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Structural Prerequisites for Sustainable Societies and the Good Life –

Taking the Sustainable Consumption Lens Seriously

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sg Sustainable Governance

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1   Introduction

This Sustainable Governance Discussion Paper is based on an international scientific workshop held at the University of Muenster March 21-22, 2013. It was jointly organized by the Chair of International Relations and Sustainable Development at the University of Muenster and SCORAI-Europe. The workshop's core objective was to gain new insights on the potentials and barriers for the pursuit of the Good Life from a sustainable consumption angle.

This objective was chosen for two reasons: 1) the hypothesized potential of a focus on the „G Life" as a guiding vision for sustainability related reforms, and 2) the fear that the arising debate on the Good Life as such a vision might too easily ignore insights on problems and pitfalls from 15+ years of sustainable consumption research. The "Good Life" clearly seems to be an attractive and most basic goal for individuals and societies and it is not surprising that the question of the Good Life is increasingly moving back into the focus of political, societal, and scientific debate. While pointing towards a millennia-old human quest, the recent linking of the Good Life to the pursuit of sustainable development has reinvigorated the debate, indeed. This is all the more the case, since the concept of the Good Life offers significant potential to discuss a wide range of ideas and controversies with respect to sustainable development.

While the discussion of determinants and indicators of the Good Life is interesting and worthwhile, the actual creation of sustainable societies on the basis of a common understanding of the Good Life - or more likely multiple understandings under a broad set of principles - is more than challenging, however. After all, both the Good Life and sustainable development are "essentially contested concepts", i.e. abstract norms that rely on underlying value judgments and associated views on the nature of human kind or the functioning of societies to arrive at more concrete interpretations. This is all the more true for the relationship between the two concepts, of course. Still, approaching the idea of sustainable development or sustainable societies from the angle of the "Good Life" would appear to be a promising endeavor, when it comes to attempts to garner new political momentum for the pursuit of sustainable development.

In pursuit of this objective, sustainable consumption discourse and governance are particularly helpful in identifying stumbling blocks. To date, it has been argued that the political and societal pursuit of sustainable consumption has failed to lead to major progress towards sustainable development. When trying to explain this failure, scholars have turned to explore the role of power relations at the center of these discourses and have highlighted structural constraints in particular, which stand in stark contrast to the standard individualization of the problem and the idea to "incentivize" the consumers dominating most political agendas. These scholars have

argued that current politico-economic structures are associated with asymmetries and dependencies in power and participation marginalizing strong sustainable consumption objectives, i.e. preventing the paying of attention to levels rather than merely the efficiency of consumption. In their interaction with social dynamics and changing societal structures, these politico-economic structures appear to be fostering ever rising resource use, irrespective of achieved efficiency gains. Specifically, claims that down-shifting or simplifying trends will easily diffuse widely throughout societies due to their assumed contribution to greater happiness appear to fall short of capturing societal realities and dynamics.

In other words, sustainable consumption research has shown that one needs to address the implications of existing politico-economic structures and institutions and inquire into the potential of alternatives for any serious pursuit of sustainable development. In order to ensure the relevance of current and future research on sustainable development and the Good Life, this research, then, needs to avoid all too optimistic views of the potential for changes in attitudes and values arising from grass roots initiatives, which themselves are embedded in and frequently dependent on the larger socio-economic structures and associated barriers to sustainable development. It also needs to avoid spending time on simply identifying aspects needing change, when there is evidence that those in power have no interest in this change. In sum, this research needs to combine attention to the fundamental dynamics of political power and social change when exploring the need and potential of visions of the Good Life to foster sustainable development.

The structure of this paper is as follows. Next, we briefly delineate the workshop's methodological approach.[1] Then, we summarize the results of the working groups, which discussed groups of 3-4 papers, whose authors and abstracts are listed at the beginning of each working group summary below. The concluding section delineates insights gained and further questions developed at the workshop with respect to three guiding questions addressed throughout the workshop.

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[1] For a more elaborate presentation of the workshop's methodological approach please see http://www.uni-muenster.de/Fuchs/forschung/projekte/sustainable_consumption.html

2   The Workshop's Methodological Approach

With the challenges delineated above in mind, the workshop sought to provide a forum for in-depth discussions on the Good Life in the context of sustainable consumption. It did so by drawing on a discussion-focused structure emphasizing collaborative learning and concentrating on three guiding core questions. In its implementation, the workshop relied on a variety of approaches and techniques in order to achieve a maximum output in a short period of time, allowing the gathering of the abundance of participants' ideas, approaches and discourses and their synthesis into new insights. Working groups discussed three to four papers each in the absence of the authors and provided comments to the authors, to which the authors of the papers then jointly responded in plenary sessions. Open space segments towards the second half of the workshop allowed the addressing and further development of ideas and themes arising in the paper-based working groups. Finally, plenary sessions, which were spread between paper-based and open-space working groups, continuously collected and discussed answers to three guiding questions and critically evaluated the progress made. The three guiding questions thus providing a structuring and integrative instrument for the entire workshop were:

Q1   Convincing visions of a Good Life: What ideas and vision of a Good Life in the context of sustainable consumption exists and how convincing are they in terms of scientific rationale/evidence and societal practicability? How universal are these visions and how universal should they be?

Q2   Changes needed for rooting and pursuing convincing visions of a Good Life in society: what ideational and material structures and processes hinder (or foster) a broad societal conception and implementation of a Good Life compatible with sustainability.

Q3   Intervening on behalf of a Good Life: where can we find truly promising intervention points to foster the societal conceptualization and implementation of a Good Life? Where is change coming from? Where may change be coming from?

Importantly, the three questions are not meant as a linear sequence. If anything, they form an iterative circle, but even that notion does not sufficiently capture the complex interactions between them (and other aspects).

3 Results from the Working Groups

3.1 Values, Emotions, and Beliefs as a Source of Change

Katharina Glaab: Ideas of the Good Life in Religious Actor's Sustainable Development Communications

"What role do religious actors play in the definition and communication of a Good Life?"

Individual sustainable consumption choices or governance decisions on sustainable development depend on norms and values, which are grounded in ideas of the Good Life. Particularly faith-based actors and religious groups express certain influential views on the Good Life, which often seem to be in opposition to neoliberal thinking of sustainability in market economic terms. Katharina Glaab argues that religious actors have an important role for practical responses to sustainable development through their articulation of visions of how to lead the Good Life. Research questions are based upon the visions of the Good Life contained in current statements of religious actors with respect to sustainable development, especially in contrast to ideas from market economy. Furthermore, it is aimed at delineating how these ideas on the Good Life influence and activate political and individual action to pursue more sustainable lifestyles and development.

