2 Why only strong sustainable consumption governance will make a difference

Sylvia Lorek and Doris Fuchs

1. The concept of weak and strong sustainable consumption (governance)

This chapter delineates academic and political debates and developments on different concepts of sustainable consumption and makes the case for the necessity of strong sustainable consumption governance as well as the benefits of consumption corridors as an instrument for achieving strong sustainable consumption. Sustainable consumption has been on the international political agenda for about three decades now (United Nations 1992; 2002; 2015b). As articulated in ‘Agenda 21’ (United Nations, 1992), sustainable consumption encompasses resource consumption, labour conditions and impacts on the social and ecological environment that originate from the production processes of the goods and services we consume. Yet over the last 30 years, the concept of sustainable consumption has been largely characterized as the promotion of ‘more sustainable’ products, services and behaviours (Fuchs and Lorek, 2005). ‘More sustainable’ in this context means improvements in eco-efficiency, that is, a reduction in resource consumption per consumption unit gained through improvements in production processes or efficiency friendly designs. It can also yield (in theory) a higher income for small-scale farmers or workers through the implementation of fair trade prices. These improvements are commonly described as win–win scenarios as they supposedly generate both environmental and economic benefits.

Improving consumption efficiency can be a prerequisite for achieving sustainable consumption. However, existing limits on the Earth’s resources and its capacity to serve as a sink for pollutants indicate that efficient consumption is a weak version of sustainable consumption. As research on the rebound effect has documented, achievements based on efficiency alone are frequently outweighed by a growth in consumption volumes (Greening et al., 2000; Steinberger et al., 2010). This implies that, in order to provide sufficient conditions for sustainable consumption, efficient consumption needs to be accompanied by reductions in the consumption levels of the global consumer class, which in turn require changes in infrastructures and in the politico-economic drivers of consumption (Kharas, 2010). The concept of strong sustainable consumption captures this understanding (Fuchs and Lorek, 2005; Hobson, 2013; Lorek and Fuchs, 2013; Spangenberg, 2014).
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The chapter proceeds in three steps. First, it sets the context in terms of current ecological challenges and the history of involvement of different actors in (global) sustainable consumption governance. The chapter then deconstructs prevailing misconceptions about sustainable consumption and discusses the implications of societal norms, the role of the notion of limits or the norm of sufficiency. The concluding section proposes consumption corridors as a useful instrument in pursuit of strong sustainable consumption.

2. Challenges to planetary boundaries and sustainable consumption governance

2.1 How (un)sustainable is our consumption?

Research on the planetary boundaries, climate change and peak everything (Rockström et al., 2009; Heinberg, 2010; Steffen et al., 2015) has been raising the alarm for more than a decade. A major study – ‘2020. The climate turning point’ – provided evidence that the more time passes, the more drastic the turnaround in current unsustainable trends will need to be (Revill et al., 2017). The three years between 2017 and 2020 have been identified as crucial to safeguarding our climate (Figueroes et al., 2017).

And yet, even these analyses neglect the important link to consumption, focusing on six milestones: a global transition to renewable energy sources, zero emission transport, decarbonized infrastructure, land restoration to replace deforestation, decarbonized heavy industry, and strong investment in climate action by the finance sector. These milestones downplay the fact that income and associated consumption are the primary greenhouse gas (GHG) emission drivers and that greater infrastructure investment requires a significant share of the available carbon budget. Therefore, political action plans also have to include policies aimed at actively reducing aggregate consumption volumes and their associated energy and material use (Alfredsson et al., 2018).

On the international political agenda, sustainable consumption has been considered under the acronym SCP (sustainable consumption and production); first during the Marrakech Process (United Nations Environment Programme/United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2008) and through the 10-Year Framework of Programmes for Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP), since 2012, both programmes under the leadership of United Nations Environment Programme. Contemporaneously, we note societal debates on the ecological effects of consumption and associated shifts in mindsets (Cohen, 2013). Indeed, there are many positive trends in sustainable consumption today. The general increase in the awareness of climate change and other sustainability issues is palpable, not least due to the massive communication campaigns around the UN Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015b). The media has also given some attention to the widening of economic disparity and resulting increases in inequity (mainly within countries). Furthermore, there is a clear increase in the consump-
tion of specific types of more sustainable products, such as energy-efficient household appliances (Newall, 2017) or organic food (Soil Association, 2018).

