



## **Altering attitudes**

### **From a culture of consumerism to a culture of prosperity**

A report from  
Denkwerk Zukunft - Foundation for cultural renewal

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## 1. **Why societies in early industrialised countries must change their perceptions and behaviour**

Societies in early industrialised countries, including Germany, focus on economic growth and maximising material wealth. This is paramount not just to their personal and collective wellbeing, but also to their social and political ability to function. The consumption of material goods ranks high in social status and is a key driver that shapes many areas of life. Societies in early industrialised countries are consumer societies: theirs is a culture of consumerism.

### *A double-edged sword*

Focus on economic growth and maximising material wealth is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it has led to an unprecedented increase in the volume of material goods available: Germany has seen a five-fold per capita increase since 1950 alone. But in an equally unprecedented way, it has also depleted the supply of natural resources, damaged the environment and harmed both individuals and society in general. Europe, once a resource-rich continent, has few natural resources left. Around the world, large areas of arable land are over-fertilised<sup>1</sup> and polluted with pesticides, while the oceans are over-fished.<sup>2</sup> Air pollution and carbon emissions are rising at alarming rates.<sup>3</sup> Added to this comes the wear and tear on society. Many industrialised societies are no longer biologically self-sustaining, social cohesion has become fractured and huge mountains of debt burden the future.

Looked at objectively, much of today's material wealth stems from exploitation of the resources needed for human survival. Without such exploita-

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Rockström (2009).

<sup>2</sup> Some 88 percent of European fish stocks are now over-fished or have been significantly depleted. See European Commission (2011a).

<sup>3</sup> With 8 tonnes per capita, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the EU greatly exceed the 2.7 tonnes per capita thought to be sustainable. See BP (2010) and WBGU (2009), p. 3.

tion, and under current technological and social conditions, it would be impossible to maintain the consumer culture prevalent today.

A hallmark of this culture is the need for higher and faster churn of goods and services. This requires a large amount of sales and marketing effort designed to spark ever-increasing needs. Dissatisfaction with the current situation is a key prerequisite in ensuring that this culture prevails.<sup>4</sup>

Even more important, however, is that those who are quickest to satisfy newly sparked desires are looked up to by society. This is largely seen as a symbol of success and social status. By way of contrast, those who reject forced consumerism are more or less pushed out to the fringes of society. In some ways, they disrupt value patterns and ingrained behaviours. Making full use of what is available and refusing to go along with every new trend is seen as a barrier to progress and as being out of touch with the times. In a culture of consumerism, consumption and wastage go hand in hand.<sup>5</sup>

This fleeting nature of consumerism shapes large areas of society. Because in many respects, people derive their social status and self-esteem from their role in the production and use of goods and services, non-monetary services and successful interpersonal relationships appear to be of only secondary value. What counts is their role as producers and consumers. Lasting personal relationships are difficult in this kind of environment.<sup>6</sup>

This culture has changed the working world. While work has always served in earning a living, people also use their jobs to develop and 'find' themselves. But for many, today's consumer culture has pushed this aspect into

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<sup>4</sup> In 2010, an estimated USD 456 billion was spent on advertising in newspapers, magazines, cinemas, on radio and television, on the internet and on billboards around the world. See Denkwerk Zukunft (2010a), Denzähl Mai; approximately €44 billion in Germany alone.

<sup>5</sup> See Bauman (2009), p. 45.

<sup>6</sup> When asked why many Germans fail to start a family, 58 percent of respondents said that children were too expensive. And 51 percent said a career was more important than a family. See Stiftung für Zukunftsfragen (2011).



the background. For them, being in paid employment makes active consumerism possible and is a means to an end.

In a similar way, social security systems serve less to provide a social safety net and more to assist the non-working population in their role as consumers:<sup>7</sup> if the non-working population can spend money, such systems have served their purpose. People have come to see the reduction of social welfare provision to the satisfaction of purely economic needs as the norm. What they expect from the state is primarily an improvement or at least the maintenance of their capacity to consume.

This one-sidedness encourages the negative impacts of consumerism to be ignored – something made all too easy by the value placed on the high of the moment.<sup>8</sup> What has already been lost or made impossible is of little importance. In consumerism culture, the past and the future play only a subordinate role: the promise of happiness lies in the immediate satisfaction of a freshly-sparked desire.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Current perceptions and behaviours losing their foundation*

The dilemma here is that the foundation of this consumer culture is disintegrating. It is falling apart physically because the generations-long exploitation of natural resources and the environment, and of people and society, has reached its limits. What this means is that either economic growth will come to a standstill or the economy will shrink, or that the economy will continue to grow but that growth will no longer increase material wealth because economic performance is increasingly linked to the correction and mitigation of damage that has either already occurred or is expected to occur.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> This is especially the case concerning statutory pension and unemployment insurance.

