new patterns of growth that will avoid crossing critical local, regional and global environmental thresholds. Innovation will play a key role” (*ibid.*). In addition to a suitable political framework and international cooperation and innovation, the OECD sees the substitution of destroyed, or depleted, natural capital by other capital as decisive to in achieving the de-linking of economic growth from the consumption of nature and the creation of new jobs. The distribution dimension should be taken into consideration. This is the familiar strategy of an innovation-driven ‘growth of the limits’, which would of course require the appropriate basic conditions.

Most of the above-mentioned contributions to the debate are based on a scenario which Raskin et al. (2010) call *policy reform*, which they see as one of four possible scenarios.⁴ It “assumes the emergence of a massive government-led effort to achieve sustainability without major changes in the state-centric international order, modern institutional structures, and consumerist values. Strong and harmonized policies are implemented that, by redirecting the world economy and promoting technological innovation, are able to achieve internationally recognized goals for poverty reduction, climate change stabilization, ecosystem preservation, freshwater protection,

and pollution control” (*ibid.*: 2629).⁵ These development patterns require “unprecedented political will for establishing the necessary regulatory, economic, social, technological, and legal mechanisms” (*ibid.*: 2630).

A key goal of a transition perspective is a changed political framework for societal actors, especially for companies, and processes, particularly as concerns innovations. The current best-known strategy for transition is that of the green economy, and, especially in Germany, the Green New Deal (see below). The latter, like the concept of ecological modernisation (overview in Huber 2011), goes back to the 1980s. The Green New Deal focuses on the changed basic conditions which would enable a green capitalism.

The transition perspective is an important component of the current academic and societal policy debate. However, it has systematic limits, in that it on the one hand reflects insufficiently on the structurally conditioned possibilities and limitations of the long-term capacity of society to take a new direction, and on the other on its metabolism with nature via political institutions and governance. A great capacity, particularly of the state, in cooperation with societal actors, to direct developments is assumed. Moreover, there is an assumption of rationality on the part of the state and/or societal actors regarding the operation of governance mechanisms which are to establish the necessary basic conditions, to the effect that these actors have sufficient knowledge as to what the problems are and how they are to be addressed. The reports currently being generated are designed to enhance governmental and intergovernmental knowledge.

The WBGU formulates the strong thesis that a kind of global societal consensus regarding the multiplicity of existing problems and also – as a result of political conflicts – of problem management could emerge by way of a global social contract. In a certain respect, this is a counterfactual claim, a statement which is to promote shifts in problem definition on the part of political and societal actors. In this way, political problem-solving would become possible once again. Here, the WBGU is particularly explicit, as it states apodictically: “It’s politics, stupid!” (WBGU 2011: 200).

This semantic jab at the neo-liberal mantra ‘it’s the economy, stupid!’ nonetheless remains stuck in the dichotomisation of politics/the state on the one hand and economics/the market on the other. The assumption of a common good embodied in the political sphere is not questioned, even and especially in the context of the ascertainment of powerful interests which

will, if necessary, stand in the way of necessary change. But this common good can only be secured by way of the ‘Great Transformation’.

Locating the perspective of transition in the current social-scientific debate shows that it is primarily being utilised in the context of the concept of governance. In critical sustainability research, the problem of transition and Governance is accurately defined as the focus on a perspective of order or management, respectively. “Conventional approaches [to governance] may sustain a myth of a world manageable through neat state-civil society-international institutions and distinctions, through scientific expertise, and through uniform approaches to problem and risk assessment based on singular views of evidence. But the melee of real-life dynamics and interactions, and of everyday practice amongst citizens, bureaucrats, and people crossing public-private boundaries suggests a far more dynamic, complex and messy world in which knowledge and notions of the problem are contested. [...] While these myths may expediently sustain a sense of order and control, at least in the short term and at least for some, this is often a fragile, problematic and ultimately illusory order” (Leach et al. 2007: 24).

