

# Consumption corridors and social justice: exploring the limits

*Doris Fuchs and Antonietta Di Giulio*

"Sustainable quality of life in a national setting is the quality of life enjoyed by the population within the national territory, the level of which is

(1) viably reproducible for the current generation, given the natural and social resources commanded by the nation, and  
(2) is gained neither at the expense of an acceptable quality of life for (2a) members of the present generation outside the nation, nor of that of (2b) members of the next generations at home and (2c) the next generations elsewhere" (...)

"it should be possible – at least in principle – to estimate the resource cost of different levels of capabilities and judge the extent to which such levels are compatible with key sustainability constraints."

Robeyns I., van der Veen R. J. (2007): Sustainable quality of life: Conceptual analysis for a policy-relevant empirical specification. Bilthoven, Amsterdam: Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency and University of Amsterdam.

"Social inequality is commonly defined as differential 'access to scarce resources', and the resources typically mentioned in social textbooks are income, power, and prestige. (...) It is evident that social inequality can reduce subjective well-being, particularly of the deprived. Yet it is not so evident that all inequalities do and that income inequality is a main thread to subjective well-being in modern society.

Cocaine is a scarce resource in most Western nations, and there are clear differences in access to it, but people who can easily get cocaine do not stand out as having greater subjective well-being. Not everything that is scarce is beneficial; a point that may also apply to socially valued luxury goods such as big cars, second houses, and fancy holidays. (...) It seems more plausible that inequality hurts only when it interferes with the gratification of basic needs, such as our need for food or respect. (...)

Apparently, we can live with big disparities in income. This accommodation does not mean that we can live equally well with all forms of inequality."

Veenhoven R. (2008): Sociological Theories of Subjective Well-being. In: Eid M., Larsen R. (eds.): The Science of Subjective Well-being: A tribute to Ed Diener. New York: Guilford Publications. 44-61.

"Perhaps the concern of greatest importance, not only for psychological theorists, but also for humanity, is the study of the relations between personal well-being and the broader issues of the collective wellness of humanity and the wellness of the planet. It is clear that, as individuals pursue aims they find satisfying or pleasurable, they may create conditions that make more formidable the attainment of well-being by others. An important issue, therefore, concerns the extent to which factors that foster individual well-being can be aligned or made congruent with factors that facilitate wellness at collective or global levels. Such research will, one would hope, point the way toward means through which individuals can seek hedonic or eudaimonic outcomes in ways that are sustainable in the context of the four billion others who also aspire to be fully functioning and satisfied in this earthly life."

Ryan R. M., Deci E. L. (2001): On Happiness and Human Potentials: A Review of Research on Hedonic and Eudaimonic Well-Being. In: Annual Review of Psychology 52: 141-166.

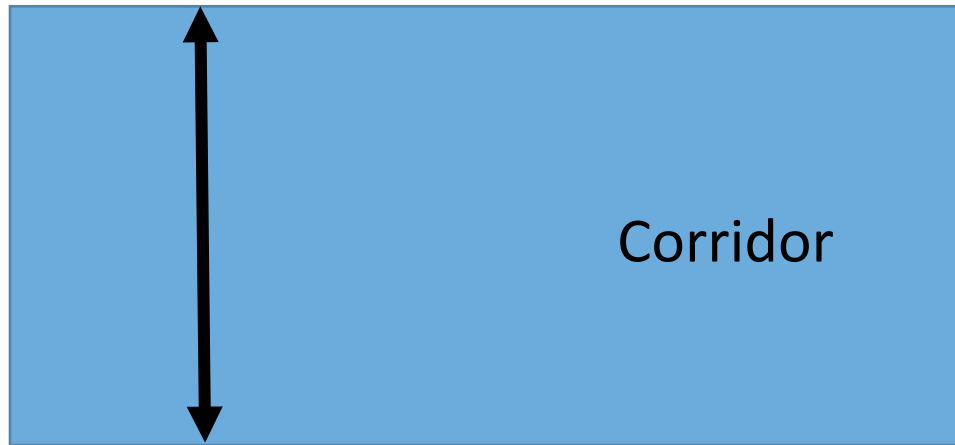
# "(Sustainable) Consumption Corridors" link sustainability, consumption, good life, individual freedom, limitation of resources, justice

1. The development of societies should be aimed at ensuring that human beings can live a life they value
2. There are universal needs ("objective needs"); to be able to live a good life means that an individual has the possibility of satisfying those objective needs he/she develops according to his/her preferences
3. To be able to live a good life, an individual needs to have access to a certain quality and quantity of ecological and social resources → **minimum consumption standards**
4. An individual's (or group of individuals') consumption of resources impacts other individuals' abilities to do the same
5. No individual/group has the right to consume in a way that other individuals' are denied the ability to live a good life → **maximum consumption standards**