<sup>8</sup> See Bauman (2009), p. 61

<sup>9</sup> See loc. cit. (2009), p. 64

<sup>10</sup> According to DIW estimates, the costs of climate change mitigation in Germany will amount to €800 billion by 2050. See Kemfert (2007), p. 169 f.

But the foundation of this culture is also disintegrating psychologically. Societies in early industrialised countries are ageing rapidly and in many places they are also dwindling. This can potentially stymie their willingness to innovate and certainly their readiness to embrace risk. Plus, there is the increasing question of whether and to what extent ageing and materially saturated societies are still in any way attracted by the promise of happiness that goes with consumer culture.<sup>11</sup>

A third factor that this culture overshadows is the sheer impossibility of it being upheld by taking on more and more debt. Without the burden of such debt, consumerism could have been turned around decades ago. The time has now come whereby societies in early industrialised countries will have to manage largely without public debt if they want to avoid complete ruin. For many, this means that they can no longer look to increasing their material wealth. The outcome: already on the decline for some time,<sup>12</sup> consumer spending will hit a downward spiral in broad swathes of society.

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<sup>11</sup> Surveys show that 64 percent of people under 30, but only four percent of those over 60, have a desire to own more material goods. See Miegel/Petersen (2008), p. 51.

<sup>12</sup> During the period 2000 to 2008, GDP growth of 9 percent in Germany only benefited the upper 10 percent of those in paid employment. Their incomes rose by 11 percent. The remaining 90 percent saw their incomes either stagnate or drop. See Denkwerk Zukunft (2011a).

## 2. A broader take on wealth

Dwindling consumer spending across large sections of society is bound to spark tension and perhaps cause considerable unrest in societies that focus on economic growth and material wealth. If this is to be avoided or at least alleviated, the principles of individual happiness and the ability of society to function must be adapted to the altered conditions. This calls for a range of measures with a common prerequisite, especially in a democracy. What is needed is a new set of attitudes: ingrained, personal and collective perceptions and behaviours must all be rethought.

Of particular importance in this regard is a broadening of the perception of wealth that for many generations has been reduced to mere material wealth. While material wealth will continue to be important, obtaining it and increasing it will no longer provide an adequate answer to the question of what is the point of pursuing it. More and more people are realising that the promise of happiness propagated in early industrialised countries can no longer be kept, and for two reasons. Firstly, their material wealth is no longer increasing, and secondly, greater material wealth does not necessarily mean greater satisfaction – not to mention greater happiness.<sup>13</sup>

### *Non-material forms of wealth*

This places non-material wealth, meaning prosperity, more firmly in the spotlight. One of the key issues is likely to be the rediscovery of time, or rather a conscious awareness of taking time for oneself and for others, and also to enjoy nature and the arts, to explore new things and broaden one's horizons, and perhaps to learn a new language, play sports, relax and do nothing, and become involved in local politics or community activities. While these have all played a role in life so far, in the lives of many people they have been overshadowed by an express need for consump-

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<sup>13</sup> See IfD Allensbach (2009), p. 5 f., and also Easterlin et al. (2010).

tion and possessions. The dominant perception of wealth remains one of material wealth.

This spreads into other areas of life. Many people measure their self-esteem against material attributes: how they dress or live, the type of car they drive and the price of their holiday. In contrast, good personal relationships, caring for others, protecting the environment and sparing natural resources, engaging in interesting recreational activities, enjoying the arts and similar pastimes all count for very little. Despite arguments to the contrary, many people believe that life can only be fulfilled through the achievement of financial success. But financial success overshadows a whole range of deficits in a society focused on material wealth.

Such focus is fostered by the fact that especially in a democracy, equality is a valuable good. However, equality is easier to achieve or is at least perceived to be more achievable in material rather than non-material terms. To a certain extent, material differences can be levelled out through work, benefits and lucky breaks. And if so desired, they can even be wiped out altogether. When it comes to non-material wealth and thus prosperity, this is either impossible or only possible within very strict boundaries. Intellectual, artistic and entrepreneurial talents are just as inequitably distributed as physical abilities and social skills. This is why in equality-focused societies there is a tendency to keep non-material wealth attributes out of the spotlight. These must be brought to the forefront if perceptions of wealth are to be broadened.

It is thus all the more important that with a general decline in material wealth, the associated differences between individuals and groups should not become even greater.<sup>14</sup> The risk of this happening lies in the fact that the public sector is increasingly less in a position to maintain the level of transfer payments made in order to supplement people's income and assets.

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<sup>14</sup> See Section 5.5.

High earners will thus have to play an even greater role in providing compensation for those less fortunate – indirectly through higher taxation and levies, and directly by means of greater civic engagement. That the first option will attract criticism goes without saying, while the second will require considerable getting used to in many instances. With the comprehensive reform of the welfare state, many people have lost the will to accept greater social responsibility.