Corresponding to this overly simplified understanding of the state, or of governance structures, as the ‘subject of steering’ is a less than well-developed understanding of what needs to be changed. The horizon of socio-ecological transition/transformation is a matter of consensus in these numerous papers; indeed, the dangers associated with the overuse of resources and sinks, and with endangered ecosystems and natural reproduction cycles, are to be reduced by appropriate societal measures such as resource efficiency, recycling or reduced consumption, or else through an appropriate adaptation to expected negative impacts. One of the arguments used, in view of the enormous uncertainty regarding possible effects, for example with regard to climate change, is that of the precautionary principle.

The predominant mode of thought is a systemic one that opposes an endangered global and/or natural system to an endangered social system. However, society as such, its structures and driving forces, stabilising factors and crises, and its actors, with their conditions of existence and resources for action, or even various constellations of actors or relations of forces, are not explicitly conceptualised. Implicitly, assumptions of the functional differentiation of society tend to dominate. Any differing conception of

society and societal relationships with nature are masked by such terms as ‘problems’, ‘megatrends’, or ‘humankind’.

To sum up, a critical analytical concept of transformation should take into account the capacity of social forms to steer societies in which the capitalist mode of production dominates. It would address the fact that dominant academic and social discourses do not consider the domination-shaped character of modern societies and would question their uncritical use of such terms as market, state, technology and innovation. Moreover, a critical analysis would focus on social conflicts, projects and societal relations of forces, exclusions and open violence; it would refer to the hegemonic elements of the existing mode of production and living.

3. Green economy as a transition strategy – green capitalism as a new form of regulation of societal nature relations

In the current multiple crises, there are many strategies (Brie 2009; Bullard 2011; Brand 2009; Candeias 2011) which are primarily driven by the need to deal with the financial and economic crisis, but also by the need to engage with the ecological crisis. In particular, the dominant forces in politics and the economy are primarily concerned with securing their own societal positions of power. Of course, not every strategy is part of a comprehensive societal project. Nonetheless, such projects can also emerge, and then become dominant or even hegemonic, if the economic, political and cultural forces which support them can formulate compromises and consensuses. Conceivable such comprehensive projects could include a neo-liberal business-as-usual approach, possibly connected with a politically and territorially authoritarian securing of conditions, as well as non-ecological Keynesian, eco-Keynesian, eco-authoritarian or even eco-fascist variations. And, naturally, there are also a large number of emancipatory strategies, which are articulated together with strategies for the development of a knowledge-based economy (Jessop 2013) as well as for financially driven accumulation (Sablowski 2009, 2012; McNally 2009), catch-up industrialisation in emerging countries, and resource extractivism in such industrialising countries as Brazil, or in substantially resource-income-based economies such as Russia, the oil states, Venezuela and Bolivia (Gudynas 2011).

With respect to an adequate diagnosis of future developments, which we cannot demonstrate here with the accuracy it deserves, there is one important distinction which, I believe, should be made at this point; on the one hand, there are such conceptualisations of a ‘green economy’ as a *transition strategy*, which have for some years now been developed by certain apparatuses of the internationalised state (UNEP, OECD, and recently the ILO), by European Green parties and by think tanks, in order to address, by various means, the economic, political and socio-ecological crises, or various ramifications of that crises. The primary purpose here is to develop suitable political framework conditions for the economy and society, so as to enable technological progress and product innovations (Brand 2012).

In a key document for the Rio + 20 Conference in June 2012, the UN Secretary-General (2010: 15f) summarised the political strategies toward a green economy in a manner that I think is exemplary:

- (a) “Getting prices right [...] in order to internalize externalities, support sustainable consumption and incentivize business choices [...];
- (b) Public procurement policies to promote greening of business and markets;
- (c) Ecological tax reforms [...];
- (d) Public investment in sustainable infrastructure and natural capital, to restore, maintain and, where possible, enhance the stock of natural capital [...];
- (e) Targeted public support for research and development on environmentally sound technologies [...];
- (f) Strategic investment through public sector development outlays [...];
- (g) Social policies to reconcile social goals with existing or proposed economic policies”.

