

Sustainable Consumption Corridors: Concept, Objections, and Responses

Antonietta Di Giulio, Doris Fuchs

In order to achieve sustainable consumption we need to flesh out its meaning in such a way as to allow us to take action while at the same time leaving sufficient room for individual life plans, for the design of one's everyday life, and for cultural and historical contexts.

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Abstract

In this paper, we explore whether the idea of “sustainable consumption corridors”, derived from concepts of a good life, can be a good starting point to define criteria of sustainable consumption. Such corridors would be defined by minimum standards, allowing every individual to live a good life, and maximum standards, ensuring a limit on every individual's use of natural and social resources in order to guarantee access to a sufficient level of resources (in terms of quantity and quality) for others in the present and in the future. We first present the idea, as it resulted from the process of integration within the focal topic *From Knowledge to Action – New Paths towards Sustainable Consumption*. We then outline potential objections to the idea. Such objections are the pluralists' objection, the liberalists' argument or the argument of lacking acceptance. We show that there is no argument strong enough to utterly turn down the idea. We end by drawing conclusions with regard to future research and to possible strategies of implementation.

Keywords

consumption corridors, good life, human needs, sufficiency, sustainability ethics, sustainable consumption

Aim and Structure of the Article

From the point of view of sustainability, humanity runs into a problem if all humans want is to be satisfied. However, the actual consumer culture by its very nature creates a sense of entitlement, a feeling that one has the right to have every wish satisfied. This culture is difficult to confront. In this paper, we explore if the idea of “sustainable consumption corridors”, derived from concepts of a good life and one of the messages that resulted from the process of integration within the focal topic *From Knowledge to Action – New Paths towards Sustainable Consumption*¹ (Blätzel-Mink et al. 2013, pp. 33), can be a good starting point for defining criteria for sustainable consumption. Such corridors would be defined by minimum standards, allowing every individual to live a good life, and maximum standards for every individual's use of resources guaranteeing access to sufficient resources (in terms of quantity and quality) for others, both in the present and the future. In order to critically evaluate this idea, we will first make the case for the ethically correlated ideas of a good life and of sustainable consumption corridors, and will secondly discuss arguments that we have found or would expect to be raised against them. Our aim is to arrive at a cautious assessment of how realistic such a corridor approach to improving the sustainability of consumption would be and whether and how it could be feasible – both empirically and politically. We will not discuss whether or why it makes sense to pursue the goal of sustainability. Rather, we take this as a given.

The paper proceeds as follows. To begin with, we discuss how the concept of sustainable development can (or should) be related to the notion of a good life and justice adopting so-called objective theories, more precisely anthropological theories, of a good

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life (a well-known example of such a theory is Nussbaum's 1992 capabilities approach). This will lead to the proposal of sustainable consumption corridors and the associated attempt to establish criteria to define these. The then following section takes on potential objections to such an approach and presents responses to these objections. In the final section, we draw some conclusions with regard to future research and possible political strategies of implementation.

Sustainable Development, the Good Life, and Sustainable Consumption Corridors

Sustainable development is "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED 1987, p. 43). This definition, as it is further developed in almost all documents of the United Nations related to sustainable development since 1987 (Di Giulio 2004), entails two aspects. It defines the provision of all individuals with the possibility to live a good life as the goal of sustainable development and it links sustainable development directly to the question of intra- and intergenerational justice. Beyond these two guiding principles, however, sustainable development is not only a broad, but also a regulative idea (e. g., Hirsch Hadorn and Brun 2007). It is broad insofar as it claims to determine the goal for the development of all sectors of human societies on a national and an international level and to guide individual behavior, the acts of corporations, communities, states, and the international community. It is regulative insofar as in each generation it has to

development looks like in action or what the substance of a good life that has to be achieved by sustainable development is. At the same time, some definitions of such ideas are needed, because otherwise they cannot be set as goals to be achieved and monitored – and these definitions must be of use to inform their implementation in space and time. As the declared goal of sustainable development is to ensure a good life for all humans now and in the future, then, we need a definition of a good life that is tangible but not restrictive. When we look for definitions of a good life to be used in the context of sustainability and for possibilities of how to define sustainable consumption, we have to take this into account.