Ines Omann: Starting from the Inside

"The potential and necessity of self-reflection as a basis for achieving a necessary change in values"

Today, humanity uses far more resources than the planet can regenerate. Especially the early industrialized countries have selected production and consumption strategies with extensively high levels of resource use which are not sustainable at all. Thereby, social challenges arising from this overuse by rich countries bare the danger of serious conflict. Also individual problems with increasing affluence such as stress, burn-out, increasing loneliness or adiposities, demand a change towards less and more just use of resources, a transition based on well-being for everyone. Ines Omann argues that such a transition cannot be started from the outside, but rather inside the societies and individuals. Thereby, it is emphasized that lower resource use does not imply less well-being. Rather on the contrary, it can increase well-being and lead to flourishing. It is argued, that a deliberate reflection on one's own life, the awareness of the harm their lifestyles can do to themselves and others can lead to a change from affluence to joy in life.

Kersty Hobson: The Socio-Material and the Good Life

"What is the potential of an emotional approach for the development of necessary values and their conversion into action?"

Kersty Hobson approaches sustainable consumption with the ascertainment that the 'outer' material world (goods, services and infrastructure) and the 'inner' human world (values, norms and perceptions) are not separate existential spheres but co-create and continually reinforce each other. It is further argued that considering this, individuals have been called upon to decouple their perceptions of the Good Life form their consumption practices, through reducing the absolute amount and/or types of consumption taking place. Such calls often frame action as being good for the individual and/or the environment. The paper tries to find other modes of framing that could prove fruitful, being promoted by the author's involvement in a recently commenced project funded by the UK Engineering and Physical Science Research Council: a project that aims to explore the potentials for creating emotional links between consumers and electronic goods.

The papers in this group all primarily addressed guiding question 1, i.e. reflected on a sustainable vision of the Good Life, however, on their basis, the discussion in the working group quickly turned to the implications for guiding question 3, i.e. intervening on behalf of a Good Life.

In their focus on attitudes, values and ideas as sources of sustainable visions of the Good Life, all papers discussed in this group started from the individual and subjective level. There was also a substantive agreement in the working group that feelings and emotions are important factors. At the same time, participants stressed the importance of context (material/ideational conditions) for gaining ideas and strategies as well as the need to consider the interaction between the outer material and the inner ideational world. In fact, there is a huge amount of scientific evidence that the outer world is highly relevant when it comes to the sustainability of consumption. Focusing on the inner world also reminds us of important assumptions underlying our perspectives and arguments: how do we conceptualize humans/humankind?

The working group also agreed with the papers' suggestion that emotional relations are important for a vision of the Good Life and in this context critically considered the suggestion that more emotional attachment to products would render consumption patterns more sustainable. In support of this argument, one could invest some hope in new or rather renewed business models of fixing and repairing things and associated ideas of sustainable design and product serviceability. Working group participants also pointed out that the relationship between emotional attachment and sustainable consumption can go both ways, however, as emotional attachment may also foster increasing consumption and subsequently raise the need for storage space, most of all. How much emotional attachment to how many products is actually "good" for us? In general, participations thought that it might be interesting to look at emotional attachment to cars (as an important driver of unsustainable consumption), i.e. what fostered the shift from cars to gadgets in terms of emotional attachment today. And more fundamentally, they felt that the non-purchase option needed to be legitimized, wondering how the issue of emotional attachment would relate to that option. Similarly, they postulated that the crucial question may be more about emotional attachment to basic needs including education or health or to overall welfare.

Participants also agreed that positive notions about sustainable consumption practices and patterns are necessary and that religious practices can indeed induce such positive utopias and/or clear visions. However, they also pointed out the important to differentiate between faiths (institutions) and individual believes, as well as between different faiths. Moreover, they argued we should not rely exclusively on religious practices. If, however, a religious approach is employed in contrast to rational approaches it may offer valuable additional insights or – to the

extent that it is associated with a sense of joy and appreciation implied by many faiths and religious practices – a powerful guiding vision. Religious perspectives may also incur additional challenges, however. Sacrifices associated with specific religious practices, for instance, to some extent may contradict the notion of freedom of choice. Likewise, an orientation towards a higher instance, the afterlife, or the immediate religious community may under certain circumstances work against an orientation towards (other) people and natural systems. Finally, the working group noted the need to differentiate between what people claim and what people do, with is relevant with religious behavior just as much as it applies to sustainable consumption.

To a lesser extent, the discussion linked the papers' contribution to answering guiding question 1 to guiding question 2 Changes needed for rooting and pursuing convincing visions of a Good Life in society. However, participants did observe that it is an open question what the important aspects to consider would be, when focusing on "individualizing" consumption patterns. Likewise, we need to explore 'how change from within can translate into structural change', thus relating to both guiding questions 2 and 3.

Regarding interventions on part of the Good Life, then, the working group participants also discussed whether and how to diffuse and upscale the perspectives and insights described in the papers. How do we go mainstream with versions of the Good Life? How do we facilitate a wider impact? Are small experiments the way to go? Yet, the participants agreed that often small initiatives are not addressing the overall structures. Some argued, however, that it is easier to address "at least" something and that therefore even small initiatives are adding something to sustainable practices. Practices, in this respect, were conceptualized as the link between structures and agency. Following on this argument, participants argued that it needs "right-minded" people infiltrating political structures (thus relating to guiding question 2) as well as relevant entry points (relating to guiding questions 2 and 3). Here, the idea of strategic action point to the question of 'what constitutes a window of opportunity' to lift up niche experiments to a next level. Should we focus on the creation of more of these windows? How would we foster this? One idea taken from the papers and the discussion in the group was to engage with different people (engineers, designers, scientists, religious practitioners etc.) on questions of the Good Life. In this context, it was also noted that design processes are relevant. Some working group participants argued that design is connecting processes, structures and ideas, and is able to integrate visions, changes and intervention in one place. Others expected that the room for maneuver for designers/companies is quiet narrow; they have to look basically at market structures, not at sustainable development. The problem with design is that the dynamics of growth are still working behind the screen.

Working group participants also identified structural resistance to reform in the political arena as a barrier, however. In this context, they noted the need to address the question of power. Moreover, they voiced concern that politicians hardly think in an integrated manner, i.e. everyone has special consultants and respective prioritized policy fields in political administrations. This was seen as a systemic problem at the elite level. Inducing chance against such structural barriers is even more difficult as there is no policy-based evidence that there is an actual impact of the described niche projects, i.e. no evidence that millions of Euros spent on campaigns have a significant impact. So, how do we intervene on behalf of the Good Life when evidence is not necessarily given? On the other hand – as the power and structural question shows – evidence is often not the only or not even an important basis for decision making.

Finally and most explicitly tying guiding question 3 back to guiding question 1, the working group discussed whether and to what extent change must originate from the individual level. Some participants found the conceptual differentiation between the inside (individual) and outside (society) problematic, especially in so far as there are is little evidence for change from the inside. The discussion showed also a considerable amount of skepticism regarding focusing too narrowly on incentive-based approaches, however, as research has shown that the one-sided pursuit of rationalist.

3.2   Ideational Structures, Sustainable Consumption and the Good Life

Stephan Engelkamp: Mauss Meets Modernity. What Drives Unsustainable Consumption?

"What are egotism-promoting mechanisms in current socio-economic relations that restrain the promotion of sustainable consumption and what are the alternatives that would foster common welfare?"