What should be distinguished from these political strategies are elements of a possibly emerging ‘green capitalism’ seen as complex *transformation processes*. Viewed in terms of Gramscian and regulation theory, ‘green’ elements are currently being developed as part of changing accumulation strategies, modes of living, consumption patterns etc. (the events have been identified by Kaufmann/Müller 2009; Wichterich 2011). The political strategies for a ‘green economy’ can be part of that, for example via the support for renewable energies or the establishment of emissions trading; however, transformation processes are more comprehensive. Whether and

how elements of green capitalism can be implemented, and what position strategies for a green economy will have in that process, cannot today be foretold. However, we can devote a certain level of attention to such obvious, albeit concealed, transformation potentials and real processes.

In my view, there is much to be said for the thesis that a strategy of a green economy or, in Germany, a Green New Deal (the proclaimed strategic objective of the European and especially German Greens, which is not a major topic in the current international debate) *will fail in terms of its own expectations*, namely those of getting a grip on the socio-ecological and economic crisis – what UNEP calls an economic paradigm which has become problematic (cf. UNEP 2011b; Brand 2012). Moreover, it is very questionable whether these strategies will be able to break open the neo-liberal mode of production and development, which Mario Candeias (2004) has seen as a combination of the increasingly highly technological organization of labour and of the division of labour, as a transnational financial capitalist accumulation regime, and as a competition and workfare-oriented mode of regulation under neo-liberal hegemony. Many papers on a ‘green economy’ have postulated the necessity for a new economic paradigm (UNEP 2011b), while others have remained more or less uncritical with regard to neo-liberal capitalism.

Nonetheless, strategies for a green economy could become powerfully effective, as here, elements are being formulated which could, in practice, contribute to the emergence of a green capitalism. This would inaugurate a new phase of the regulation of societal nature relations, which would not fundamentally stop the degradation. Like all societal relations under conditions of the capitalist mode of production, it would be selective, permitting many people to achieve more income and a higher material standard of living, while excluding other people and regions, or even destroying their material foundations of life.

The current dynamics involve a reinforced valorisation of nature, which will be intensified once again by the currently high and still increasing raw materials prices, geopolitical and geo-economic competition, and powerful financial market actors, e.g. by means of land purchase and infrastructural development.

A greening of the capitalist mode of development would necessarily be an exclusive development model for some regions. It would not abolish

competition and exclusion mechanisms, or dynamics of valorisation and land acquisition. The ‘oligarchical mode of living’ in the countries of the global North may be expandable, but it is not generalisable (see below).

Particularly in such countries as Germany or Austria, green capitalist development models might be implemented in the medium term, if a range of different societal forces were to group together around such a project and were able to dominate the ‘hegemonic block’. These could include green sectors of capital, parts of the service unions, and environmental and consumer associations, which could also articulate themselves through political parties, and establish a presence in the state apparatus. In the United States and China, state crisis policies indicate that there too, interest in ecological modernisation is becoming more significant. In Great Britain, the discussion of a green economy is closely tied to the financial sector and questions of financial services, for instance in the area of emissions trading. These strategies and the constellations of forces supporting them could ‘become state’, in the sense that concentrated power relationships under the leadership of certain economic and political groupings would initially push forward such a project and underpin it with the force of the state (Gramsci 1971: 245).

Green economic strategies are limited, when measured by the standards of their own objectives. Nonetheless, they could become a tool for handling a crisis of growth and accumulation. That would result in the creation of compromises, with the agreement of wage-dependent sectors and of the trade unions, under the conditions of industrial capitalist modernisation and its globalisation.