To be of use in the context of sustainability, it makes sense to approach the notion of a good life by so-called objective theories of a good life, more precisely by anthropological theories of a good life (for further elaboration see, e. g., Di Giulio et al. 2012). These theories proceed from deliberations as well as empirical findings on characteristics of human beings and on the conditions of a decent human life. They claim to determine relevant external conditions that should be given to that end without prescribing in detail how an individual life should be led in order to be called good, thus leaving room for individuals to define what they deem to be a meaningful life for them.

A well-known theory of this kind is the capabilities approach promoted by Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (for a discussion of the differences between Nussbaum's and Sen's perspectives, see Robeyns 2005): following Sen (1996) and Nussbaum (1992), humans have certain capabilities because they are human beings, irrespective of the contexts in which they live. To be able

A promising way to ensure a good life for all humans now and in the future is to define and respect "sustainable consumption corridors", that is, minimal and maximal standards of consumption.

be substantiated anew.² With a view to this second characteristic, the idea of sustainability is comparable to the ideas of justice and freedom: they are meant to inform the organization and development of a society and they can all be filled in a variety of ways, depending on one's assumptions about human nature and the functioning of societies, or – scientifically speaking – on the theoretical perspective used. Furthermore, they change in content depending on the possibilities and challenges of a given historical and cultural context. An attempt to deliver a conclusive definition of what exactly freedom or justice are in terms of precise political goals, policies and indicators would be futile. Accordingly, a definition of the notion of sustainability or sustainable development does not and cannot specify in detail, what sustainable

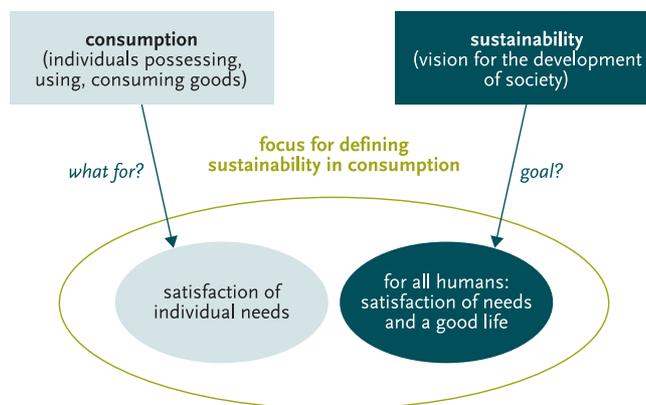
to pursue a good life means on the individual level to be able to develop and use one's capabilities. The capabilities identified by Nussbaum reach from not dying prematurely, to health and bodily integrity, sensual functionings, the ability to form emotional attachments, and to having control over one's environment. They >

2 Regulative ideas (such as freedom or justice) are ideas that inform the development of a society without defining exact goals the development has to achieve. They are ideals insofar as they never are finally materialised, and at the same time they are real insofar as they inform concrete societal goals and arrangements that have to be defined and are defined by each generation. The concept of regulative ideas goes back to the philosopher Kant.

FIGURE 1: Given that acts of consumption are usually performed with the aim of satisfying one's needs and given that the overarching goal of sustainable development is that all humans now and in the future have the possibility of satisfying their needs and of living a good life, the concepts of needs and a good life are pivotal for defining sustainable consumption.

do not state that all human beings necessarily have to develop the same capabilities as these may not be equally important to all individuals. But, whilst individuals have different ideas about what it means to them to actually lead a good life, all human beings should have the choice and the opportunity to develop these capabilities – as far as this can be ensured by providing external conditions (the differing personal, i. e., internal and physical, conditions impact of course the choice). To give a simple example: Everyone should have the possibility to eat enough and to pursue recreational activities, but this does not imply that people are obliged to eat a certain amount and/or a certain kind of food or to go on holidays abroad. Following Sen and Nussbaum, we can identify the necessary provision of external conditions as a prerequisite for the ability of individuals to develop and use their capabilities and thereby pursue a good life, and these external conditions are contextual and need to be negotiated in each society at each point in time.³