### *Sustainable business and lifestyles*

For a broader perception of wealth, economic practices and lifestyles are necessary that are incomparably more sustainable than those embraced in consumer cultures. While the latter focus on the fastest possible churn of goods and services, the broader perception of wealth is largely based on doing with as few material goods as possible. And those that are available are used for longer and, wherever possible, their benefits are shared with others. This uses fewer resources, protects the environment, and places less of a burden on people and society.

The problem is that large parts of society are ill prepared for such a change in attitudes. For most people, 'having a lot' symbolises wealth far more than 'needing very little'. If this very little is then largely in the non-material sector, many have difficulties in recognising it as wealth. Their perception is different thanks to the legacies of past generations. Interpreting 'needing very little' as 'having little', they associate it with an uncompensated-for loss of wealth.

### 3. Barriers to change

Lifeforms that fail to adapt to altered conditions become extinct. The same applies to human societies, cultures and civilisations. If large sections of society hold on to traditional perceptions and behavioural patterns that run contrary to their altered realities, they eventually disappear. History has repeatedly borne witness to both physical and at minimum cultural disappearances over time.<sup>15</sup>

That history should repeat itself today cannot be ruled out. Once again, many people hold on to traditional production patterns, consumer behaviours and lifestyles although the conditions in which these came about either no longer exist or will cease to exist in the foreseeable future. It seems maintaining the status quo is their first priority. For many people, this has value in itself and is something they are ready and willing to make painful sacrifices for.

Such behaviour is hardly surprising because to a certain extent it is an expression of human nature and society. The traits that people and peoples take on in the course of their development not only shape their tendencies, but play a major part in forming their identities. Their thoughts, feelings and actions – in other words, their ‘conscience’ – make them what they are, just as their ‘being’ does not allow them to think, feel or act differently.

#### *Altered attitudes, altered identities*

A change in attitude often means a change in identity – something most people try to block for good reason. This is why the many attempts to create a ‘new human being’ have repeatedly failed. For the most part, people have stayed as they were. But this does not necessarily mean all have remained equal or are equal today. Human nature constantly demonstrates distinguishing and specifying characteristics.

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15 See Leggewie/Welzer (2009), p. 82 ff.

Hence, persuading people to alter their ingrained, long-practised behavioural patterns can prove extremely difficult. In some cases, it can take several generations before change kicks in. There are many who believe that this can only happen when faced with survival-threatening crisis or disaster. The Europeans were only willing to live more or less in harmony with one another, or so the argument goes, after more than 70 million people had lost their lives in murderous wars and repression in the space of just three decades.

Comparisons can be drawn with the challenge faced by society today. More and more people and societies find themselves in survival-threatening conflict with the challenges thrown up by planet Earth. But similarly to the start of the 20th century, when all calls for peace went largely unheard, great effort goes today into negating the reminders and warnings put out by the modern world. While there is broad recognition that things cannot continue as they are, the conclusions drawn from that recognition, if any, are not taken all that seriously.

#### *Tight time window*

Time is of the essence if societies in early industrialised countries and in fact the human race per se are to adopt fundamentally different attitudes. For example, to ensure that global warming does not rise by more than 2° Celsius compared with 1990 levels, a country like Germany must reduce its CO2 emissions by 40 percent by 2020 and by at least 80 percent by 2050.<sup>16</sup> That this is a very tall order goes without saying. But with each year that passes by, it appears more and more unlikely that the aimed-for targets will be met. The same applies to cleaning up contaminated land, rivers and the oceans, and to protecting forests. No matter what the issue or the aim, time is tight and doubts are growing as to whether what needs to be done can be done in whatever time is left.

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<sup>16</sup> See Bundesregierung (2010a) and WBGU (2009), p. 3.

*Attitudes are shifting but not all at the same pace*

Nonetheless, there is only a small group who not only speak out in favour of adapting to altered conditions but also act on their instincts.<sup>17</sup> Given their perceptions and behavioural patterns – their conscious awareness – people in Germany, like those in other industrialised countries, can be divided into four general groups:

- Those who have recognised the need to adopt sustainable economic practices and lifestyles, and who behave accordingly.
- Those who have recognised the need but still carry on with their existing lifestyles.
- Those who, although they have recognised the need, carry on as before because they hope that science and technology and other innovations will make it possible for them to continue the lifestyles they have come to know.
- People who either negate or even deny the need to adopt sustainable economic practices and lifestyles.

Putting numbers to each of these groups is difficult. They fluctuate both from region to region and from time to time. And they are largely event-related. When disaster strikes as it did recently in Japan's Fukushima nuclear power plant, the number of energy-aware people rises rapidly, but then drops off just as quickly afterwards. The situation is similar in respect of oil and gas supply, in efforts to prevent soil, air and water pollution, and in consumption of meat, fats, sugar and other foodstuffs.

