Appendix 1  Summary of the overall concept of the Cluster of Excellence

Scholars, journalists and experts have repeatedly warned that inequality is on the rise in Germany and in many other countries around the globe. The widening gap between the middle and upper class and the growing number of poor, disadvantaged citizens have triggered public debates about potential solutions to this problem. In the words of former US President Barack Obama, rising income inequality remains the ‘defining challenge of our time’ (Remarks on Economic Mobility, December 2013). One could argue that there is no reason to worry. In fact, standard models of political decision-making posit that, when faced with increasing levels of inequality, voters should demand governmental action in order to mitigate it. Anti-austerity protests, the Occupy movement and parliamentary debates about executive salaries all seem to be obvious signals that inequality has become an issue of major political concern – one which should be adequately addressed. This conclusion, however, may be premature. Political responses to rising inequality have been extremely diverse, often deviating from the expectation that growing inequality automatically leads to political attempts to reduce it. Why is this the case, and how can we explain the diversity of political responses to inequality? This is the central research question that our cluster seeks to address. Our research is guided by three possible answers to this puzzle. One answer may be that people’s perceptions of inequality and the appropriate political solutions could be biased. In other words, while there is an objective inequality people do not perceive it to be problematic, or are unsure as to how politics could possibly address it. But even if inequality is an issue of concern to people, this does not mean that they take political action. Hence, a second answer to our research question may be found in the widely differing responses to inequality in terms of political participation. In some instances such as the Arab Spring, rising inequality triggers political protest and even civic conflict. In other cases, especially in wealthy democracies, rising inequality has not empowered traditional defenders of working class interests but has strengthened populist parties and movements. Finally, even if citizens mobilise against inequality, the actual policies that result from this effort and their impact on inequality can be diverse. In the United States, the perceived neglect of the white working class has led to the election of President Trump, who has had success in passing inegalitarian policies such as the recent tax reform. President Macron in France has also challenged established political elites, but in contrast to Trump, is supporting a policy platform that emphasises the need for centrist labour market reforms.

Three research areas The triad of inequality-related perceptions, participation and policies constitutes the core conceptual framework of the cluster and defines its three Research Areas (RAs). The first RA on “Perceptions” will address issues pertaining to people’s awareness of inequality, how this affects the preferences they form, and what the role of framing is in this process. Before it can become a politically relevant issue, inequality needs to be perceived as problematic. These perceptions, in turn, reflect individuals’ ideas about what is fair or unfair, their evaluations
of actual distributions of resources and their beliefs concerning their individual position within that
distribution. Such perceptions and evaluations are often biased; for example, rich citizens often
underestimate their position in the income distribution, while poorer citizens believe themselves to
be better off than they actually are. Individual perceptions are likely to be affected by the social
and political context. Political elites and the media contribute to misperceptions about inequality by
highlighting certain aspects of these distributions and omitting others. Language plays an impor-
tant role in shaping both perceptions of inequality, but also people’s political preferences. The aim
of this RA is to study the processes that link inequality, perceptions thereof and preferences for (or
against) policies related to redistribution. It will bring together scholars from different disciplines,
including linguists, whose expertise has been missing in social science research about perceptions
of inequality and preference formation.

The second RA on “Participation” will investigate why perceptions of unfair distributions often fail
to lead to political participation and mobilisation to change them. Overcoming the collective ac-
tion problem may be particularly challenging in the field of inequality. Rising inequality might well
increase the number of individuals of lower socioeconomic status who are in favour of more re-
distribution; at the same time, however, this group is less likely to articulate its preferences and to
challenge the authorities. After all, the inclination to become politically active varies according to
the level of education, income and legal status. Nevertheless, numerous instances of successful
mobilisation of the disadvantaged clearly illustrate that the link between inequality and political par-
ticipation is more complex. The mobilisation of former non-voters, who contributed to the success
of populist candidates and parties in the US and Europe, is a case in point. This phenomenon
also reveals that not only economic deprivation but also perceived losses of power and influence
may fuel populist reactions. In studying the mechanisms that lead to political mobilisation against
inequality, we will focus on conventional and non-conventional forms of engagement, including
violent ones, in democratic and non-democratic contexts. We will also examine the role of social
media and new communication channels and determine if they render participation of the disad-
vantaged more likely, or simply reinforce apathy among those already silent.