Similar approaches are those by Max-Neef (1991) or Costanza et al. (2007). Costanza et al. proceed from the notion of “objective human needs” instead of human capabilities. They conceive the external conditions providing the possibility to meet these needs in terms of “social, built, human and natural capital” providing “opportunities” to meet these needs. They deliver a list of human needs such as subsistence, reproduction, security, leisure, spirituality or creativity/emotional expression and thereby claim to integrate the most important approaches to the issue, including the capabilities approach. They also assume that the “content of the needs themselves are dynamic”, meaning that how a need is specified in concrete terms will and has to change over time. Costanza et al. distinguish between objective needs and subjective well-being (happiness). They suggest measuring the “quality of life” in order to assess sustainability-related progress (see also Costanza et al. 2014), and they define “quality of life” as “a function of both the level of human needs met and the extent to which individuals or groups are satisfied with this level” (Costanza et al. 2007, p.268).⁴ We also suggest using the concept of objective human needs because we consider it compatible with different disciplinary and political approaches (see Di Giulio et al. 2012; for a discussion of the notion of needs see also Soper 2006).⁵ But, in contrast to Cos-



tanza et al. (2007) and in order not to link this notion too tightly to a specific theoretical approach (e. g., the capital stock approach), we call the external conditions either “external conditions” or “resources”. The goal of sustainable development can thus be rephrased as providing human beings in the present and in the future with the resources necessary to meet their objective needs and therefore to be able to live a good life according to their individual choices.

Ensuring the provision of the required resources (external conditions) means, for instance, providing access to natural resources such as clean water, which is a precondition for a long and healthy life. It also means providing access to certain social resources such as education or a functioning health care system. The problem with these resources is that many of them are scarce. With respect to environmental resources, this scarcity is clearly visible. Numerous reports by a diverse range of actors have demonstrated that the global population today is massively overusing the Earth's resources and sinks. But even social resources frequently are limited. This becomes visible when we consider social resources clearly associated with high financial costs, such as medical services. When looking for approaches to, and policies for, sustainable development, we have to take into account not only the just distribution of such resources in terms of allocation (local, national, global) and time (keeping in mind both present and future generations), but also their scarcity. This leads us to the requirement of defining a minimum quantitative and qualitative level of natural and social resources as a prerequisite for individuals to meet their needs and thereby pursue a good life.

Following this line of thought further suggests that sustainable development as an inherently ethical concept implies certain rights, but also certain duties for both individuals and states. Individuals are entitled to have access to the necessary resources allowing them to satisfy their objective needs and live a good life. States and the international community have the duty to provide individuals with the necessary resources and to ensure these resources for the future generations. Individuals have the duty not to harm others with regard to their access to sufficient resources and therefore their possibilities to live a good life.⁶ In other words and transferred to the field of consumption, this means that it should be the duty of consumers to consume only that quality and

3 It goes without saying that such approaches proceed from the precondition that societies shall be organized in a democratic and constitutional way.

4 This way they integrate so-called “subjective theories” of a good life, that is, theories defining a good life by the personal felt well-being of people.

5 We distinguish between objective needs and subjective desires and (individual) ideas about the degree and breadth of satisfaction of objective needs and subjective desires (Di Giulio et al. 2012; see also Defila et al. 2014, in this issue).

