



Dissertation (Phd thesis) of Jochen Dallmer

University of Kassel, Germany, Department of Political Sciences. 2019.

Title: Happiness and Sustainability. Subjective well-being as a leitmotif for sustainable development - an alternative to the deprivation-related conception of sufficient lifestyles?

Summary

The present work deals with the question of how happiness and sustainability relate to each other. Based on the finding that the approach of sufficiency needs to be considered more in order to enable global sustainable development within the planetary boundaries, the current materialistic way of life is up for discussion. This is associated with a loss of well-being and leads to rejection - a reflected consideration of the conception of happiness, satisfaction and subjective well-being leads to a more differentiated result.

The thesis examines empirical knowledge about subjective well-being as well as philosophical ideas for a good life. A critical examination of the currently dominant materialistic way of life shows that the pursuit of the greatest possible material prosperity does not go hand in hand with the greatest possible subjective well-being. Rather, one can speak of an ideology in the historically grown working and consumer society that increasingly takes on pathological features with its performance paradigm.

With reference to happiness research, four elements can be named as a counter-model to this unsustainable performance society, which would contribute significantly to well-being and at the same time offer a high degree of compatibility with the sufficiency approach: nursing social relationships, play, leisure, art and culture

An analysis of the existing concepts for sufficiency shows a predominant focus on Eudaimonian approaches: a return to an imaginary true, good and humble life is required, which is often associated with the premise of asceticism. According to the critical analysis, this is ecologically plausible, but from the perspective of striving for well-being, it is only of limited preference. As an alternative approach, enlightened hedonism is cited in the work, which enables a reflected form of striving for well-being that is not oriented towards work and consumption, but strives for qualitative experiences in the sense of an art of living. The role of corporeality is to be emphasized in particular.

Finally, the implications for political science considerations are worked out, namely which measures a policy of well-being would have to take into account in order to also act as a sustainability policy.

Overall, the hypothesis of the work can be confirmed: happiness and sustainability do not have to contradict each other. An enlightened pursuit of happiness can rather make a relevant contribution to sustainable development.

The full dissertation will be published in German language in June 2020 by transcript Verlag.