# (Sustainable) Consumption Corridors

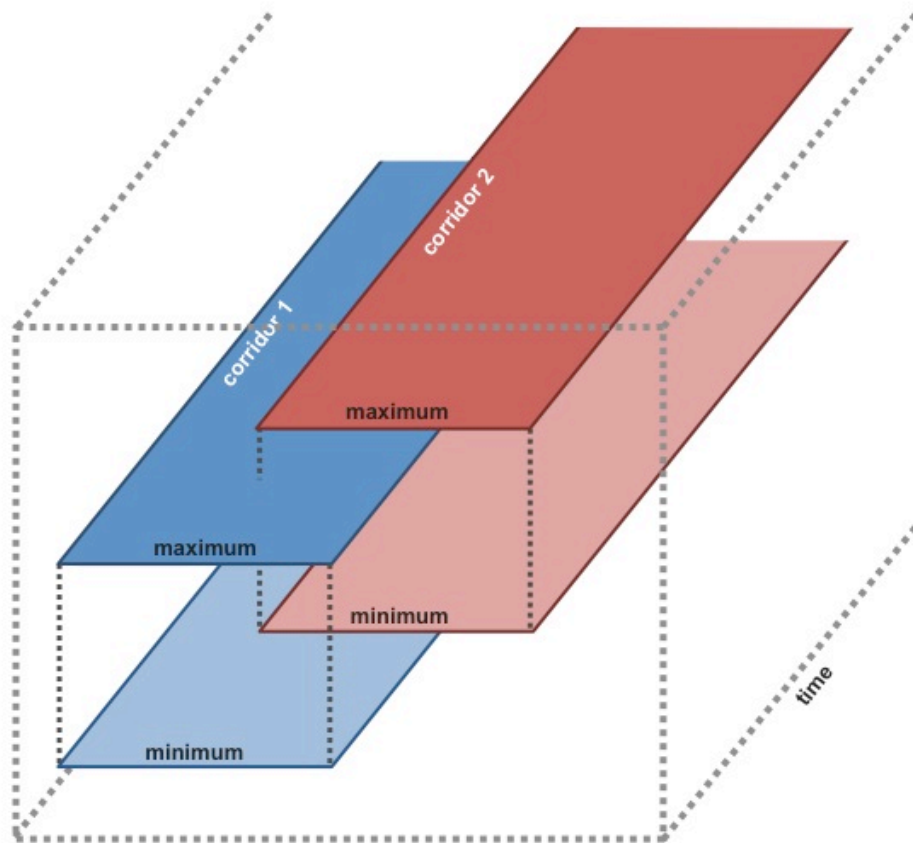
Space between minimum and maximum consumption standards → corridors of sustainable consumption

Maximum



Minimum

# (Sustainable) Consumption Corridors



Corridors refer to objective needs define use of resources related to needs

?

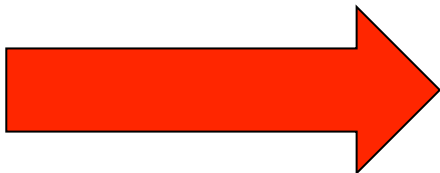
Should we define a certain number of corridors per

- need
- resources
- consumer goods
- sectors ...

# (Sustainable) Consumption Corridors

## Process

- Definition of "objective needs"
- Identification of resources needed to satisfy objective needs (= 'resources\_N')
- Identification of 'resources\_N' that are endangered in terms of quantity or quality by acts of consumption (= 'resources\_Nd')
- Definition of minimal standards and maximal standards for the use of resources\_Nd



Negotiation and dynamic adjustment



# Justice and Consumption Corridors

*Supported:* Inter- and intragenerational, environmental justice, social justice

*Adopted:* Natural law based theory of justice  
Needs based approach to (re)distributive justice

*Required:* Procedural/participatory justice

# Consumption Corridors and the role of the state

- *State's responsibility*: protect the individual and help individuals jointly pursue an objective they would not be able to reach individually
  - state support and intervention legitimized in the context of (Sustainable) Consumption Corridors
- *State's role*: initiate and support societal deliberation on "objective needs" and their translation into minimum and maximum consumption standards; implement and enforce these standards
  - fundamental assumption is democratic, constitutional state; not excessive intervention or a dictatorial surveillance state

# Embedding (Sustainable) Consumption Corridors

## Related Concepts in the Literature

- Doughnut Economics (Raworth)
- Environmental Space (Hille, Opschoor, Spangenberg )
- Safe and Just Operating Space (Dearing et al., Rockström et al.)

Similarities: planetary boundaries, justice; partly: the good life

Differences: consuming lens; dynamics; ecological and social resources

## History

SOEF (BMBF)  
Research Program

"From Knowledge  
to Action – New  
Paths towards  
Sustainable  
Consumption"  
(2008-2014)

10 research groups  
1 accompanying project facilitating  
integration of knowledge



Thank you for sharing your thoughts!