In his seminal study on morality of exchange in "archaic societies", Marcel Mauss noted that through gift-giving, social bonds evolve that continue through space and time until the future moment of exchange. In these on-going practices of exchange a notion of solidarity is achieved through the social relations that were forged in upholding these practices. In his contribution, Stephan Engelkamp argues that in contrast to this model, modern practices of consumption seem to be fuelled by consumer obligations that are not directed towards society, but to the individual self. The paper aims at identifying shifting socio-economic exchange relations as a structural driving force behind current (unsustainable) practices of consumption. It is argued that in hoping to gain personal esteem and social recognition through consumption, a debt relation is constructed, binding the individual in an endless cycle of deferral that can never be fully redeemed. What results from this is a continuous production of consumers.

Ortrud Leßmann: From Sustainable Consumption to the Quest for a Good Life

"How can the antagonism between egotism and common welfare ("I" vs. "We" rationality) be overcome and what potential has the capability approach in that context?"

What needs to be defined is what sustainability is about in order to derive what kind of consumption may be conducive to this goal. According to Ortrud Leßmann, sustainability is about broadening and sustaining freedoms for contemporary and future people in the sense of the capability approach, hereby referring to Amartya Sen. These freedoms pertain to one's own

well-being as well as to one's agency. Consumption is usually associated with the former goal and follows a logic that differs from the political and civic realm of agency. Referring to what Katherine Soma and Arild Vatn call "I" and "We" rationality, any behavior aiming at sustainability should follow a "We" perspective. Nevertheless, consumption focuses on one's own well-being and is called into question by other-regarding goals. Thus, the term "sustainable consumption" is self-contradicting. The capability approach offers a framework that may lead to an integrated understanding of the Good Life that encompasses consumption-driven well-being as well as "We"-rational agency achievements.

Thomas Princen: Fossil Fuel Consumption: A Good Life?

"How can fossil fuel consumption be economically accounted for in a more appropriate way and, at the same time, how can a new ethics of fuel consumption be conceptualized?"

If there was a single substance driving overconsumption of the past century it is fossil fuels. Nevertheless, according to Thomas Princen, fossil fuels have been largely neglected in the sustainable consumption literature. In order to tackle new approaches on sustainable consumption, a different ethic of fossil fuel consumption must be envisioned, including the very real possibility of widespread societal collapse if fossil fuel continues to be burned. A starting point would be the empirical accounting of extant and expected costs of fossil fuel extraction, processing, distribution and combustion, followed by the construction of a new ethic of fossil fuels, partially phasing out fossil fuels in providing essential services. From this comes a politics of delegitimization, a politics that renders fossil fuel use contrary to the Good Life if it does not conform to such ethical standards.

Kate Soper: Sustainable consumption and the 'dialectics of progress'

"How can the constraints that the market has now placed on personal pleasure and fulfillment both in and out of the work place be overcome?"

Today, ideas of 'progress' and 'prosperity' are closely associated with economic growth, high-tech development and consumer culture that they are defined by reference to it. It cannot be dismissed that the advances in democracy, social justice and sexual emancipation have been accompanied by market society and mass-production. Nor can it be denied that limitations were imposed by pre-modern societies on individual self-realization. But, one can certainly be critical of the constraints that the market has now in turn placed on personal pleasure and fulfillment both in and out of the work place. In this context of dialectic progress, Kate Soper argues that nations that once had figured as relatively 'backwards' might reconstitute themselves in such a period of historical transition and conceptual reconstruction as in the vanguard in comparison with the 'over-development' characteristic of the imperial powers or metropolitan centers that had once rendered them marginal and pre-modern by comparison.

The discussion in this working group started from a focus on guiding question 2, i.e. *Changes needed for rooting and pursuing convincing visions of a Good Life in society*, and focused subsequently mostly on guiding question 3, i.e. intervening on behalf of the Good Life.

All papers in this group are based on a (frequently implicit) theory of social change, i.e. building on specific ideas about sources of change. In this, they all appear to perceive (actually quite dramatic) shifts in values attached to material goods as particularly relevant sources and forms of change towards sustainable consumption. On this basis, the working group participants debated the necessity of and possibility of new societal ethics and how they can be translated into political

practice and provide intervention points for a Good Life. They explored the question whether such a new ethic was possible with respect to fossil fuel consumption, as it seems to have developed with respect to health, specifically smoking. The underlying argument was that a lot of good aspects exist in our everyday lives that have nothing to do with fossil fuels. A relevant ethic would build on these aspects and conceptualize a Good Life without fossil fuels. There was some controversy whether a new ethic can indeed be a starting point, whether we can "just wait" for a new ethic to develop or whether activists and academics actively have to build it up. Moreover, participants pondered whether some kind of tipping point exists for the successful development and diffusion of a new ethic.

In a similar vein, existing societal concepts and the potential to change them can be investigated. Thus, we may ask what progress actually is. For a more successful pursuit of sustainability, we may well need a new concept of progress allowing us to move away from the growth economy. Providing an outlook to the debate on guiding question 3, the participants noted that one needs to ask who actually defines progress in which way and with what consequences. In that context, it was critically discussed whether positively reframing progress to fit the goals of a Good Life is actually helpful. Accordingly, critical voices asked how far the alternative concepts of progress and the Good Life suggested in the papers may take us or whether ideas of progress that contradict the objectives of a Good Life are already so deeply embedded, that we have to leave behind the concept of progress as such. Moreover, they wondered whether we can really generalize individual preferences for crafts, for example, as a basis for societal visions of the Good Life.

Bringing the notion of gift-exchange into modern consumerism may provide an additional ideational impetus for change. Again, the critiquing of an accepted societal norm, in this case the norm of consumerism, can be seen as a necessary first step towards change. The questions for debate, here, would be: what are or can be the two parties of gift-exchange, the individual and society, the current and the next generation (then the individual would not even be a part of it)? In a second step, reframing consumption as a gift would need to emphasize the notion that one takes on the responsibility to pay something back. However and thereby referring to guiding question 3, i.e. intervening on behalf of a Good Life, such reciprocity would currently be just an assumption, not reality.

The working group further and more fundamentally discussed to what extent ideas for a Good Life can really provide a guiding vision for societies. There are a multitude of possibilities for such ideas, but can they be generalized? Indeed, one may ask whether it is at all possible to have a comprehensive and inclusive vision for a Good Life, relating back to guiding question 1. The

American dream could perhaps provide a relevant example, but even this example is both controversial and, of course, highly ambivalent when it comes to sustainability. Controversy arose also on whether visions today can be partial only. What about 'Energiewende' or Transition Towns as visions of the Good Life? More fundamentally, the group asked who talks about Good Life for whom and wondered whether there was too much focus on the North. In this context, the question of how the "I" of the self-interest and the economic logic and the "we" of the societal and political life as well as sustainability may go together and perhaps can be reintegrated. It was argued that a Good Life is about relations in society, the benefits of which could potentially supplant those sought by material consumption to some extent. Again, the case of the prohibition of smoking indicates that feeling or being seen as responsible for others' well-being helped to change individual unhealthy practices. Hence, an increasing focus on relational rather than individual logics of the Good Life, in the sense of changing the whole of society and not individual practices, needs to be considered.