In the third RA on “Policies”, we will study which voices are most likely to be heard in the political
arena, and which political responses they trigger. Obviously, policy-makers are limited in the num-
ber of topics that they can address and thereby must be selective. At the same time, some groups
are more present in the political arena and some interests better organised than others. Conse-
quently, politicians are often more responsive to the wishes of those who are better off and can
voice their concern more effectively, thereby translating economic power into political influence.
By covering a broad range of different political systems from democracies to autocracies, we will
investigate why selectivity of policy responses differs widely across these systems. We will also
examine the consequences of these political responses, most importantly as regards their impact
on the level of structural inequalities. At the same time, however, political responses may again
shape individual perceptions, preferences and patterns of participation, encouraging or discouraging further political mobilisation. These policy feedback processes need to be taken into account in order to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the links between inequality and political processes.

**Three domains of inequality** The framework of perceptions, participation and policies is defined independently of a particular type of inequality. In our research, we will apply it to three domains. The first domain, “education and information”, concerns inequalities in the distribution of educational resources and access to information. This includes inequalities in educational attainment or participation but also informational inequalities, e.g. those related to changing patterns of communication and information flows between citizens and political actors in times of social media. Projects in the second domain of “income and wealth” will concentrate on the exploration of economic inequalities. We will adopt a broad understanding of this area in order to not just include inequalities related to income and wealth distributions in the narrow sense, but also unequal distributions of labour market risk, employment opportunities and social compensation. Our research in the third domain of “rights and privileges” will address legal and social questions about what people are entitled to do, or what they are banned from doing. By rights we are referring to legal rules that differentiate along ethnic, religious or gender lines. By privileges, we mean social norms creating discrimination and informal political practices leading to power imbalances between groups.

**Project ideas** In order to investigate perceptions of, mobilisation against and policy responses to inequality in these domains, the cluster will devote a large share of its budget to research projects that will be selected through a competitive peer review process. In this proposal, we present a number of sample projects we plan to conduct as part of the cluster. They illustrate our research across the research areas and inequality domains. Most importantly, they show that the study of inequality cannot be limited to individual disciplines. Rather, understanding the politics of inequality requires close collaboration between the different disciplines. This is why every single one of the sample projects includes researchers from at least two, but in many cases even three different disciplinary backgrounds.

In the RA “Perceptions”, one project studies the perceptions of educational inequalities among students, teachers and parents and their effect on educational careers and support for policy reforms (1A). Another team plans to look into preferences for fair wage differences and to analyse how these affect perceptions of organisational justice and wage policy changes (1B). A third project would be comparative in focus and investigate the rhetorical strategies and linguistic devices used to frame ethnic and gender inequalities in political discourses in contexts as diverse as Germany, Ghana and India (1C). In the RA “Participation”, a team of researchers plans to analyse how resources for political participation such as civic and communicative skills are acquired in different school contexts (2A). A second project plans to focus on the nexus between financial crises, political polarisation and inequality (2B). A third project wants to address the topic of political framing
and the mobilisation of ethnic inequalities in non-OECD countries (2C). In the RA “Policies”, finally, one project intends to answer the question of why reform programmes identified as fair and efficient are not pursued by policy-makers (3A). A second proposed project examines how politicians’ preferences about inequality and potential policy solutions evolve and to which extent they match actual statements and parliamentary decisions (3B). The third project proposal in this RA studies the impact of ethnic policies including measures that are implemented to enhance integration, quotas for minorities as well as language rights in contexts as diverse as Africa, Europe and America on different dimensions of inequality (3C).

Despite their different disciplinary backgrounds, the researchers involved in the projects share common analytic approaches rooted in empirical social science research. This approach is motivated by our interest in the conditions under which inequality is perceived as fair or unfair by those affected by it, in their mobilisation efforts and in the according policy responses. Even though our research framework does not explicitly highlight normative questions related to inequality, these are central to our efforts to explain the politics of inequality. Only if we understand if and how individuals perceive inequality as illegitimate or unfair – in essence, their normative stance – can we understand why sometimes political action is taken to remedy it, but sometimes not.