However, there are many problems associated with this which need to be analysed more closely: whether or not a project becomes feasible for a certain mode of development does not depend only upon technological or economic factors and economic policy, but also on the societal relations of forces, and on desired and experienced everyday practice, including forms of division of labour along multiple lines. A green capitalist project could be implemented in an authoritarian version, but could also – for instance in such countries as Germany or Austria – become effective in the form of a green corporatism, which would thus tie in major sectors of the wage-dependent population and their interest groups. People would be instructed that they should continue to primarily pursue their

own economic interests, such as generating profits, incomes and economic growth, and that ‘green innovations’ would bring growth, prosperity and jobs. Thus, subalternity and domination would be reproduced. A green capitalist mode of development would have to be associated with a more appropriate understanding of well-being, and with promises and experiences of progress.

Mechanisms to ensure the possibility of externalising negative aspects – such as the shifting of dirty industries to other countries, or the export of wastes to Eastern Europe and Africa – will have to become effective in order to secure the oligarchisation of global modes of living. With reference to the energy base, a point that should be explored is to what extent the dominance of fossil fuels should be retained, the expansion of solar energy promoted, or a ‘return to biomass’ undertaken.

Even if the strategies for a green economy postulate a fundamental restructuring of the economy and especially of its energy base, they will fail, due to the prevailing non-sustainable modes of production and living. At best, there will be partial changes; the real developments will remain controversial and mutually contradictory. Nonetheless, we can assume that, in the capitalist centres, a bourgeois mode of living has emerged which is broadly practiced and accepted, and consciously desired, and that it will continue to spread globally through the upper and middle classes of other countries. Markus Wissen and I have proposed the term ‘imperial way of living’, which, briefly, means the following: production and consumption patterns which become hegemonic in certain regions or countries can, by means of capillary processes, and with considerable lags in time and space, become globally and unevenly generalised. This is connected with concrete corporate strategies, trade, investment and geo-policies, but also with purchasing power and conceptions of a desirable mode of living in those societies into which production and consumption patterns diffuse via the world market. The imperial way of living is becoming generalised by means of spatially specific class and gender relationships, as well as along ethnic or ethnicised lines; it thus has a different appearance in different historical periods. ‘Generalisation’ does not mean that all people live a similar way, but rather that certain conceptions of the ‘good life’ and of societal development exist which are deeply rooted. In addition to spatial differences in the phenomenology of the imperial way of life, particularly between the global

South and the global North, there are also as a result considerable social differences (for greater detail, Brand/Wissen 2012a, 2012b).

In spite of all exceptions pointing towards greater sustainability, the state and the international political system tend to reinforce these conditions. The term ‘imperial way of living’ identifies a determining factor for why very little is happening politically, along with such other factors as one-sidedness in politics and the media, obvious power strategies, including repression of criticism and proposed alternatives, and political co-optation. At the same time, the fact that people remain politically passive opens up space for authoritarian, mostly right-wing political tendencies. Moreover, the fact that current crisis strategies are insufficient is becoming increasingly apparent.

Nonetheless, if the shifts within the power block become significant, green-capitalist strategies could become an integral part of state policy.

4. Perspectives

Theoretical work and analyses of current developments will never be able to reflect the manifold nature of social reality. They can, however, by means of plausible arguments, create awareness, and point to significant facts which are ignored in other social-scientific approaches. The goal of this paper has been to undertake a substantive, theoretically directed proposal to understand current dynamics by introducing the conceptual distinction between transition and transformation.

The analysis of current developments, i.e. strategies for moving towards a ‘green economy’ and the possible contours of a ‘green capitalism’, are analytically rife with questions and uncertainties in terms of real history. In this section, I would merely like to show that even strategies which fail in terms of their own formulated expectations – here, the fundamental restructuring of the energy and resource base – can nonetheless become historically effective.

According to this tendency, state policy will continue to be a policy for securing existing societal relations, or changing them in line with domination-shaped changes. The promise of the many political strategies, as reflected by the concept of transition developed herein, towards a green

economy is also a promise, in view of the multiple crises, to address the crisis of crisis management.