Food waste has received increasing political attention (Stewart, 2009) and stimulated a range of improvements, such as environmentally sound packaging and the organized distribution of leftover food (SAVE FOOD Initiative, 2017). Rising acceptance of vegetarian and vegan lifestyles indicates that there is an increasing awareness of and demand for strong sustainable consumption (Cherry, 2015). There have also been positive developments in human mobility. For instance, participation in car sharing initiatives is rising, as are sales in electric vehicles. One beneficial development is the decreasing interest of younger people in car ownership as a status symbol (Klein and Smart, 2017).

Nevertheless, these ‘positive’ developments are only a small part of the picture (Fuchs, 2017). In terms of mobility, for instance, the identified trends do not mean that we can identify an overall improvement in the sustainability of travelling patterns. Not only sales of electric cars but also those of specifically diesel cars and SUVs have increased (Fuchs, 2017). Similar trends exist with respect to kilometres per person travelled. Air travel, in particular, has increased over the last decade — especially among the younger generation (Luzecka, 2016).

In addition to more frequent travel (for example, weekend trips), ICT (information and communication technologies) equipment has also become a status symbol (van Wee, 2015). Its ecological and social impact is also substantial. ICT not only changes the way people communicate and interact, but it is also associated with socially and ecologically unsustainable mining, is characterized by inbuilt obsolescence and creates hazardous waste. On the positive side, ICT has enabled the rise of collaborative consumption: the peer-to-peer-based activity of sharing access to goods and services, coordinated through community-based online services (Hamari et al., 2016).

Sharing, in general, has attracted significant attention as a potentially sustainable consumption activity. It foregoes attachment to individual ownership of commodities — the central feature of a materialistically oriented economy (Heinrichs and Grunenberg, 2012). However, the fast and widespread commercialization of sharing via platforms such as Airbnb and Uber has led to major regulatory and political disputes. Some sharing companies can be characterized as applying predatory or even exploitative practices. Therefore, we need to distinguish between non-profit and for-profit initiatives. Non-profit sharing organizations are potentially powerful tools for building a social movement centred on genuine practices of sharing and cooperation (Schor, 2016). Yet, realizing this potential will require the democratization of the ownership and governance of such platforms and/or the diffusion of alternative non-market-based platforms.
2.2 (Global) sustainable consumption governance and its participants

*International policy* actors have pursued some relevant activities to steer consumption away from an unsustainable direction over the past decade. The ‘10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production’ (10YFP) came into force after the Rio+20 conference in 2012 (United Nations, 2015a). It is coordinated by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and originally consisted of six thematic programmes: sustainable public procurement, consumer information, sustainable tourism, sustainable lifestyles and education, sustainable buildings and construction, and sustainable food systems. However, while all of the programmes explicitly aim to enhance decoupling, the activities they emphasize mainly aim at encouraging and enabling more conscious (for instance, more resource-efficient) consumption choices without reducing overall consumption, that is, implementing weak consumption governance (Bengtsson et al., 2018).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015 (United Nations, 2015a) and hailed as a milestone in global sustainable development policy, include SDG 12: ‘Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns’ – the result of successful lobby by UNEP and other actors. A closer look, however, reveals the political compromise that this goal represents. The first target is to implement the 10YFP on SCP at national level and progress towards this is to be measured in terms of the number of countries with a national SCP action plan. Given the absence of a specific template for such an action plan, many plans focus on national green growth development strategies aiming to meet growth targets in a more sustainable way. Half of the remaining targets included in SDG 12 (measured by twelve indicators) aim at increasing knowledge and awareness, implementing corresponding policies, and strengthening research and development. Only four of the eleven targets have more ambitious overarching goals in terms of achieving absolute improvements in the sustainability of consumption.2 A closer look at the indicators, however, shows that they fall short of the targets since they measure progress in relative rather than absolute terms (Bengtsson et al., 2018).3 In addition to SDG 12, SDG 8, which focuses on decent work and economic growth, refers back to 10YFP, especially in its target 8.4: ‘to improve global resource efficiency in consumption and production and endeavour to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation’. Again, the focus is on efficiency gains, which represent weak sustainable consumption governance. In sum, neither the 10YFP nor the SDGs envision a turn towards strong sustainable consumption (Spangenberg, 2017).

