

Happiness and Sustainability.

Subjective well-being as Leitmotiv of sustainable development – an alternative to the deprivation connoted concepts of sufficient lifestyles?

The PhD project will explore what contribution insights from happiness research could contribute to the current debate on spreading of sustainable lifestyles. With this question, the project refers to contemporary discourses on sustainable lifestyles (sufficiency), post-growth, as well as concepts and indices on prosperity and well-being. The work refers to the increasingly relevant argument, that to achieve a sustainable development not only efficiency and consistency are needed, but also more focus on sufficiency is necessary. Current research shows a clear discrepancy between knowledge and action of individuals in the field of sustainability. An important aspect of this is the fact that sustainable lifestyles are usually connoted with waiver, limitation, loss. In particular, the concept of sufficiency has negative connotations and is commonly perceived as deprivation. Meanwhile studies from happiness research show that human well-being mainly depends on non-material things, such as social relationships, personal freedom, time prosperity.

Against this background, the hypothesis is created that subjective well-being (happiness) and sustainable lifestyles (sufficiency) are not opposite, but can be productively linked. Accordingly, the work will explore approaches as of how concepts of happiness and sustainable development could be combined and complement each other. This will be done in two steps:

1. By means of theoretical analysis of literature from the fields of happiness research, sustainability research, as well as political theory is the hypothesis – split into several sub-theses - to be verified.
2. Evaluating given empirical research will explore what specific, measurable changes in individual behavior could be determined if the individual behaviour is based on the theme of subjective well-being. Field of this examination is the area of individual consumption behavior.

In addition, obstacles and barriers should be identified, which could hinder the practical implementation of "happiness centered sustainability concepts".

Finally implications for the practical applicability of subjective well-being are determined as the leitmotif for Sustainable Development. This focuses in particular on the field of "Education for Sustainable Development", which features individual skills acquisition, but thus far hardly addressed questions of subjective well-being. The development of possible connecting factors should both show how the research findings can be used, as well as designate further, desirable research.