The potential of ethics, norms and ideas as impetus for the necessary sustainability transition in consumption was, thus, controversially discussed. While the ideas presented in the papers are considered valuable, participants in the working group noted that information on how to get "there", specifically the question of agency (guiding question 3) is missing. Ideas and visions have to be developed, diffused and integrated in relevant alliances and networks which may still have to be created. But who is supposed to do that: governments, movements, or academics themselves? Particularly, the role of academics was critically discussed. While some argued that academics are in a unique position to translate theoretical thinking and philosophical visions into political activities and change the world, other participants questioned this ability and argued that we depend on a broader spectrum of power elites, which are in the position to accelerate or stop the necessary diffusion of alternative visions for a sustainability transition.

A range of alternative intervention point and strategies was discussed. Some working group participants emphasized the benefit of highlighting successful experiments or blueprints. Others, however, pointed out the difficulty that may exist when it comes to deciding what can be regarded as successful. Another strategy debated was to intervene in peripheries, i.e. outside dominant structures. The suggestion arising from that would be to choose paths that are alternatives to the typical ones, as the latter tend to be limited by structural constraints imposed by specific agendas and ideas (role of money, state, job creation). Further relevant intervention strategies considered by the working group was to try to use experiences gained from successful public health initiatives (see above) and to try to involve individuals more directly, based on the

assumption that as soon as people have their own (material) interests in issues, they can become agents.

In the end, the discussion focused on the issue of power. Who has the power to define relevant norms and ideas, to develop and diffuse new ethics or to change material context conditions? Taking the perspective of interaction and exchange, we may also note, however, that power may be reciprocal and not just imposed. People, who drive cars, give power to fossil fuels, for instance. We thereby link ourselves to the imposition of power. At the same time, we cannot and should not neglect the power of producers.

3.3   Change: Where are we? Where will it come from and how?

Bettina Brohmann: Strategies of Transformation and Models of Change

"The potentials of social innovation for the realization of a Good Life and sustainable consumption."

For the societal change towards more sustainability and the Good Life to succeed, mechanisms of societal change processes as well as their basic structures and patterns must be identifies and used systematically. Though, how and when a social innovation will be transferred into a mainstream phenomenon is still a matter of research. According to Bettina Brohmann, the dissemination depends, among others, on the framework conditions together with the different structural levels and actors. In parallel, the dissemination potential of a specific innovation is influenced also by profoundness of individual changes needed, the required degree of commitment and the stringency of the social conventions to be overcome, especially in so far as the latter may be affected by persisting influences such as advertising and marketing. Core questions and challenges are: (1) which prerequisites must be met for models of "Good Life" to be disseminated? (2) To what extent do individual and structural conditions (qualification, motivation, organization) play a role in securing successful dissemination? (3) Can transformation processes be accelerated or steered, and what could be supportive measures? (4) Which criteria exist or should be pursued to assess the broad impact of models of "Good Life"?

Maurie Cohen: Positing a Post-Consumerist Future: Social Innovation in an Era of Fading Economic Growth

"How should or could the Good Life be conceived, irrespective of consumer goods? And how does this conception relate to national and international economic developments?"

Four decades have passed since social theorists first gave serious consideration to a transition from consumerism to post-consumerism. The intervening years have given rise to committed efforts in the United States and other affluent countries to reinforce the preconditions of consumer society through the deregulation of key economic sectors, the liberalization of international trade, and the reassertion of military power abroad. Enthusiasm for renewing these interventions now seems to be waning amid protracted difficulties restoring customary increments of economic growth. The prevailing situation, combined with a reversal of once favorable trends with respect to demography, household income, social routines, political capacity, and resource availability, suggests that the pillars of consumerist lifestyles are coming under increasing strain and new routines are beginning to develop. We are witnessing today the advent of numerous social innovations including local living economies, "prosuming," collaborative consumption, peer-to-peer provisioning, self and communal cultivation/fabrication, community-based energy and food production, social lending, and "non-consumption." These insurgent practices are notably evident in locales that adjoin dynamic city-regions like Manhattan, San Francisco/Silicon Valley, and the Boston vicinity. It is at the same time instructive to recognize that the transition to post-consumerism will for the foreseeable

future be halting and partial and be characterized by a complex intermingling of consumerist and post-consumerist arrangements.

Anna Davies: Guiding Good Food

"The relationship between Consumer and Citizen Perception and Food"

The early 21ˢᵗ century has seen a plethora of future-oriented roadmaps and foresight exercises focused on increasing food supply in order to feed a growing global population under conditions of uncertain climate change. But, the complex politics underlying food production and distribution, as well as factors that shape the highly uneven practices of food consumption are often obscured. Anna Davies adds two dimensions to common agrifood debates that usually centers upon the supply-side and technological advancements, it examines the implications of relocating eating practices to the heart of planning food futures and second, it reflects on consumer-citizen perceptions of their ingredients for the Good Life in relation to food consumption. It is further argued that simplistic predict and provide approaches to food production need to be recalibrated to fully address the complex socio-technical transition required for sustainable eating.

Sylvia Lorek: Taking the Sustainable Consumption Lens Seriously

"What could a vision of a Good Life look like and how could one make it attractive?"

The majority of proponents for sustainable development as well as for sustainable consumption promote a strategy which sounds similar to the Good Life but in fact is something completely different: 'the better life'. Without any doubt the 'better life' is necessary for those suffering in poverty. Promising 'the better life' however seems quite contradictive to the members of the consumer society. Two elements responsible for the ongoing push of 'the better life' are identified by Sylvia Lorek. First are indeed the power structures in society and especially media which constantly tell us that 'happiness is around the corner' if only this or that new product is bought. The second reason is that even those who in general see the advantages of 'the Good Life' do not manage so far to really sell the concept. The paper intends to kick off discussion how the vision of a 'goof life' could look like and how to make it appealing.

All papers in this group aim to provide contributions towards the move to a steady-state reproductive economy. On the basis of the ideas presented by the authors, the papers allowed the extensive discussion of all three guiding questions.

A critical theme regarding guiding question 1, *Convincing visions of a Good Life*, which emerged throughout the discussions, was the subjectivity of the Good Life concept. Is a universal vision for a 'Good Life' possible or even desirable? As sustainable consumption researchers, we may reflect on the concept of the Good Life in the context of consumption. However, even within a group of people with similar academic interests, we may all have varying opinions on what the 'Good Life' means to us. In this vein, the Good Life as a concept also relates us back to familiar debates within sustainability research: how to measure the immeasurable; what do we mean when we use the terms 'sustainable', 'successful', 'positive', and 'development'. Thus, we may want to question how 'we' can work towards a Good Life if such significant variations in individuals'

conceptions of the Good Life exist. This also leads to the conclusion that it is very important to distinguish between (a) personal/individual visions of what a Good Life, (b) visions of a Good Life prevailing in a society (and backed-up by institutions such as education, media, advertisement, legislation etc.), and (c) visions of a Good Life emerging from theoretical (incl. ethical) and empirical research.