A more meaningful step towards making the impacts of unsustainable consumption more visible is the greater application of a consumption perspective in statistical accounting, by the European Environment Agency, for example (European Environment Agency, 2013). This perspective focuses attention on the fact that resource use and GHG emissions along the production process need to be accounted for in the countries in which the products and services are consumed and not where they are produced. Thus, this could provide a basis for strong
At the level of national policies, the understanding and interpretation of sustainable consumption varies substantially between countries. Only a small number of countries have developed a dedicated national SCP framework programme or action plan. Ministries active in SCP policymaking at national level and who set the tone and direction include: environment, agriculture, energy, industry and transport. Accordingly, energy, food, agriculture, and buildings and construction play a role in the action plans, flanked by environmental protection or conservation in general. Some examples are: ‘More from less – wisely’ in Finland (Finnish Ministry of the Environment, 2013), the ‘National Programme for Sustainable Consumption’ in Germany (German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety, 2018) and the ‘Strategy for Sustainable Consumption’ in Sweden (Government Office of Sweden, 2016). More frequently, however, national governments address aspects of SCP in their framework policies at the general level, with a focus either on sustainable development, green growth/green economy or national environmental action plans. Some have included programmes relevant for SCP in more than one strategy. An analysis of environmental laws and regulations within EU member states (Slezák, 2017) further reveals an ‘implicit framework’ of policies with relevance to SCP at the level of strategic planning. The new EU member states, in particular, address aspects of SCP in their thematic programmes in the context of environment and energy, or in the ones addressing rural development (Slezák, 2017). In various countries, national institutional and/or multi-stakeholder mechanisms for SCP have been established. They most commonly involve stakeholder groups including governmental and public institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and foundations, academic institutions and research centres. In terms of policy areas, a focus – at least within Europe – appears to be on green public procurement/sustainable public procurement (GPP/SPP); waste management and waste prevention (including food waste); organic/ecological agriculture; information provision (including European, regional and national eco-labelling); Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR); eco-design, life cycle analysis and eco-innovations; and urban mobility (Slezák, 2017). Furthermore, policymakers appear to assume that improvements will come from knowledge transfer, learning and information sharing, communication, and awareness raising, in addition to the development of standards, guidelines and labels relevant to SCP.

In general, then, national (and regional) policy mainly promotes weak sustainable consumption. Efforts echo the ‘buy sustainable’ recommendations (European Commission, 2012), highlighting the principle of consumer sovereignty (Akenji, 2014). EU legislation on eco-design and energy labelling, for instance, might be an effective tool for improving the energy efficiency of products. The main objective of the legislation, however, is to support industrial competitiveness and innovation by raising the environmental performance of products throughout the Internal Market (European Commission, 2016). Yet, the sustained promotion of these products maintains the myth that technological solutions are sufficient for achieving
sustainability. It distracts from the need to tackle challenging issues, for example, the prevailing culture of consumerism and materialism that is closely linked to resource use and environmental impacts. Policymakers are often concerned that meaningful consumption policies are too controversial to propose, even where there is strong public interest in improving the sustainability of consumption patterns. Policy is never neutral, but shapes social norms and values in society (Mont et al., 2013). Currently, this ‘shaping’ continues to predominantly foster a tendency towards more unsustainable development.