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<sup>17</sup> In a survey, only one in ten people in Germany were prepared to accept a 10 percent price rise for products that contribute less to global warming. In contrast, some 49 percent of the German population would not be prepared to accept higher prices for climate-friendly products, while 41 percent would accept an increase of no more than 10 percent. See UBA (2010a), p.39, Table 16. In reality, the number of people who are willing to pay more is likely to be lower still. Experience has shown that few people actually adopt sustainable practices than the survey results would indicate.



Much speaks in favour of the second and third groups – the diehards and the innovation worshippers – forming the vast majority. In contrast, the first group – those who act on their beliefs – are gradually growing in numbers, while the fourth group – the deniers and negators – will eventually fade away.<sup>18</sup> At least, their presence in the media is becoming rare. What this means is that the decisive step on the way to economic practices and lifestyles that are in touch with the new reality has less to do with people's lack of awareness and more with their inability to act appropriately based on what they know.

There are five possible reasons for this.

### 3.1 Vague and distant challenges

Although by now, most people have recognised that their traditional perceptions and behavioural patterns are neither sustainable nor a good example to follow, few people in early industrialised countries face any threat to survival that would force them to change the way they live. For most people, the challenge appears so vague and distant that to a certain extent it only touches the right side of their brains. Up to now, the message behind the challenge has lacked an emotional dimension that also addresses the left side of the brain and can entice people to take action.

While most people can readily imagine what it must be like to be unemployed or seriously ill and are moved by the thought, notions of climate change, rising sea levels, biodiversity loss and global reductions in crop yields are more or less abstract. People experience these phenomena as freak or extreme weather events, or learn of them through maritime data, biological bulletins and reports from far-off countries. The island residents who actually see the land they live on sinking into the sea and the beekeepers whose hives are dying off are in a small minority.

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<sup>18</sup> Arguments in favour of these trends include that the existence and risks of anthropogenic global warming are gradually being recognised by ever-larger sections of society, and are now generally acknowledged. Their existence is denied by only a very small minority.

Also, many have the not unjustified hope that there will be 'enough to go around' for them and perhaps for their children. They feel no real need, even in their own interests, to change the way they live. While they believe that such change will be necessary at some point in the future, they do not see this happening for one or two generations to come. For most, that seems too far away to require any immediate action. In the course of their evolution, human beings have been conditioned to simply make it through the day and perhaps the next winter. Young people often find it difficult to think about preparing for old age. And they find it even more difficult to set about changing their behaviour in order to avoid developments that do not even remotely affect them in time or place.

Finally, people are less willing to change when they have not only grown used to the lifestyles they lead, but have come to value the many comforts and niceties they offer. The advantages of increasing material wealth remain at the forefront – a comfortable place to live, nice cars, and expensive holidays. The downside to all of this is pushed into the background.

### 3.2 Manipulation and misinformation

Secondly, there are individuals and groups, including non-government organisations (NGOs) and political parties, who encourage the general public to continue their current lifestyles. They do so because it allows them to hold on to ingrained ways of thinking and behaving. This is why they call for ongoing economic growth and the associated increase in production and consumption. Increased consumption is also seen as a desired goal in materially rich countries, and is sometimes propagated as a more or less patriotic obligation.<sup>19</sup> The effort and expense involved in achieving this goal is tremendous.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Following the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, the then US President George Bush declared the American economy "open for business", encouraging people to go out and spend in a show of patriotism. See FTD (2008).

<sup>20</sup> See Note 4.

Despite the change in attitudes among large sections of society, there is an increasing impression that ongoing economic growth can easily be reconciled with environmental principles such as wise use of resources and environmental compatibility. This might well be the case in certain instances. But the overall impression is often false or at minimum misleading. Among other things, companies consciously market their products as being environmentally friendly or 'green' although their production is anything but sustainable.<sup>21</sup> Still, consumers are taken in by such marketing strategies and often act against their better judgement.

Many policymakers work along these lines. Although a growing number stress the need for sustainable, environmentally sound economic practices, they are quick to push environmental issues aside at the first sign of a potential conflict situation. And if consideration of environmental issues harbours the risk of job losses or social unrest, they are often blocked altogether.<sup>22</sup> The only thing that then counts is economic growth, and with it a rise in wages, welfare benefits, profits and tax revenue. That such growth comes with a price is often deliberately ignored.

People must be confused by such signals. On the one hand, they are constantly called upon to reduce their consumption of resources and to curb practices that are harmful to the environment. On the other, policymakers use a mix of ingenuity and authority to entice people to do just the opposite. For many, this is a conflict that cannot be resolved. It is easier just to carry on regardless, ignoring everything that involves a behavioural change.

### 3.3 A feeling of helplessness

A third obstacle that must be overcome on the road to altered lifestyles is shaking off the feeling of helplessness when faced with the huge chal-

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<sup>21</sup> A strategy known as 'greenwashing'.