**Advancing interdisciplinary collaboration and methodological excellence**  The flagship projects of our cluster illustrate our intention to cover a broad range of national and regional contexts within and outside the OECD, utilise a variety of theoretical approaches, engage our research topics on different analytical levels, and make use of an extensive methodological toolkit. This will be made possible by bringing together researchers from different disciplines, but also by creating new cluster professorships to strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration in areas we currently cannot fully cover. One of these professorships (W3) will focus on political and social psychology, connecting political science and sociological perspectives on inequality with psychological approaches to perceptions. The second one (W3) will be devoted to the comparative study of public policy in developing countries. In addition, we aim to create two tenure-track professorships (W1 for six years, then W3). The first focuses on political communication in order to strengthen the link between linguistics, communications research and political science. The second will expand our existing expertise in social movements, and will specialise in non-conventional forms of participation and mobilisation in response to inequality.

To tackle the methodological challenges related to our empirical work, we intend to establish a research support unit called the “Methods Hub”. It will allow our cluster’s members to access a repository of expertise from different disciplines, cultivate innovative research designs and generate an environment for collective learning about methodology. The Methods Hub will unite existing expertise from facilities at the University of Konstanz that have so far been operating independently of each other. These include the Lakelab (Urs Fischbacher), the surveyLAB (Thomas Hinz), the Centre for Data and Methods (Andreas Jungherr and Peter Selb), the iScience Group (Ulf-Dietrich
Reips) and the LingLab (Miriam Butt and Tanja Kupisch).

**Institutional integration and development** In order to promote the integration of the cluster with the university’s departments and other relevant units, the cluster will adopt an organisational and management structure that is designed to facilitate flat hierarchies with transparent decision-making processes. To ensure that our participating researchers will benefit from a productive and supportive working environment, the cluster will rely on the outstanding infrastructure provided by the University of Konstanz.

One important goal is to promote young talent within the cluster. At the doctoral level, the cluster will build on the structures and experiences of the university’s Graduate School of Decision Sciences in regard to recruitment as well as the organisation of supervision and study programmes. Doctoral researchers will be provided with various opportunities to become involved in cluster-sponsored research, either by joining cluster-sponsored project teams, or by obtaining one of five annual independent doctoral fellowships.

Apart from the above-mentioned tenure-track junior professorships to be created as part of the cluster, there will be other opportunities for post-doctoral researchers. First, they can join project applications as co-PIs or to submit proposals for their own projects. Second, third-party funded projects can be fully integrated into the cluster’s structures. Third, junior professors joining the cluster as PIs can apply for a special professorial bridging fellowship that will give them the opportunity to continue their research after the end of their regular appointment. Finally, we include funding for a five-year independent fellowship at the university’s Zukunftskolleg.

Across all career stages, and in keeping with our cluster’s scientific focus on “inequality”, we intend to make gender equality an important institutional focus within our cluster. With its dedicated pursuit in raising the percentage of female researchers in its departments, the university has set high standards for gender equality that mirror the DFG’s “Research-Oriented Standards on Gender Equality”. To help advance these efforts, our proposed cluster will implement a clear agenda on gender equality that includes setting both quantitative and qualitative targets. The cluster will also advance an organisational culture that is family-, gender- and diversity-conscious. For researchers with family obligations, we will provide customised support to help balance a successful academic career with family life, including access to the Kinderhaus childcare facility on campus. Beyond its institutional support, our cluster intends to promote equal opportunity by expanding our knowledge about the politics of inequality in relation to gender, social background, disability, language and ethnicity.

Our cluster reaches out to numerous institutions and colleagues working on related questions. We will strive to expand on an already extensive network of renowned cooperation partners. By sponsoring a number of fellowships for outgoing and incoming students and researchers, our cluster will promote the university’s internationalisation and establish itself as a leading centre for inequality research.