Thus an assessment of international and national policy developments reveals the great challenges ahead if we want to induce fundamental and rapid changes in consumption levels: long-term or systemic perspectives are required as well as changes to inadequate legislation and frameworks including necessary reforms to tax codes, subsidies and infrastructures (Slezák, 2017).

Do other actors fill the gap left by international and national policy with respect to strong sustainable consumption governance? Earlier analyses have shown this is not the case (Fuchs and Lorek, 2005; Lorek and Fuchs, 2013). Indeed, the vast majority of business actors are still entrenched in an economic model based on (ever-increasing) mass production and consumption. Not surprisingly, these actors have little, if any, interest in promoting strong sustainable consumption. At the same time, however, business actors, in particular transnational corporations, exercise more political power than ever (Fuchs, 2013; Gumbert and Fuchs, 2018). These actors are enabled by significant asymmetries in material resources with regard to civil society and the public sector, and also because of the continued hegemony of neoclassical economic thinking and the ‘growth imperative’. Creating (or keeping) jobs continues to be the dominant argument, even in contexts with an environmental or social approach to sustainability. While the Agenda 2030 preamble flags people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership as the guiding principles for sustainable development (United Nations, 2015a), actual debates still focus on the triple bottom line: people, planet, and profit (Elkington, 1994; 2018).

Similarly, many NGOs shy away from politically costly messages that communicate the need to reduce consumption. They also tend to promote ecologically superior purchases rather than no purchases. This may not be surprising to the extent that NGOs depend on membership for survival. Efforts by political parties, such as the Green Party in Germany, to promote speed limits or vegetarian days at public canteens in the interest of saving ecological resources have had a high political cost in terms of lost votes (Spengler, 2018).

In contrast, research on sustainable consumption has experienced remarkable growth since 2005, with an increasing number of publications, citations in journals and special issues of journals in evidence. Indeed, Liu et al. (2017) document the evolution of sustainable consumption research from being focused primarily on behaviour and single-interest issues towards more comprehensive and systemic assessments, with a broad range of topics in the worldwide research arena. This
gradual shift towards analysing systems for sustainable consumption (and production) in fact reflects strong sustainable consumption aspects. This part of the literature highlights that achieving truly sustainable consumption levels requires fundamental changes in the economy and in the infrastructures serving our daily habits, in the dominant culture and in unsustainable lifestyles, as well as in the institutions and power relationships which drive them (Vergragt et al., 2014; Fuchs et al., 2016).

Beside research explicitly anchored in the sustainable consumption discourse, other research communities clearly address elements of this debate. Noteworthy examples include research on social innovation (see Backhaus et al., 2018) and degrowth (D’Alisa et al., 2014). The former does not necessarily challenge dominant institutions, as it tends to reproduce prevailing approaches based upon political consumerism, rather than fundamental rethinking of policy, and economic and social organization (McFarland and Wittmayer, 2018). The latter, however, explicitly considers limits and delves into the development of relevant structures – from mental to political – for ensuring a good life with limited resources (D’Alisa et al., 2014).