<sup>22</sup> A clear majority of people in Germany say that in times of conflict, securing prosperity (54 percent), job creation (63 percent) and the establishment of social justice (60 percent) should take priority over efforts to protect the environment and mitigate climate change. See UBA (2010a), p. 18, Fig. 4.

lenge and the fact that many are (still) unwilling to join the caravan. People ask themselves what they can do to prevent resources being wasted and to stop the environment from being destroyed when firstly, billions of others are doing everything they can – no matter how intensive the use of resources and the damage to the environment – to raise their material lifestyles to a socio-culturally acceptable minimum level, and secondly, the world population is growing by some 250,000 each day, all of whom must also be fed and watered, clothed and housed.

In reality, the sobering finding is that despite growing recognition of the need for change, people continue on more or less the same course in the knowledge that the damage caused increases accordingly. Despite the gradual change in attitudes, the situation regarding the vital resources needed for human survival continues to deteriorate and there is no end in sight to this trend. This has a paralysing effect, especially when individual states, societal groups and certain individuals insist on continuing their materialistic lifestyles and even intensify them further. That this is the case can be seen in the alarming evidence produced by international conferences on environment protection.<sup>23</sup>

Even though most stakeholders in industry and government are more than aware of the problems caused by their attitudes, they still try to justify both to themselves and to the public that others behave in just the same way and that to change their behaviour would only bring economic disadvantage and not 'save' the world. By this argument, a change in attitudes can only be expected and only makes sense if it is called for by all. Unfortunately, only policymakers are considered in a position to make that call. And it is they who are thus considered under obligation to do whatever is necessary to secure the vital resources needed for survival. A single business or a single individual, it is asserted, cannot do this alone.

This confirms many in their view that they themselves can do little to help solve the anticipated problems. They rush to pass on their responsibility to

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<sup>23</sup> Examples include the UN Climate Change Summits in Copenhagen (2009) and Cancun (2010).

policymakers and industry, for it is they who should ensure that, for example, cars become more environmentally compatible and electrical appliances use less power. Only few see that more thoughtful use of such products could have a similar effect. The majority content themselves with activities which when added together are not altogether effective but give those involved the feeling that they have done the right thing.<sup>24</sup> They might separate their waste and use energy-efficient light bulbs, but they still drive big cars and spend their holidays in exotic countries.<sup>25</sup> And why not? Everyone else does.

#### 3.4 Lack of knowledge, lack of ability

A fourth obstacle to overcome involves the lack of knowledge and ability rife in government and administration, industry and society, and also among individuals. The reason for such deficits lies in the fact that although strong economic growth is a phenomenon that is easy to date historically, it was long suggested that such growth is here to stay without really reflecting on the situation. This negated all need to think about possible alternatives. The questions as to whether and to what extent industry, society and people themselves could develop beyond the paradigm of constant economic growth was no longer given any serious consideration. The work of the Club of Rome and others, who in the 1970s and unlike those who had gone before them clearly drew the boundaries of growth, came to many as something of an unpleasant surprise to which they merely closed their eyes. A lot of people still do this today.

It was mostly outsiders who systematically addressed how the labour market, social security schemes, public budgets and many other systems could still continue to function in a stagnating or even shrinking economy. The broad public, including all political parties, held on tight to the out-

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<sup>24</sup> See Knaus/Renn (1998), p. 145.

<sup>25</sup> This is known as 'single action bias'. That is, a small number of measures are carried out that are cheap and easy to implement so most ingrained behaviour patterns can be left intact. See CRED (2009), p. 21 f.

dated premise that no growth means no investment, no full employment, no social security, no consolidated public budgets, no help for the poor, and no adequate education and training.<sup>26</sup> Only in recent times have people begun to question this linkage and to put intensive thought to how a functioning society and personal satisfaction can be ensured without constant economic growth.<sup>27</sup>

This thought process has not, however, produced a workable alternative that replaces the prevailing paradigm without causing great disruption. Its development is still in its early stages and is only really convincing and mature in certain areas. Without any further advancements to show for, the vast majority of people in government and industry, and society in general, will stick firmly to their existing practices and lifestyles. This stymies the necessary discovery processes. Only when the outlook is such that new models can actually be implemented will there be any incentive to develop them further. At the moment, the situation is one of people getting in their own way.

To a certain extent, this is also the case at individual level. People have often only learned to build their lives around material forms of wealth and to be more or less passive consumers. A lifestyle that focuses more on non-material forms of wealth calls for considerable self-initiative and a proactive attitude. This applies to maintaining personal relationships, and equally to civil engagement, working on one's own initiative, hobbies and sports, and artistic and intellectual activities.<sup>28</sup> In all of this, skills are needed that many individuals must first acquire, but from which many shy away once they see the amount of effort involved.