After all, consideration of analytical and normative perspectives of transformation – including processes of transition – involves consideration not solely of the democratic structuring of societal nature relations. This is an important research perspective and raises questions such as the following: what are the already existing democratic forms of resource control, which struggles have been and will be necessary in order to realise them, and how do they stabilise themselves institutionally? Which demands can be made, in a comprehensive sense, for the democratic structuring of society's interaction with nature? To what extent do the concrete strategies of a green economy, or for a Green New Deal, have a supportive effect here, or are they, on the contrary, harmful?

What would ultimately be interesting would be a detailed examination of the socio-ecological content of the various protests, revolts and processes of change which are occurring worldwide, with the goal of determining the extent to which the ecological crisis and socio-ecological transformation perspectives are a factor in them. In some countries of Latin America, such as Bolivia and Ecuador, that is obvious. In Argentina, Brazil and probably also in North Africa, things look very different; there, a classical development consensus is dominant. This development consensus will have to be taken into account when considering the concrete forms of an emerging green capitalist mode of production and living.

Translation by Phil Hill (Berlin)

- 1 I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers of JEP and Markus Wissen for their useful comments and Hanna Lichtenberger for editorial support.
- 2 Michael Brie (2004: 5-6) rightly criticises the fact that transformation research usually works with dichotomies, like 'dictatorship and democracy', or 'plan and market', which obscures concrete intermediate practices of political steering and economic (re-)production.
- 3 Alex Demirović pointed out this connection to me.
- 4 By contrast to predictions, scenarios are "intended as renderings of plausible possibilities, designed to stretch the imagination, stimulate debate, and, by warning of pitfalls ahead, prompt collective action" (Raskin et al. 2010: 2627). Their plausibility and internal consistency are marked by uncertainty.

- 5 The other three scenarios are Market Forces, which would involve a continuation of market-driven globalization; Fortress World, characterized by increasingly authoritarian measures against various global crises; and Great Transition, which would mean a ‘fundamental transition’ (here too, the two terms are used interchangeably).

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Abstracts

This article reviews some central elements of the current debate about the multiple crises and related politics of crisis management in which the terms ‘transition’ and ‘transformation’ gain importance (used as analytical

tools to understand actual dynamics; not so much in a normative sense, which is also part of the debate). A distinction between the two concepts is introduced to argue that transition focuses mainly on political steering whereas transformation points at more complex societal and economic processes. Analytical and political perspectives and proposals of transition are important but tend to underestimate societal power relations and hegemonic patterns of production and living. The current debate about a ‘green economy’ is located in the epistemic terrain of transition, i.e. political steering, whereas the term of transformation might indicate a more complex process towards a ‘green capitalism’.

Der Beitrag untersucht einige zentrale Elemente der aktuellen Debatte über die multiple Krise und Krisenpolitiken, in der die Begriffe „Transition“ und „Transformation“ an Bedeutung gewinnen (verwendet als analytische Instrumente, um aktuelle Dynamiken zu verstehen; weniger im normativen Sinn, der ebenso Teil der Debatte ist). Eine Unterscheidung zwischen den beiden Begriffen wird dahingehend eingeführt, dass Transition vor allem politische Steuerung fokussiert, während Transformation komplexere gesellschaftliche und ökonomische Prozesse in den Blick nimmt. Analytische und politische Perspektiven der Transition sind wichtig, aber sie tendieren dazu, gesellschaftliche Machtverhältnisse und hegemoniale Produktions- und Konsumweisen zu unterschätzen. Die aktuelle Debatte um eine „grüne Ökonomie“ ist im epistemischen Feld der Transition verortet, das heißt in der politischen Steuerung, während der Begriff der Transformation auf einen komplexeren Prozess hin zu einem „grünen Kapitalismus“ verweist.

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