The working group suggested the need to develop and explore tangible future visions and scenarios for sustainable living. It was argued that for fully embracing a new and alternative future there is a need to feel or 'envisage' what this new future could look like. Following this discussion, session participants then considered the irony of perhaps trying 'too hard' to design the future. They argued that when designing for an alternative future it is difficult to escape the current prevailing system. They discussed that one potential future avenue for the sustainable consumption agenda should perhaps focus on how to instigate change rather than how to 'design' a future. On the other hand it was quite obvious that change can (or better: should) not be instigated without criteria to define what exactly should be changed and in what direction.

The important role of values attitudes and behaviors as drivers towards the pursuit of the Good Life raised some interesting discussions. When the papers discussed in this session were considered collectively, the ideas emerging could be interpreted as calling for a refocus on practices rather than values as a driver for the Good Life. A related theme emerging from the papers was that behavior can lead to a change in values, an argument which runs contrary to some of the traditional socio-psychological linear models that hypothesizes that values lead to a change in behavior, and this opened up a wider debate about the broader relationship between values and behaviors indicating the necessity to engage in a broader interdisciplinary debate.

With respect to guiding question 2, *Changes needed for rooting and pursuing convincing visions of a Good Life in society,* all papers in this session pointedly focused on the notion of 'change' and opening comments reflected on the contested definition of 'change'. In this context, the relationship between the underlying concept of change and the underlying concept of society was discussed as well, with participants commenting that how we envisage change is inherently linked with how we envisage society.

There was widespread agreement among the working group participants for the need for change and the papers discussed throughout the session highlighted examples of change in action, e.g. carbon tax and Transition Town Movement. How future change could be achieved however, was a more contested point of discussion. Debates pertaining to the important role of technological innovations for change and the ability of technology to change the sustainable consumption landscape were overshadowed by discussions around the role of a social innovations approach. It

was noted that among the papers there may be an inconsistency regarding our notions of social change. Furthermore, it became quite clear, that 'change' and 'innovation' per se are neither good nor bad, this discussion summing up to the conclusion that criteria are needed to define what kind of change or innovation is 'good' (and why), this leading back to the need of a vision of the future that is backed-up societally and scientifically. It was commented that it is very important to strategize change so that a vision is available if a window for real change opens.

All papers discussed in this group questioned the magnitude and inevitability of change; specifically are the changes that are already occurring and the changes that we are discussing (social innovations etc.) inevitable? Subsequently, the working group pondered whether the notion of inevitable change was a hindering or enabling concept. Interesting and conflicting opinions were voiced on this issue with some participants advocating exercising caution about the inevitability of change and questioning whether local movements and experiments would automatically spread. Others noted that given the large number of experiments underway, it was inevitable that some would fail. The topic of whether we were being over-optimistic or over-pessimistic about change remained unresolved. While the notion of envisioning and projecting alternative ways of living and using good practice case studies (i.e. successful Transition Towns) as examples for others to emulate was advocated by some participants, others voiced concerns regarding the real impact of many of these good practice case studies. Arguments proffered included the fact that while some of these local groups and movements were indeed growing, many were also not successful and had ceased to exist. Similarly, for every positive example of sustainability trends, we can also find a negative one. Other participants, moreover, raised the issue of the tenacious rebound effect, noting that while an initiative could be applauded for its progress towards sustainability in one sector, there may be unknown rebound effects in another. Thus, when assessing sustainable consumption initiatives and identifying areas where change is already occurring, we may be inclined to arrive at rather optimistic evaluations. The question remains, however, whether this optimism is really grounded in what is actually happening. Accordingly, the participants suggested that we should take a closer look on these activities, and cautioned not to be too optimistic.

This question of whether we tend to be over-optimistic also arose with respect to the notion of a post-consumerist society. While some working group proffered that we may already be approaching such a society, other participants strongly felt that we still tend to define societal relationships and hierarchies predominantly in a materialistic way. Even if some people start doing things differently, labeling this already as post-consumerist may be a too optimistic interpretation. Rather, the meaning behind such practices could be entirely different. For

example, hybrid cars are still 'consumerist'. This topic evolved into a broader conceptual discussion of the notion of 'consumption' and 'green consumerism'. The latter concept refers to the practice of making consumerism less ecologically destructive. However, we are not moving away from the model of owning or using resources for certain needs. Some participants raised the question whether modernity is even possible without 'consumerism' as an underlying ideology. If this ideology is what underpins modern identities, what would be necessary to create an identity in a "post-consumerist" world? Can a post-consumerist future exist at all and if so, how would it look like?

The participants addressed these questions by identifying two sets of systemic factors that constitute human conditions: first, there is the realm of habit and unconscious behavior; whereas the second set of factors concerns conscious behavior and decisions. Consumerism works through the first set of factors, which are difficult to overcome. As one participant noted, 'it is very hard to de-program your own brain'. In contrast, points of intervention are identified in the second realm, the domain of awareness and conscious decision. In this respect, the discussion focused on the issue of social relations as the main driver for consumption: instead of the product itself, it is its social meaning of consumption as a means to relate to other people. Hence, consuming may be a substitute for social relationships. If this is the case, the challenge for a post-consumerist alternative would be to provide an appealing alternative that does not draw on consumption as an identity-defining practice. Importantly, however, values that are predicated on the notion that giving something up is not necessarily negative, of 'Zufriedenheit', of being content with what you have, exist in society, as well. Can they facilitate the transition to the post-consumerist society?

Local initiatives like transition towns seem to present one concrete opportunity for putting social relationships into the foreground. Transition towns offer places for relating with other people. This idea appears for some people appealing and can be one element in a 'post-consumerist future'; however, when it comes to the diffusion of transition towns potential barriers to up-scaling move into focus.

With respect to this issue of scaling-up, many of the working group participants argued that there may be a danger of interpreting a social innovations approach as simply creating 'innovation that then would cascade out'. The session participants acknowledged that the potential transformational power of grassroots movements could become lost when mainstreamed (as they get incorporated and folded into the dominant economic structure). They also acknowledged that scaling up an initiative like Transition Towns is a complex task, given the fact that they are often based on complex interwoven relationships and are about time, space and identity. Can we really

and should we aim to up-scale such activities? Some participants cautioned against mainstreaming these initiatives and argued that the aim should rather be to localize and look for other practices on the ground. This should be considered as resilient strategy of re-claiming space for other purposes besides consuming.

In summary, working group participants suggested that more research was required on the benefits, risks and challenges of social innovations. They agreed that there was potential in exploring historical research on social movements such as feminism, anti-slavery etc. to explore what lessons could be learned to advance the sustainability movement. However, some cautioned that analogies may be difficult given the historical context of many of the movements referenced.