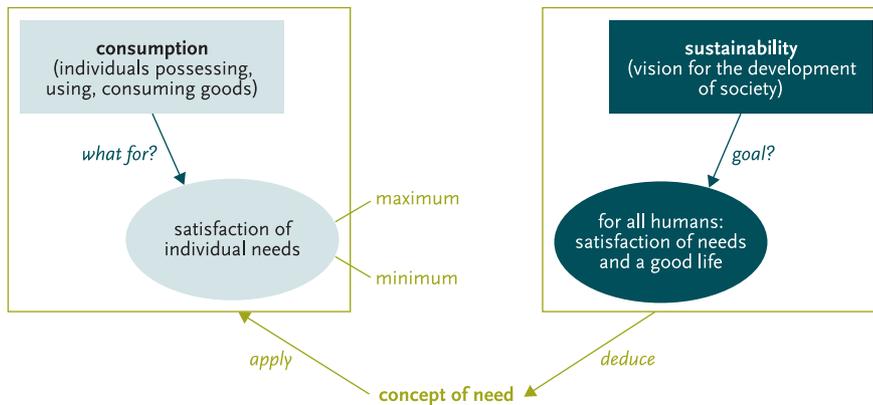


FIGURE 2: To link sustainability and consumption, the focus should not primarily be on consumer goods, but on the needs these goods are linked to. To define sustainable consumption, therefore, it seems reasonable to deduce a concept of needs from the notion of good life in the context of sustainability and apply it to consumption. This allows defining minima required, in terms of natural and social resources, to satisfy objective needs and maxima which, if they are exceeded by individuals' and/or groups' acts of consumption, endanger the satisfaction of objective needs of other humans now or in the future.

quantity of natural and social resources that allows others to also have sufficient access to them. Accordingly, a definition of sustainable consumption should extend to both a minimum level of natural and social resources as stated above and a maximum level of natural and social resources that individuals are entitled to have access to. In other words, we end up with the conclusion that we have to define not only minimum but also maximum standards for consumption.⁷ Sustainable consumption, then, is consumption respecting these minima and maxima. To give a name to this idea of defining and respecting minimal and maximal standards of consumption we use the metaphor of “consumption corridors”.

Consumption also relates to the idea of a good life, irrespective of whether it is aligned with sustainability objectives (figure 1). Acts of consumption do not take place for the sake of themselves. Rather, individuals perform them in pursuit of certain goals (see also Kaufmann-Hayoz et al. 2012), and these goals are individually felt needs. As such, individuals intend consumptive acts to improve their lives in one way or another. Looked at from this point of view, consumer goods are merely satisfiers. Accordingly, consumption is connected to individuals' ideas of what their lives should look like. It is thus always linked to individual conceptions of a good life, even if these ideas may not be well thought out and may not be explicit.⁸ Therefore, we have potentially conflicting notions of a good life when we talk about sustainable consumption:

the “subjective” one (“my personal quality of life”) and the “objective” one (“the quality of life sustainable development should provide for all humans”). From an ethical perspective, sustainable consumption should be defined as to bring them both in line (figure 2): It should be consumption allowing individuals to live a fulfilled life and at the same time it should be consumption which contributes to the improvement of the chances of others to live a fulfilled life, now and in the future (or at least does not hurt these chances).

We try to meet this requirement with the notion of sustainable consumption corridors (figure 3). Thus, we aim to define criteria for consumption that are situated between the extremes of trying to define sustainable consumption for each single individual and his or her single acts of consumption and of defining universalistic standardized prescriptions for all individuals at all times without taking into account the different cultural, historical and individual situations they are embedded in. Such corridors leave room for the realization of individual life plans and choices, and they are a way to ensure that all individuals are able to live a fulfilling life.

Such an approach does not start from arguments along the lines of being satisfied with little or less or with other consumer goods. In other words, it does not promote a strategy of sacrifice and renunciation. Neither does it promote unspecified moral suasion in the form of “we should consume less”. Instead, it proposes first to jointly define the external conditions necessary to live