### 3.5 Few role models

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<sup>26</sup> Chancellor Angela Merkel in her government statement on 10 November 2009. See Bundesregierung (2009), p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> The German Research Foundation (DFG) is providing funding for the period until 2015 for a research group of sociologists at the University of Jena to look at, among other things, the effects of a shrinking economy on the functioning of the 'welfare state'. See Friedrich-Schiller-Universität (2011).

<sup>28</sup> See Miegel (2010), p. 159 ff.

Despite the equality postulated by democratic societies, there are individuals and groups from whom the majority tend to take their lead.<sup>29</sup> They try to copy the lifestyles of such individuals and groups and if they are unable to do so, they at least believe the perception and behaviour of their role models to be 'right'.

The problem here is that because such role models have acquired their status under conditions created by a materialistic paradigm, they have usually achieved a level of financial success that far exceeds the average. Those who are financially unsuccessful or only marginally successful are rarely seen as role models.

This causes a dilemma both for role models and for society in general. To become a role model under the conditions created by a new paradigm, the financially successful would need to adopt a lifestyle in which they have no material aspirations and are rich in non-material forms of wealth. But very few do so. Most want to enjoy the fruits of their financial success and that usually means a material lifestyle. This dilemma has been debated on numerous occasions, with the most convincing solution being to share material wealth with others or to use it for the common good.

This remains the exception rather than the rule, however. In reality, people who are very successful tend to adopt extremely materialistic lifestyles, although the ostentatious lives of luxury led by certain individuals and certain small groups are only the tip of the iceberg. What shapes people's perceptions is the behaviour of those who have achieved above-average success and who demonstrate that success primarily means material success that entitles those who have it to use more resources and burden the environment to a greater extent than the average man on the street. The outcome is that in early industrialised countries, around 80 percent of resource use and environmental impact is caused by only

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<sup>29</sup> Such groups are often described as leading milieus. On the distribution of social milieus in Germany, see for example Sinus-Sociovision GmbH (2009).

about 20 percent of the population.<sup>30</sup> Ironically, it is this group in particular who often declare themselves to be environmentally aware.<sup>31</sup>

The group of materially rich individuals who restrict their behaviour and signal to the masses that happiness and social status are possible without spending lots of money is still relatively small. If the shift in perceptions is to occur without causing social unrest, then it is this societal group that must alter its attitudes first and foremost.

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<sup>30</sup> See Weller (2007), p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> Members of the post-material milieu also belong in large numbers to the financially strong section of society who consume large quantities of resources. See loc. cit.



#### 4. Mobilising social potential

To overcome the barriers that stand in the way of sustainable economic practices and lifestyles, it is necessary to activate a wide range of individual and collective forces. The prerequisite here is to educate the general public in depth, both about the risks and weaknesses inherent in their current materialistic lifestyles and the potential for less materialistic forms – the aim being to empower people with less material wealth to live a fulfilled life and to ensure society’s ability to function. What is also needed is a willingness by policymakers to employ whatever unpopular measures are necessary to establish sustainable economic practices and lifestyles.<sup>32</sup>

##### 4.1 Less materialistic lifestyles

To enable people to stand back from their familiar materialistic perceptions and behaviours and acknowledge the potential of less materialistic lifestyles, they need an idea of what these involve:

- How good life can be with less material wealth
- How happiness and social status can be achieved when faced with lower income opportunities and fewer consumer options
- How less resource-intensive, environmentally compatible economic practices and less materialistic lifestyles might look that do not ask too much of society
- How a society can remain functional without maximising material wealth

##### *Fostering a broad-based, open search across society*

Answers to these questions must be found in an holistic search across society. That search has already begun. From city greening initiatives, urban gardens, car-sharing schemes, repair networks and organic shopping communities, to multi-generational homes, community power plants and

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<sup>32</sup> See Section 5.

social entrepreneurship, to regional currencies and the foundation of largely self-sufficient transition towns, there are many examples of how people can move away from materialistic economic practices and lifestyles to embrace non-material forms of wealth and perceive that move as an enrichment.<sup>33</sup> While they can derive satisfaction, self-confirmation, esteem and social acceptance from their new way of life, only very small groups of people have made the switch so far. Plus, their ideas and models are often either too immature or simply not suited to implementation across broad sections of society.

### *Pioneers of change to the fore*

This is why the search must be conducted across society in general. Considerably more pioneers are needed who simply forge ahead and set an example to the masses, showing how social status, personal wellbeing and a fulfilled life can be achieved with less material wealth.

One prerequisite in all of this is a social climate that allows open dialogue, experiments and the testing of unconventional ideas. Another is for more people, social institutions and businesses to play a more active role. Instead of first looking to the state and expecting others to change their ways, as many people as possible should start changing their own behaviour and attitudes. The more often people, social groups,<sup>34</sup> non-governmental organisations (NGOs), businesses and others embrace less materialistic lifestyles, the greater the likelihood that generally applicable ideas and models will be found, and the greater the pressure there will be on policymakers and industry to take a proactive approach in helping to design new economic practices and lifestyles, and break down any barriers that obstruct the search process.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> See for example Müller (2011), Steffen (2008) and Denkwerk Zukunft *Inspiration – Leuchttürme*.