Fundamentally, the discussion on *Change: Where are we? Where will it come from and how?* led to calls for us as scientists to distinguish between (a) ongoing change and/or change that is imposed, and (b) change that is sought for. With regard to (a) science should try to understand the mechanisms and the powers leading to change in order to influence these mechanisms and/or to learn from these powers to instigate change that is sought for. Furthermore, the effects of such change on present arrangements and routines should be investigated and assessed. With regard to (b) science has to define, rationalize and back-up the goals of such change and it has to identify as precisely as possible what has to change (behavior of individuals, system of provision, system of governance, production etc.).

Regarding guiding question 3, *Intervening on behalf of a Good Life*, the discussion focused on 'our' role in the context of intervening on behalf of a Good Life, with numerous working group participants critically questioning the widespread employment of the term 'we' in many contexts and by many authors. The central question within this debate was 'who' are 'we'?' If 'we' refers to an elite group of researchers focusing on the theme of sustainable consumption, then this needs to be clearly acknowledged. Moreover, a core and controversial question was whether interventions really lead to processes of change that are socially and politically meaningful.

Related to this, the '*Change: Where are we? Where will it come from and how*' discussion concluded on a reflective note with all participants considering their roles as researchers in this field. How do we as researchers in this topical and emotive field reconcile the conflict of wanting to occupy the potential role of the activist while retaining a position of scientific neutrality? How exactly should scientific neutrality be depicted in such a normative context as sustainability? And if we take a stance at the interface of science and practice, are we more interested in and apt to providing concrete tools to use in projects and initiatives, or do we see our role as addressing more fundamental questions about concepts and alternative visions for a sustainable future?

3.4   Steering towards Sustainable Consumption and a Good Life

Doris Fuchs & Antonietta Di Giulio: The Good Life and Consumption Corridors

"Is it possible to define a consumption 'corridor'?"

This paper starts from two convictions. First, we believe that the ability to lead a Good Life depends on the fulfillment of certain external conditions, as for instance the capability approach by Sen and Nussbaum would suggest. Second, we do not exclude the possibility that the finite nature of the Earth's ecological resources and existing limits and challenges to societal resources are scarce relative to those needed to provide a growing global population with those external conditions. Based on those two convictions, we argue that it is necessary to define corridors of consumption maxima and minima. The minima, of course, are needed to provide for the external conditions needed for flourishing and the ability to lead a Good Life. The maxima are needed to ensure that those minima can be provided for all people. If that is the case, however, the question arises how such corridors can be defined for pluralist societies and an even more heterogeneous global population. Through what processes can we – if at all - foster the development of (joint?) visions of a Good Life, arrive at definitions of (societally acceptable?) minima and maxima, not to speak of their implementation?

Michael Maniates: The Trojan Horse of Libertarian Paternalism

"The potential of 'choice-editing' for the promotion of desired courses of action (and dangers of 'architecture choice')"

Behavioral economist Richard Thaler and legal scholar Cass Sunstein's notion of libertarian paternalism has recently emerged as an influential frame for fostering a Good Life. According to this approach patterns of consumption can be shifted for individual and social good by altering the "architecture of choice". This is marked by preserving choice at all costs, but altered by the configuration of choice to privilege the long-term foundations of the Good Life. However, Michael Maniates warns that by fostering a benign politics of 'choice architecture' that embodies notions of consumer sovereignty and free markets, libertarian paternalism may be more of a Trojan horse than any meaningful policy foundation for the Good Life. The paper analyzes 'choice editing' as the other concept's major rival. Choice editing appears distasteful to many because of its authoritarian aura. This paper argues that these concerns are overblown. By outlining several practices of effective choice editing drawn from inductive analysis of past experience it is concluded that it will not get to it without sustained, strategic, and informed use of choice editing.

Philip Vergragt: A Possible Way Out of the Sustainability Crisis

"The reduction of wealth and income-reduction by taxation minimum wages etc. as one way to realize sustainability."

The current crisis seems like a crisis of civilization. It certainly is a crisis of modernity. Analyzing a multitude of problems and possible solutions, Philip Vergragt comes to the conclusion that a radical reduction of the current wealth and income inequality is the most promising way forward. It has been documented that societies with less inequalities perform better on a wide range of social indicators of well-being, including social trust and support for democratic institutions, political participation, educational outcomes, health status, crime, hope of social mobility and other. Reducing wealth and income disparities will require a steeply progressive taxation of income, wealth and inheritance, and a range for public policies intended to restrain the currently distorted economic system which siphons the collective wealth from the working people to the financial sector and other rent-seeking activities and the corporate elites. According to the author, there are basically only two scenarios: a strong and visionary citizen's

movement, which would put pressure on the governments or a major social collapse, caused by persistent high unemployment, deterioration of the infrastructure, neighborhoods, and cities, and declining life support systems of the Earth.

The above papers' shared a focus on steering towards Sustainable Consumption and the Good Life and the discussion in the corresponding working group primarily concentrated on the third guiding question of the workshop "Intervening on behalf of a Good Life", accordingly. On the basis of the papers, distinct steering approaches were discussed: the negotiation and implementation of consumption minima and maxima, proactive choice editing, as well as the reduction of inequality through highly progressive taxes, for instance, were deemed important governmental intervention strategies, albeit also difficult to bring about. The discussion of these different steering approaches, in the end, culminated in the identification of a crucial aspect that requires further attention: the question of power.

Sustainable consumption corridors may be a means to steer consumption levels and patterns towards sustainability by identifying minimum and maximum levels of consumption needed to allow individuals to live and Good Life and to prevent them from consuming so much that others are constrained in their ability to live a Good Life. But who has or should have the power to decide what is needed for a Good Life? Who has or should have the power to decide what is too much? Promoting sufficiency, i.e. a maximum level of consumption, especially requires a closer look at the power and the role of the business sector, both with respect to their political influences but also with respect to the role of marketing.

Choice editing as a practice, i.e. the steering of consumption via the removal (or in some definitions also the advantaged promotion) of certain choices, is currently primarily applied by business actors and in some cases political elites. Consequently, a pivotal question can be formulated: where can choice-editing counter-elites for sustainability be located? Given the David and Goliath-situation, it would be instructive to analyse present achievements and investigate how societal steering instruments such as choice editing can be implemented by power lacking minorities and evolve from niche to mainstream.

Reductions in wealth and income inequality may also provide an interesting instrument to move societies towards sustainability. Here, a central actor could be the government via steeply progressive wealth and income taxation. Again, however, the question arises, from where pressure for such change should arise. After all, the trend has been in the opposite direction, for the past thirty years, and political elites frequently are members of the economic elite or aspire to become such members.

While concepts, such as consumption corridors, or equality objectives, as well as sustainability and the Good Life in general may be inspiring and generate political momentum, it is obviously crucial to identify the right actors and promoters for initiating change. In the end, then, it all returns to the question of power and potential origins of change. Who will decide about these steering approaches, who can and will implement them, who eventually exercises the power?