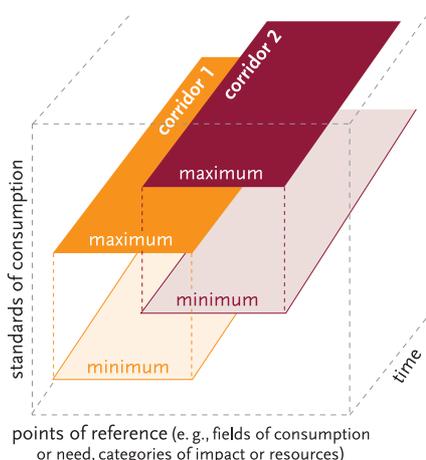


FIGURE 3: Corridors of sustainable consumption are defined by minimal and maximal standards of consumption. Their number and the degree of overlap depends on how many points of reference (fields of consumption, environmental and social impact categories, etc.) will prove to be reasonable and on how much these will be disjoint. The corridors will have to be readjusted periodically.

- 6 Looked at from an ethical point of view the duty of individuals emerging from the idea of sustainability goes beyond the obligation not to harm others and entails the obligation to actively contribute to the achievement of the conditions for a good life for all humans now and in the future (Di Giulio 2008). For the sake of our argument regarding consumption corridors the obligation not to harm others suffices, however. Accordingly, we will not pursue this argument further here.
- 7 It should be noted that these minima and maxima do have to relate to the same resource, but they do not necessarily have to be defined in the same “currency”, that is, they do not have to follow a pattern like “minimally two pair of trousers, maximally four pair of trousers”. Instead, to give another rather simple example, primary education as a resource could be defined by the minimal number of years children are entitled to go to school and the maximum teacher-pupil ratio paid for by the state.
- 8 Accordingly, satisfiers could, as, for example, Max-Neef (1991) suggests, be categorized with a view to their suitability to genuinely satisfy needs (e.g., whether they are indispensable or detrimental for the satisfaction of a need).

a good life qualitatively and quantitatively and use them as a basis for defining minimum consumption standards. Second, it proposes to jointly negotiate maximum consumption standards, that is, levels of consumption at which no substantial further improvement in well-being is to be expected and the quality of life of others is being endangered. ‘Sufficiency’ would mean the societal norm of accepting and observing these levels.

Defining such levels has of course to allow for adjustments over time. Corridors of sustainable consumption thus cannot be defined once and for all. Rather, they have to be defined taking into account the given cultural and historical context, that is, they have to be readjusted periodically according to social and ecological developments, new insights, and evolving value systems. In suggesting the definition and respecting of minimal and maximal standards of consumption, we thus suggest establishing a periodic discussion and reflection on what a good life consists of and on what is needed for allowing humans to live a good life on a societal level.

Objections and Responses

We are fully aware of the fact that the idea of defining corridors of consumption has substantial implications for the organization of modern societies and international cooperation and is associated with a considerable number of not only political and juridical but also scientific challenges. In the following, we will draw attention to the most important objections to corridors of consumption, in particular the definition, implementation and enforcement of maximum standards, as we perceive and/or anticipate them. Considering each one of these objections, we will formulate potential responses and show from which theoretical approaches and empirical findings the further development and implementation of corridors of consumption could proceed:

The Pluralists’ Objection

Argument: We live in a pluralistic society, not only on a national, but also on an international level. In a pluralistic society, the characteristics and associated conditions of a good life cannot be defined in absolute terms. Rather, the reality in today’s pluralist societies is that extremely diverging lifestyles exist and that a normative agreement beyond procedural rules is neither possible nor indicated. Furthermore, what we consider elements of a good life may not concur with what people in other cultural settings would consider a good life. Therefore, it would not be right to impose a western vision of what a good life consists of on people of other cultures – that would be a neocolonial approach.