<sup>34</sup> These include consumer organisations like the consumer protection agencies, consumer institutes, and consumer working groups, consumer watchdogs like Germany's Stiftung Warentest, and so on.

<sup>35</sup> See Section 5 and also Kreye (2011) and Wehrspaun (2010), p. 14 f.

But above all, as the numbers of emerging 'pioneers of change'<sup>36</sup> grow, so do those of people who come into contact with less materialistic lifestyles in their immediate surroundings. The more people experience directly that friends, neighbours and colleagues are both happy and content without needing to acquire ever-more material status and goods, the more likely they will be to change their own attitudes and behaviour, and the greater their willingness to adopt less materialistic lifestyles.

#### *Social responsibility among celebrities and the financially successful*

People who act as role models for others have a special responsibility. These are primarily celebrities like actors, entertainers, musicians, top athletes and fashion models. If their media presence were less shaped by high incomes and the presentation of expensive consumer goods, and more by a far more modest, less materialistic lifestyle that includes civic engagement and environmentally friendly behaviour, it would significantly raise public acceptance of non-material lifestyles.

Those with above-average incomes are also called upon to play a greater role. Maintaining society's ability to function will in future largely depend on their services to society and certainly their financial backing for social projects. But it will take more than the occasional donation and handout. If the material capacities of broad sections of the population and of the state are reduced, then public swimming pools, parks, sports centres, opera houses and gifted students from low-income families will all have to be supported by those who have the means to do so in addition to paying their taxes. Without their support and ongoing engagement, in the form of private foundations, gifts, donations, scholarships and personal effort, social cohesion, social security and social harmony are likely to suffer.<sup>37</sup>

#### *Cooperation across society*

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<sup>36</sup> WBGU (2011), p. 6 f.

<sup>37</sup> See Miegel (2010), p. 205 ff.

Also, to foster the search for sustainable economic practices and lifestyles, both the state and non-government organisations need to work more closely with one another. All too often, their activities run in parallel and are uncoordinated, meaning that they lose much of their potential impact. And in many cases, staffing, intellectual and certainly financial resources are poorly utilised.

The main reason for this is the still widespread tendency to think in party political and/or world view categories, and the belief in the power of technological and market economy solutions as the answer to all evil. This applies to government and administration, industry, the institutions of civil society and the relationships between these various sectors. It is not unusual for stakeholders to either avoid coming into contact with one another or at minimum to distrust each other. This situation must be overcome. Opportunities for cooperation take in not just the search for widely adoptable economic practices and lifestyles through activities such as joint research, making innovation reality, supporting civil initiatives and recruiting financial backers. Presenting a united and thus powerful front is a key prerequisite in communicating potential solutions, both to broad sections of society and to policymakers.

#### 4.2 Promoting the benefits of non-material lifestyles

To alter the perceptions and behaviours of broad sections of society, people must be better informed and educated about the risks of materialistic economic practices and lifestyles, the limits of technological innovation and efficiency gains, and, most importantly, the benefits to be had from making economic practices and lifestyles less materialistic.

Apart from education, the key institution in this regard is the media. Just as journalists, publishers, film producers, script writers, advertisers and everyone who addresses the general public via the media have been in-

strumental in shaping western consumer culture, they could equally serve as drivers of a shift in attitudes.<sup>38</sup>

### *Emotional, realistic reporting*

However, the media must alter the way in which they report on the risks of materialistic lifestyles and on the benefits of less materialistic habits. Current reporting on such topics fails to reach many people: it is too abstract and has little to do with their real life situations. Plus, it is often broadcast at antisocial hours or is placed in print media in such a way as to suggest that the issues concerned are of lesser importance than others. The most people take away from such media content is that something is not quite right with the way they live their lives. What that might be and how they might change their ways remains vague and non-committal. Few people are able, for example, to transfer reports on climate change and biodiversity loss to their everyday lives, or to draw the necessary conclusions for themselves and others. This is why they fail to recognise that through their own action and non-action, they can make a significant contribution to these trends – and that by altering their attitudes they can help steer things onto a sustainable course.

To effect a fundamental change in the way people think, act and feel, reports and documentaries must be made more realistic and touch people emotionally. Abstract and distant phenomena like scarce resources, environmental exploitation, species loss and extinction, climate change and rising sea levels must be perceived as a personal problem or as a threat to humankind, to nature, and to things that people value. And reports on adopting less materialistic lifestyles must communicate a sense of personal enrichment, social esteem and recognition.

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<sup>38</sup> See Assadourian (2010a), p. 210 ff. and also Kasser (2002), p. 109.