Here, the role of existing political systems and the distribution of power in them need to be critically considered. This is especially the case, if we perceive democracy as being held hostage by hidden but powerful elites. But assuming that governments still have room for manoeuvre, a key question similarly is: how can they be activated? There was some hope voiced in the discussion, that representatives of democratic governments privately may feel unease with and ambivalence toward current unsustainable developments and trends themselves. If so, there might be a good chance for change and a research agenda investigating how private 'fears' can be activated in their public roles suggests itself. If, however, current representatives of democratic governments do not take such a normative stance, the research agenda looks different and includes the questions: how to change attitudes and engagements of existing elites and what structural constraints prevent existing elites from promoting a more sustainable path and how can they be overcome.

Alternatively, change may come from the outside. In this context, business does not seem a likely candidate, however, as consumption corridors, sustainability focused choice editing by social elites or reductions in income and wealth all run counter today's dominant business model of mass production and consumption. If the change is supposed to derive from civil society, the question of strategies for exercising sufficient pressure and the underlying power resources arises again. A generally critical issue in this context, moreover, is the appropriate level of intervention, which relates to the potential proponents of change: who are the actors, what are their specific stakes and what could, for instance, be the role of transnational civil society or grass roots movements?

One fruitful way to progress in this direction may be investigating existing cases and best practices of change towards a Good Life. Especially searching for cases in unlikely places could be effective, such as the Swiss maximum for income-levels and bonuses for bank managers. Analysing established and proved tools, for instance from the health sector, may be informative and provide ideas how to successfully implement the suggested concepts.

Besides the aspect of power the missing social vision of a Good Life can potentially hinder a transition as well. The two aspects are also related, of course. Without a comprehensive vision it might be difficult to encourage the development and execution of power corresponding to the consideration: "what we have now is better than to leap into the great unknown". In this regard

ongoing discourses need to be reflected and can be utilized for implementing promising steering instruments. Such discourses can be both, potentially supportive or counterproductive, like the dominant discourse on consumption, growth and work after the economic and financial crisis that definitely would constrain the negotiation and implementation of maximum consumption standards.

In all of the discussed types of steering, ethical questions are important. They range from the question of what constitutes a Good Life to issues regarding political influence and democratic legitimacy. In this context, the potential role of researchers in the processes may be discussed as well. They may play multiple and crucial roles in the power relations necessary to implement instruments that are effectively steering towards sustainable consumption and a Good Life. Are we, as researchers, comfortable with such a role?

4   Insights Gained and Questions Developed

The working group results provided the foundation for further discussion in open-space and plenary sessions. On the basis of these discussions, then, the workshop arrived at certain conclusions but, naturally, even more at a range of new questions, which need further attention in the eyes of the workshop participants. A vast variety of issues was addressed in intensive and inspiring discussions fertilized by the multi-disciplinary background of the workshop participants. Two specific themes, however, kept reappearing in the working groups and subsequently dominated plenary discussions as well as open space sessions: power and up-scaling/diffusion. Accordingly, these are addressed in more detail below, when discussing the results for guiding questions 2 and 3.

4.1   Q1: Convincing Visions of a Good Life

With respect to guiding question 1, workshop participants noted that the focus on the Good Life can be used to map and define possibilities as well as necessities in terms of the Good Life and interventions on behalf of individual and societal abilities to pursue a Good Life. Furthermore, it can help create an effective language for external communication and serve as a catalyst for change. Consensus existed also on the need to follow a pluralist conception of vision<u>S</u> of the Good Life, given the heterogeneity in and across societies. Thus, visions of the Good Life are likely to differ in many respects. At the same time, they are also not completely arbitrary, in so far as cultural contexts and human needs are likely to induce the existence of some common ground. Currently, large shares of the population in Western industrialized countries, at least, seem to concur in the ideas that people should have access to education and should not be killed for religious reasons, for instance. The notion of universal human rights and objective needs approaches similarly suggest a potential common ground for such an endeavor. For the development of relevant visions of the Good Life, moreover, participants felt that societies would, at a minimum, be able to agree on process qualities (e.g. tolerance). The question then becomes how such processes for the development and diffusion of visions of the Good Life that are compatible with sustainable consumption may be induced. Do we already have venues for the development and societal deliberation of such visions, and, if not, what could such venues look like?

In the context (pluralist visions) of the Good Life, we can also notice that ways to satisfy certain fundamental needs can differ widely within and across societies. Nevertheless, the Good Life can serve as a useful tool here to identify satisfiers, which are inacceptable from a societal perspective,

as they reduce the ability of others to pursue a Good Life. In other words, thinking about sustainable consumption in terms of the Good Life points to the need to talk about corridors of sustainable consumption, delimited by consumption minima and maxima. Minimum consumption levels are recognized as setting a base condition, while maximum consumption levels may be required to allow others the chance to live a Good Life as well. Beyond that visions of the Good Life need further development, especially in so far as they may provide alternatives to the current predominance of consumerist lifestyles in industrialized countries. Such alternative visions may be fed by ideas and values already existing in society or even old and traditional ones embedded in different faiths, for instance, but they also may have to be developed.

In the end, at least four fundamental questions regarding visions of the Good Life need to be answered. For whom should such visions be developed? By whom should such visions be developed, specifically how do the currently disenfranchised sectors of society get their views in? Why and to what ends should such visions be developed? And how do we know whether a vision is a "good" one?

4.2 Q2: Changes Needed for Rooting and Pursuing Convincing Visions of a Good Life in Society

Regarding guiding question 2, the workshop participants agreed on the need for normative change, but wondered from where such change could or should arise and who would, could or should determine its direction. In this context, they pondered the need for accompanying structural changes, i.e. changes in material resources and sources of power. In terms of sources of change, in general, and normative change in particular, participants saw a chance of relevant change developing from new ideas and visions, or ideas and visions that already exist in society receiving more attention. Here, participants saw considerable potential for momentum deriving from the development and diffusion of visions of the Good Life, delineating alternatives to those visions currently promoted by advertising and the media in particular. As noted above, however, they also recognized the challenges involved. On the level of language, narratives and norms and values, participants also suggested the need to create a new language to better capture the benefits of sustainable consumption as a motivator for change.

Moreover, the workshop participants agreed on the indeterminacy of evaluations of the current state of change. Indeed, views that relevant structural change has started to begin based on claims that there is a coherent evidence of transition and that relevant developments already are influencing key figures and institutions, were opposed by views that relevant changes are still relegated to the margin of society and constrained by socio-economic and political structures

preventing them from becoming relevant beyond the individual level. So how do we evaluate the existence of thousands of small sustainability initiatives and how do we see their chances of survival and diffusion? How do we recognize when we are being too optimistic or too pessimistic in our evaluations? Methodologically speaking, how do we avoid the selection bias involved in studying positive cases, i.e. initiatives that were at least initially successful enough to emerge and be recognizable, and not initiatives that did not develop?