Response: When looking at the pluralist nature of today’s societies, we should ask what this pluralism – or accepting the pluralist nature of societies – actually means. Clearly, there are differences in lifestyles, life plans, etc. across and within societies – nobody could and should deny this fact. However, there are also

similarities uniting human beings. The entire debate and present agreements on human rights proceed from the assumption that humans have certain rights because they are humans, regardless of where they live, their gender, religion and *Weltanschauung*, and that these rights should be protected (Donnelly 1989). Findings in the field of cross-cultural research on human values, again, show different cultural patterns, but at the same time also support some kind of universality of at least some values (see, e.g., Schwartz 1994). To accept pluralism in society does therefore not necessarily mean that one should apply a completely relativistic approach. Instead, it makes sense to distinguish between what can and cannot be claimed to be universal, based on scientific evidence. Otherwise, one would mix scientific and political arguments. Moreover, from an ethical point of view, an argument ending up with the cynical conclusion that everything is allowed that some group of people claims to be part of “their culture” should be avoided. Accordingly, our aim with the consumption corridors is to give room for heterogeneity to be lived, without defining every inch of what happens in this room, but also without making it arbitrary.

The Liberalists’ Argument

Argument: The only agent that would be able to enforce corridors of consumption is the state. But the state should not be allowed to intervene excessively in individuals’ life plans and personal well-being. Individual freedom and consumer sovereignty have to be valued higher. Moreover, corridors of consumption could only be established if we simultaneously established a perfect and comprehensive system of control – and nobody would want to advocate a surveillance state.

Response: States, of course, should not be dictatorial, but democratic and constitutional, ensuring individual freedom. However, this is not the end of the story. Fundamentally, the human being is a social animal that cannot live on its own. The very notion of living in societies under some form of commonly agreed rule reflects this aspect of human existence and simultaneously shows the potential for agreeing on certain limits to individual freedom (Locke 1689 [1988], Hobbes 1651/1668 [2012]). Civil law codes document this well. Accordingly, this response starts from the question of what the core tasks of community or the state as manifestation of governance of societies are. At least two such tasks – and associated subtasks – that are of relevance with respect to consumption corridors can be named here. First, the pursuit of the common good is the responsibility of the political community (Rousseau 1762 [1997]). This includes the management of commons, and a lot of natural and social resources should be rightly addressed as commons. We are convinced that the design and implementation of consumption limits is a way of guaranteeing the common good if the finiteness or even scarcity of natural and social resources and/or the risk that they may be severely damaged is taken as a given. Secondly, it is the task of the state to protect individuals against infringements on their freedom by others and

to prevent discrimination (Locke 1689 [1988]). Consequently, the state has the right and the obligation to prevent individuals from consuming to such an extent that access to a sufficient quality and quantity of resources is denied to others. In the context of the significant asymmetries in power that exist in the market and in politics today, the need of exerting this right and obligation is, in fact, particularly important (Fuchs 2005, 2013). Looking at the liberals' argument from another point of view easily reveals that individuals are far from being completely free and uninfluenced. In fact, there are numerous actors who influence individuals' conceptions of what a good life is. Such conceptions do not just arise

tion acts is far from perfect. However, that state of affairs also applies to almost all aspects of sustainable development and the vast majority of issues and circumstances in our world. Demanding perfect knowledge refers back to an outdated understanding of knowledge and makes inappropriate demands of science. If, however, definitive knowledge can hardly ever be provided by science, the question can only be how to deal with the incompleteness and uncertainties in understanding. Given the urgency of the sustainability related challenges humanity is facing, it is clear that to wait until everything one could know about the functioning of natural and social systems and the impacts of consumption decisions

Exploring potential objections to the idea of “sustainable consumption corridors” shows that there is no argument strong enough to utterly turn down the idea – therefore, it should be developed further.

from “within” the individuals themselves, but are also societally transmitted, negotiated and thus influenced by a multitude of other actors (as is reflected in a number of debates, for example, on the influence of advertising, games and movies on the development of children and teenagers and on people's satisfaction with their life).⁹ The state, therefore, has a responsibility to weigh in on the discursive contests on behalf of the common good and against the dominance of individual particularistic interests. Finally, even liberal economists accept that state intervention is allowed in the context of market failure (Mankiw et al. 2002). With current prices widely failing to reflect the values of many environmental and social resources, market failure abounds when it comes to the sustainability characteristics of consumption. The liberals' argument, thus, will considerably lose weight, if it is properly scrutinized.