The 2010s have also seen the rise of various networks on SCP research, all trying to connect to other stakeholder communities and to contribute to policy and action. In preparation for the Rio+20 conference, the Global Research Forum on Sustainable Production and Consumption (GRF-SCP) was set up to strengthen the community of researchers and practitioners engaged in research on the worldwide transition to sustainable production and consumption systems. This network is closely related to policy processes at global level. So far, its global conferences have tackled issues such as dialogues between global and regional research on SCP (Lorek et al., 2012), prerequisites for a global transition to sustainable lifestyles (GRF-SCP, 2014), the circular economy (GRF-SCP, 2017), and transforming production and consumption (GRF-SCP 2019). A further network is the Sustainable Consumption Research and Action Initiative (SCORAI). It consists of professionals working at the interface of material consumption, human well-being, and technological and cultural change. SCORAI explicitly aims to foster a transition beyond the currently dominant consumer society. Exchange on specific content (especially via the lively e-mail list), thought-provoking workshops, a video series and a map of sustainable consumption teaching are part of SCORAI’s formats. Another global initiative is a Knowledge–Action Network on Systems of Sustainable Consumption and Production (KAN-SSCP) within the Future Earth organization. The network aims to strengthen collaboration between communities of researchers and practitioners that are currently focused on either production or consumption. In working groups ranging from SCP in cities, via SCP in global value chains, to the political economy of SCP, the network has set up a research and engagement plan that extends almost as far as 2030 (KAN SSCP, 2018). The plethora of research networks on sustainable consumption, however, also reveals a problem. It highlights a wealth of research activity vying for attention and influence, but also fragmentation. It remains to be seen whether the current level of
noise and momentum created by research on strong sustainable consumption will result in real change. Relevant research networks have come and gone before, for example, the SCORE research network on sustainable consumption, and many other fruitful but temporary undertakings.

Thus far, we can only conclude that political and societal efforts in pursuit of strong sustainable consumption remain weak. One important dimension stifling efforts by civil society and governments are current norms and ideas dominant in many countries. Accordingly, the following section will discuss and deconstruct some of these norms and suggest different perspectives on less ‘attractive’ ones.

3. Guiding the path to strong sustainable consumption governance

3.1 Unveiling misconceptions

Two major misconceptions regarding sustainable consumption are widespread. One is that lots of small individual changes will produce significant results. In other words, if we can get individuals to commit to improvements in their consumption habits at little cost in terms of finance or convenience and perhaps even resulting in financial benefits, such as turning off lights when leaving a room, the quantity of such actions taken will make a considerable difference in overall energy consumption. Furthermore, individuals will, over time, automatically proceed from such small steps to greater steps as they became more aware of the ecological impacts of their consumption habits.

Unfortunately, research has found these perspectives to lack empirical support. The sum of small individual changes tends to result in insufficient aggregate improvements, and a procession from small to large changes by individuals is certainly not automatic and is highly improbable. On the contrary, individuals frequently overestimate the impact of the small steps taken and perceive a reduced need for greater ones. Mont et al. therefore argue that, while small changes and mass movements may make a difference, it is essential to underline that large changes are also necessary. Policymakers as well as civil society should therefore emphasize a dual approach: acknowledge the relative importance of the small changes that individuals can make in their lives and encourage them to participate in the necessary large-scale changes as engaged citizens (Mont et al., 2013).

At the turn of the millennium, research had identified food (meat and dairy consumption), housing (heating/cooling and the living area/person) and mobility (individual car mobility and air traffic) as the most important consumption clusters (Lorek and Spangenberg, 2001). A stronger focus on these clusters in communication and regulation is needed urgently. While the tremendous impact of meat and dairy products is recognized, the importance of shrinking the average per capita dwelling area remains confined to debates in few (academic) circles working for example, on sufficiency (Bierwirth, 2015; Thomas et al., 2017; Cohen, 2018; Lorek,
Air traffic is recognized as a problem, but current policy practices further support its expansion.

The second misconception often shines through in the claim ‘I cannot afford sustainability’. Weak sustainable consumption governance with its focus on efficiency improvements in products has meant that sustainable lifestyles often are perceived as something that can be bought, indeed, which have to be bought, like the energy retrofitting of buildings, A(++) appliances, organic food and e-cars. These commodities are indeed frequently only available at high (or higher) prices.