And from a normative political perspective speaking, how can we upscale small scale sustainability initiatives to the meso-level or replicate and diffuse them throughout society, if up-scaling is not possible, because the local, intimate nature of relationships is a defining characteristic of the initiative? Here the suggestion arose to study successful social movements, albeit the potentially limiting nature of contextual factors in such a comparison was also acknowledged. Moreover, participants suggested that experimental learning is likely to play an important role and suggested that we should disseminate information on interesting and fruitful initiatives, even though we may not be able to provide finite evaluations of their benefits. Thus, change and the associated processes of societal learning should be conceptualized as rather dynamic and perhaps more wave-like than linear. Again, the question of power reappears as well, however: who has the power to push or hinder the up-scaling or replication of sustainability initiatives, or who should have the power to decide, which initiatives should be up-scaled or diffused?

Workshop participants also saw a potential for change that would not derive from organic developments or the diffusion of new values, but through crisis. In this context, the presence of multiple forms of discontent in societies around the globe with the current state of affairs as well as political representation was noted as well as the potential existence of a tipping point. On that basis participants discussed, how one should prepare for such a crisis and noted the relevance of leadership and the insights gained from existing sustainability initiatives and experiments.

4.3   Q3: Intervening on behalf of a Good Life

Finally and regarding guiding question 3, substantial debate took place at the workshop. In general, questions of who could and should intervene, where and how arose in all contexts. Most fundamentally, however, participants kept returning to questions of power. Power influences the questions being asked and the answers being provided. It influence political agendas, outputs, and impacts, and, most fundamentally, power shapes identities and interests, thus intervening even before the political agenda-setting stage. In this context, workshop participants questioned

whether sufficient societal capability to even envision alternative futures and formulating alternative visions of the Good Life still existed.

In terms of the necessary differentiation between the different sources of power that are relevant and the different ways in which power dynamics play out in the political game, workshop participants acknowledged the role of discursive power in terms of the diffusion of norms and ideas in general, as well as visions the Good Life, in particular. They pointed to the role of instrumental power in terms of access to political decision makers and the influence of lobbying and donations on political output. Similarly, they highlighted the role of structural, material power in terms of the potential for and barriers to the up-scaling and diffusion of sustainability initiatives; and they considered the interaction between material and discursive power in the role of advertising and the media, for instance.

Indeed, structural barriers to sustainable consumption appear formidable fast, if one looks at the issue of power. This is particularly the case, if we take a strong sustainable consumption perspective, i.e. start from the assumption that sustainable consumption cannot be achieved with improvements in resource efficiency alone, but will require fundamentally changing consumption patterns, lowering consumption levels, and addressing questions of sufficiency. Such changes in consumption imply major challenges to today's powerful interests: corporate actors (and their investors), whose business model is based on concepts of mass production, and consumers, whose life takes place in the context of materialistic, pluralistic, accelerated and increasingly inequitable societies.

The balance of power between business/investors and consumers is open to debate. On the one side, one can (and for some actors it may be politically opportune to) argue that the consumer has the ultimate power and that business only supplies and can only supply what consumers demand. Consumer sovereignty is a keyword often used in this context. On the other side, information asymmetries, marketing strategies, choice-editing, and other structural constrains imposed on consumer decision-making all suggests limits to the validity of the consumer sovereignty concept.

Similarly, the balance between the relevance of discursive, i.e. ideational, and material sources and forms of power is open to debate. On the one side, one could argue that discursive forms of power matter the most, as the power of certain ideas and norms is already embedded in language, for example, which in turn completely pervades our everyday life and fundamentally influences how we see the world. On the other side, one can just as well argue that material realities and dynamics shape our existence and especially its political and socio-economic contexts, irrespective of overlaying narratives. Such material realities and dynamics include mergers and

acquisitions and their implications for capital concentration and redistribution, as well as the impacts of lobbying, campaign and party finance if not corruption on political decisions irrespective of the narratives used to justify these decisions. Clearly, then, both discursive and material sources and forms of power matter and they interact. Individually and in their interaction, moreover, they strongly influence the sustainability of consumption as well as the potential for reform.

Which currently existing power structures currently constrain the potential for sustainable consumption the most? Here, participants pointed to dominant discourses (of consumerism), the media structure, business models of mass consumption, the political and administrative structures with their dependence on resources and associated asymmetries in influence, the financialization of almost all sectors of society, and, finally, as well as education. Most fundamentally, they identified existing inequities in resources and associated political influence – whose size tends to be grossly underestimated by the public - as a major barrier to sustainability. Indeed, the question is how processes for the development and diffusion of visions of the Good Life that may be compatible with sustainable consumption (especially in the sense of strong sustainable consumption, i.e. consuming less) may be induced, given the current (im)balances in power and communication in industrialized societies. Accordingly, most workshop participants saw the empowerment of the people, the reduction in current resource and participatory inequalities and the associated decentralization of power as important precondition for a sustainability transition. They wondered, however, how such a broader empowerment of people and diminution in differences in power and resources may be achieved – against the interests of the powerful and rich! One idea in this respect could be to raise awareness of the existing inequalities and use social justice as a mobilizing discourse, another to remind societies of the feasibility of different structures, evidence of which may be provided by the welfare state of the 1970s, for instance. Most fundamentally, however, workshop participants suggested that we need to make existing power structures both visible and open to debate and thus constrain the practice of taking them and their supposed benefits for granted. Simultaneously, they argued that we should contest the idea that change for sustainability will automatically install itself from the grassroots level. In other words, neither the functioning of our current formal democratic systems nor grass-roots democracy appear sufficient, at the present moment, to induce the fundamental changes in consumption patterns and levels needed for sustainability.

Finally, self-reflective segments of the discussion also addressed the role and power of scholars and sustainable consumption research. Thus, some participants argued that for a more active role of scholars in influencing the diffusion of specific visions of the Good Life, specifically, and in

instigating change in general. They pointed out that other actors, e.g. business/advertising were taking on these active roles, and that one cede the ground to them completely. Thus, they claimed that the process of visioning needs to be undertaken, that it has to be undertaken in parallel and in conflict, and that scholars need to take part in this discussion. Science, here, could function as performative science, i.e. point out change as well as the need for further change. Questions arose as to whether positive ("look at all these sustainability innovations going on") rather than negative ("look at these powerful interests opposed to change") arguments would be more helpful in fostering the political and general pursuit of sustainable consumption. In this context, the nature and extent of the power of science and scholars also was debated, as well as strategies for empowerment. While a common feeling was that networking with civil society (e.g. the climate justice movement) and political decision-makers is important, there was also concern to what extent scholars could have a real influence in an era where policy makers appear to draw on scientific evidence only in so far as it supports their predetermined substantive strategies rather than being open to learning. At the same time, participants also were aware of representing only a select segment of society.

With these results, the workshop set the stage for further debate and inquiry. Clearly, sustainable consumption in the context of visions of the Good Life and structural constraints is a fascinating topic deserving more study. In this context, power and up-scaling/diffusion are particularly important issues due to their relevance for all kinds of theoretical and political questions relating to sustainable consumption and the Good Life. Future research, therefore, should inquire into the power dynamics underlying consumption patterns and policy, the potential for moving promising examples of sustainable consumption into the societal mainstream, and the interaction between the two.