The Argument of Lacking Information

Argument: First, we do not and never will know with certainty how to define objective needs. Second, we will never be able to enumerate, let alone quantify, the resources needed to satisfy objective needs. And finally, we do not sufficiently understand the direct and indirect impacts of single acts of consumption and the implications for the use of natural and social resources to be able to determine consumption limits that if transgressed would prevent others now and in the future from leading a good life.

Response: With regard to the argument that the necessary knowledge to define sustainable consumption corridors is lacking, we agree that knowledge of the limits, the future development of natural and social systems and the impacts of individual consump-

tion is known would be wrong, even if one believed that perfect knowledge could ever be achieved. If, then, action is necessary now and despite incomplete knowledge and uncertainty, it means that the strategies chosen require some room for error and adjustment. In other words, they should entail a reflexive process allowing for learning to occur and therefore should be adaptable to new insights. Furthermore, we would stress that even if science could provide definitive and comprehensive knowledge, this would remain descriptive and thus no normative conclusion could be derived from it without completing it with value decisions.¹⁰ Again, value decisions have to emerge from societal negotiation as they cannot be provided by science. Therefore, the maximum – and minimum – limits of sustainable consumption corridors can and should not be defined once and forever, nor should they be based on scientific, descriptive knowledge alone. Instead, they need to be negotiated and checked regularly and, if necessary, adjusted. Finally, we want to point out that further elaboration of corridors of consumption would not have to start from scratch, because research from different disciplines is already gathering knowledge on objective needs (Binswanger 2013, Frey 2008, Veenhoven 2011), and developing proposals on how to approach the definition of minimal and maximal standards of consumption (see, e.g., Hille 1997, Rao and Baer 2012, Spangenberg 2002), although these proposals are restricted to natural resources. >

9 The effect Mathias Binswanger (2013) calls “Statustretmühle” belongs here as well: He describes how people gain satisfaction and happiness out of comparing their situation with the situation of others in their environment (see also Zaccai 2007, Veblen 1899 [1994]).

10 This applies, as well, to target knowledge (CASS/ProClim– 1997), as also target knowledge is descriptive knowledge.

The Argument of Lacking Acceptance

Argument: The idea of consumption corridors is highly unrealistic, because people would never accept such a thing, neither on the national nor on the international level. They feel that they should, for instance, be able to buy the car they want, as long as it is within their budget, and that they should be allowed to drive it as much as they want (Hobson 2002).¹¹ And even if they accepted the notion of consumption corridors in certain respects, the economic and social costs of implementation would be so high that no society could afford them.

Response: With regard to the potential lack of acceptance, particularly of maximum standards, we question the empirical foundation of such an argument. In fact, numerous examples of societies democratically agreeing on and accepting such maximum limits exist. Simple examples are alcohol levels when driving or maximum speed limits. In the social sector, some countries set limits for the number of health insurances an individual may have or in the number of universities in which an individual may be enrolled. We are also familiar with such limits in particular environmental policy areas. Examples are regulations around logging in forests in some countries or fishing quotas in the European Union. In other words, we would argue that the idea of limiting individual freedom by (jointly) defining limits for individual behavior in terms of minimal and maximal levels is, at least for European countries, not at all a revolutionary. Instead, and this leads back to how to define the tasks of a democratic state, it is an integral part of what constitutes societies.

The Argument of Lacking Impact

Argument: Even if we assume that corridors of consumption are a good idea per se, agreement on the exact definition of these corridors would have to be achieved at the international level, first – and this will never happen. It would be fruitless to define such corridors at the national or even sub-national level, as this would not have a sufficient impact on global sustainability with regard to consumption. And those individuals or groups causing the most negative impact with their acts of consumption would just side-step regulations implementing corridors by moving to another country.