As pointed out above, however, purchasing ‘greener’ products by itself does not constitute a sustainable lifestyle. The reduction in energy use gained by a general switch to more efficient products would translate into a substantially reduced ecological footprint and thus a sustainable lifestyle for only a very few households belonging to the global consumer class. Sustainability in consumption requires a far more comprehensive approach than buying specific items. Indeed, a substantial body of research now confirms that higher income levels almost uniformly correlate with less sustainable lifestyles – regardless of how many sustainable items the households has purchased or how ‘green’ the attitudes of the household members are (Moser and Kleinheuckelkotten, 2017). In addition to the rebound effect (Wallenborn, 2018), researchers have identified the action–impact gap as a cause here, along with the well-researched attitude–action gap. Overall, lifestyles on lower budgets often turn out to be much more sustainable. The implications of this insight are ambivalent, however. A resource-low lifestyle not based on a voluntary decision but caused by poverty, for example, can be in conflict with the social aspects of sustainability. This issue remains largely undiscussed.

3.2 Overcoming an obsession: Letting go of the ‘better life’ in favour of a ‘good life’

Over the past decades, if not centuries, the pursuit of a good life has come to be reinterpreted as the pursuit of a better life. Indeed, the idea of the need to pursue and invest in one’s potential to live a better life is continuously carried forth like a mantra, by advertising, entertainment formats and in politics. The Brundtland Commission’s definition of sustainable development manifested the vision of ‘the better life’ as the heart of the sustainability debate (Brundtland, 1987). This ‘carrot’ of promising a better life has proven very successful even in sustainability debates, despite its contradictory implications. While the good life entails elements of stability and contentedness, the search for the better life necessarily includes discontent, as there is always something more to strive for.

Two forces contribute to the societal preoccupation with the pursuit of a better life: first, the power structures in the political economy and second, and especially, the constant media promotion of a message that ‘happiness is around the corner’. Consumers are bombarded daily with suggestions for improving their lives and
themselves by purchasing new products. The proponents of this message strictly stay in the ‘more’ and ‘growth’ philosophy, within which only slightly more sustainable consumerist alternatives are acceptable (Lorek and Fuchs, 2013).

A better recognition and cultivation of *contentedness* (in German: *Zufriedenheit*) could take a tremendous amount of pressure from global resource demand. *Zufriedenheit* describes the deep inner feeling that things are good and enough just as they are. However, constant marketing and powerful media explicitly aim to persuade people that they are not content since content people might choose to leave the rat race for the ‘good’ life instead. There has been research and action on how to support the flourishing of *Zufriedenheit* (for example, Kasser 2002), but examination of this needs to be expanded considerably (for example, Lorek and Fuchs, 2013).

### 3.2 Discovering the appeal of limits and sufficiency

Over the last decades, sustainable consumption has been pursued mainly through the greater efficiency of new technologies, as noted above. Efficiency is represented as the silver bullet in the fight against high resource and energy use. But energy efficiency is specifically and intentionally not about conservation. Larger, more powerful, more functional products are given the label ‘efficient’ simply by using less energy than other equally large, powerful, functional products (Calwell, 2010). Efficiency labelling is based on measuring efficiency per unit of volume (for example, cubic metres in the case of refrigerators), even though the product itself might be much larger than the previous models that in total consumed much less electricity – a highly misleading measurement approach.

In consequence, a stronger approach than relative efficiency is slowly attracting interest: sufficiency. Sufficiency implies upper limits for resource consumption but also goes far beyond this. An article by Spengler (2016) on the ‘two types of enough’ explains that while the envisioned sufficient lifestyles need to offer *enough* for everyone to live a dignified life, as called for by justice theory, there is an *enough* in the sense of a maximum identified in environmental science. With this clear awareness of limits, sufficiency becomes an antithesis to the ‘higher, further, faster, more’ orientation that drives the current economic system. If sufficiency were established as an organizing principle of society, it could replace the growth paradigm, offering an opportunity to overcome current distributional dynamics and reap the benefits of a more equitable society (Spangenberg, 2018). Conceived in this way, sufficiency could steer technology and its innovative potential to help efficiency measures achieve their full potential while simultaneously avoiding rebound effects (Lorek, 2018).

Academic and societal debate thus has to focus on: (1) how to identify upper and lower limits, (2) how to reach the sufficiency space between these limits, and (3) how to arrange lifestyles worth living within that space. Various authors are currently developing concepts that aim to answer these questions by integrating...
insights from social science in a more strategic way. Among them are ‘consumption corridors’ (Di Giulio and Fuchs, 2014; Fuchs, 2017), ‘contract and converge’ (Vadovics et al., 2012), the ‘doughnut economy’ (Raworth, 2017) and ‘Living Well within Limits’ (Steinberger, 2017).

4. Implications for research (and practice): Consumption corridors

Based on the notions of a ‘good life’ and limits, scholars have developed the concept of sustainable consumption corridors. In our view, this concept holds the most promise for operationalizing and implementing strong sustainable consumption governance: it focuses squarely on consumption in its simultaneous pursuit of social justice and ecological sustainability. Accordingly, this concluding section delineates the concept of consumption corridors and presents ideas on ways of pursuing their design and implementation.

The consumption corridors concept starts from the assumption that the purpose of consumption is to enable individuals to live a good life that meets their needs, rather than promoting growth or absorbing surplus production (Di Giulio et al., 2012). The focus here is on ‘objective’ or ‘protected’ needs, those fundamental needs that are associated with being human and opportunities for living a good life (Defila et al., 2018). Furthermore, following an anthropological approach, the concept of consumption corridors assumes that humans have universal needs that are independent of cultural contexts. Moreover, it posits that an ethical obligation exists to provide all humans with the possibility of fulfilling such needs, regardless of whether they make use of them. Such needs must be distinguished from subjective desires. The substantive core of needs, in turn, is adaptable to contexts of time and space. It is crucial, moreover, to distinguish needs from ‘satisfiers’ (products, services, infrastructures or institutions necessary for meeting needs) and resources (needed to provide and use satisfiers).

In order to have an opportunity to fulfil their needs individuals will need to have access to a minimum level of resources for consumption. Guaranteeing such a minimum consumption level for all individuals in a world of limited resources translates into the necessity of upper limits to consumption. In other words, maximum consumption limits need to be set at the level beyond which consumption by one individual or group would not compromise other individuals’ abilities to meet their needs and thus achieve minimum consumption levels (Blättel-Mink et al., 2013; Di Giulio and Fuchs, 2014; Fuchs, 2017). Together maximum and minimum consumption limits define consumption corridors, that is, the space in which sustainable consumption is possible and in which individuals are free to design their lives and consumption according to their own preferences. Thus, consumption corridors address simultaneously planetary boundaries and issues of intragenerational and intergenerational justice.
To design such consumption corridors, societies first would need to engage in deliberative processes to reach consensus on needs and appropriate satisfiers for those needs that were relevant to their context. Translating these satisfiers into resources, in turn, would pave the way towards an identification of minimum consumption levels. In principle, this exercise is not all that different from current political practices of identifying consumption baskets in the context of welfare policies. Important distinctions, however, are clear differentiation between needs and satisfiers, and also societal deliberation; these could be starting points for the design of consumption corridors. Taking into account these minimum consumption limits in terms of resources and scientific knowledge about planetary boundaries would then allow the determination of maximum consumption levels.

Clearly, the design and implementation of consumption corridors is a challenging task. It is likely to be associated with societal contestation since strong sustainable consumption in general and consumption corridors in particular require a redistribution of global resources. Consumption corridors are a worthwhile endeavour, however, as a world of sustainable consumption corridors would allow all individuals living now and in the future to live not a better life, but a good one.

NOTES
1 At the same time, it is important to acknowledge, of course, that improving the quality of life of billions of people in the developing world requires increased consumption of energy and materials (O’Neill et al., 2018).
2 See 12.2, 12.4, 12.6, 12.C (available at https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/Global%20Indicator%20Framework%20after%202019%20refinement_Eng.pdf).
3 See 12.2.1, 12.2.2, 12.3.1, 12.4.2, 12.5.1, 12.C.1 (https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/Global%20Indicator%20Framework%20after%202019%20refinement_Eng.pdf).

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