Response: Turning to the question of uselessness, finally, we accept that such arguments are being made. Constructivist perspectives would see in them norms entailing actors' ascription of responsibility to others (Mason 2008). Economic perspectives on global environmental cooperation tend to phrase them in the form of collective action and free rider problems (Sandler 2004). Indeed, experiences with international negotiations in the area of environmental policy and especially sustainable consumption can easily

destroy one's belief in the potential for fast and substantial agreements (Fuchs and Lorek 2005). But, first, all of these are not valid arguments for waiting. Rather, we believe that such a stance is cynical in the face of urgent problems and that it is our ethical duty to pursue meaningful efforts once our responsibility and obligation can be identified. Hence, the argument that the international level should come first is untenable on ethical grounds. Second, it is not necessary to rely on an international top-down approach alone to stir societal change and have impact on an international level. Major societal change often starts with the initiative of small groups and/or one country. Many historical precedents for such changes exist. The so-called "Bananenfrauen", for instance, an initiative in Switzerland in the 1970s by women who were concerned with the unfair production processes and trade in bananas developed into the fair trade movement, which in turn quickly spread to other countries. Car sharing is another example, which has become widespread in many European cities. Against the background of these findings in the field of social movements and/or social innovation, we argue that it could be more appropriate to move forward rather than to demand impact a priori (Eitzen and Stewart 2006). Finally, it simply would not make sense to define corridors of consumption on an international level. Corridors of consumption have to be tailored to the specific cultural, social and natural context. Otherwise it would not be possible to leave sufficient room for varying conceptions of a good life. The basics of nationally defined corridors, however, objective needs and criteria and procedures on how to define the corridors, should be internationally discussed and agreed upon.

Conclusions

The idea of defining corridors of consumption (figure 3, p. 187) is a result of linking two complex phenomena, that is, individual consumption and sustainable development, and of, when doing so, not shying away from the resulting complexity. We explored potential objections to the idea, but believe that there is no argument strong enough to utterly turn down the idea and that it should be developed further, therefore. This entails tackling the question of potential strategies for the design, implementation and enforcement of sustainable consumption corridors, which, then, also offers an answer to the one criticism we have not addressed yet: the objection of impossibility of design. The argument of impossible design arises from a combination of some of the above objections. It would posit that the numerous and diverse environmental and social impacts of individual consumption acts cannot be sufficiently reliably and comprehensively calculated to ensure that maximum standards are not exceeded and that the implementation and enforcement of consumption corridors is unfeasible, accordingly. While we acknowledge the difficulties involved in such a task, we do think that by taking two specific steps the definition and implementation of sustainable consumption corridors may become feasible. First, there needs to be a transdisciplinary discussion about the idea as such as well as about ob-

¹¹ See also the notion of "entitlement" mentioned above.

jective needs and the kind of resources needed to satisfy them in society. Secondly, a further transdisciplinary process is needed for the definition and implementation of such corridors. Three potential starting points suggest themselves for such an endeavor: fields of consumption, categories of environmental and social impact, and/or use rights expressed in institutional regimes¹². Indeed, we do not think that one of these starting points necessarily is the best in all cases – they may have to be combined. For all three potential starting points, however, we require theories to link natural and social resources to human needs, and empirical evidence on impacts. On such a basis, we can then start defining and implementing sustainable consumption corridors one by one.

The major task for the future will be to respond to these challenges by developing and evaluating ideas for design and imple-

mentation. As we have shown in our article, this cannot be done by relying on one scientific discipline alone, as it involves theoretical and empirical findings from a range of disciplines. Moreover, and that is our final conclusion, designing corridors for sustainable consumption cannot be done by academia alone, but has to be a transdisciplinary endeavor.

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¹² Following this approach (see, e. g., Gerber et al. 2009), institutional regimes organize societal rules regarding the acquisition and exertion of a given set of use rights. If one purchases a car, for instance, one acquires the right to use it, but also the right to influence the air quality via emissions, etc.

*“My mother sleeps every day.
My dad does chores.
My brothers fight.
There are trash bags all over the place.
Half-eaten dinners, cat poop, mountains of clothes: this is my lovable daily life, and a loveable Japan.”*
Artist's Statement, Motoyuki Daifu, 2014



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