### *Infotainment*

Infotainment programme formats are well suited to providing emotive and realistic information. Such formats target people who, rather than primarily seeking knowledge, want to be entertained and distracted. Topical issues and practical solutions are embedded in documentaries, animated films, soaps and quiz programmes in an entertaining way and/or in the form of everyday life stories. One successful example is the Dutch television programme *Echt Elly*, in which Elly Lockhurst, a celebrity with a huge following among the low-income group, shows how she acts in an environmentally friendly way by saving on electricity and water, and by recycling many of the things she buys. Thanks to their high entertainment factor, infotainment programmes can be transmitted at peak viewing times.<sup>39</sup>

### *Addressing target groups*

To increase the opinion-making effect of informational programmes, the language and the tone used should reflect the world views and the milieu-specific backgrounds of the specific target groups. For religious viewers, use of the word 'creation' when talking about endangered species is far more emotive than 'ecosystems'. Also, the credibility and importance of the information being provided is increased if it is communicated by experts who view the issue from several differing standpoints.<sup>40</sup>

### *Role models in the media*

The status and value of non-materialistic lifestyles could also be increased if in films and on television, and in computer games and similar media, actors could be seen to be living out such lifestyles as a matter of course. Instead of driving big cars, they could use the underground or

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<sup>39</sup> For more examples of infotainment formats, see CSCP (2010), p. 26 ff.

<sup>40</sup> See Kahan et al. (2010), p. 23 ff. and CRED (2010), p. 6 f.

take a tram.<sup>41</sup> In turn, materialistic attitudes could be given a negative connotation. While, for example, many actors are seen smoking in older films, this now only applies to those whom no-one wants to identify with. Scriptwriters and the authors of books are thus called upon to invent convincing characters who live less materialistic lives. If such books, films and television series prove popular, then producers, publishers, TV companies and businesses are ready and willing to finance, publish and transmit them, and to buy advertising time during the breaks.

### *The power of advertising and celebrity endorsements*

Advertising is one of the key instruments in using emotion to influence people's thoughts and actions. Instead of the current practice in which advertising almost exclusively creates images of material desire, it should in future serve to increase the status and the value of non-material lifestyles. Successful anti-smoking and anti-obesity campaigns, and pro-seatbelt and safer sex adverts show that advertising can foster preventive behaviour and/or attitudes that focus on the common good.<sup>42</sup> Until now, what is known as 'social marketing' has made up only a minute fraction of the global advertising budget.<sup>43</sup> Without more engagement from potential fund-givers from (civil) society, little will change. Unless prompted, businesses and the advertising sector are unlikely to start propagating less materialistic economic practices and lifestyles because they would effectively be taking a slice of their own markets.

This is where celebrities are again needed as role models. At present, actors, athletes and musicians tend to promote fast cars, expensive jewellery and exotic holidays. But they could equally lend their name to boosting the image of public transport, cultural events, music lessons, neighbourhood schemes and sustainable investment. And because they

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<sup>41</sup> One example is Zurich, where the tram network was made more energy-efficient back in the 1980s. Billboards were used to show that even people with high incomes choose to use the tram.

<sup>42</sup> See Sachs/Finkelpearl (2010), p. 212 ff.

<sup>43</sup> See Assadourian (2010a), p. 210 f.

would receive either no fee or a significantly lower one than usually offered for their efforts, they would be setting a two-fold example to the public.

### *Interactive media*

The younger section of society makes full use of new media communication and entertainment formats such as blogs, chats, YouTube, Twitter, social networks and many others.<sup>44</sup> Such forums serve as channels to inform and educate people about risk and opportunity. Thanks to their interactive options, they have the potential to drive the search for less materialistic economic practices and lifestyles. People who embrace such lifestyles can use these forums to exchange ideas and learn from others. Once addressed online in virtual spaces, the issues discussed usually find their way into the real world. They are taken up, copied, and dominate the conversation on school playgrounds, at parties and in the workplace. Ideas are easily spread, and like-minded people can use online channels to link up and share their knowledge and skills. Examples include subject-specific networks like Utopia<sup>45</sup> and SPREAD,<sup>46</sup> in which consumers inform one another about socially responsible and environmentally sound products and services.

### *Non-media platforms*

When informing and educating about the risks of materialistic and the benefits of non-materialistic economic practices and lifestyles, use should also be made of non-media platforms like exhibitions, conferences, concerts and similar events. These may have a shorter reach, but when it comes to altering attitudes they often address just the right target groups. These include journalists who disseminate their impressions and the

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<sup>44</sup> Three quarters of Internet users are active in social networks. Among the under 30s, the figure rises to significantly more than 90 percent. See Bitkom (2011).

<sup>45</sup> See [www.utopia.de](http://www.utopia.de)



ideas they take away via a range of different channels. And taking art museums as another example, these are often visited by people with above-average incomes and high-consumption lifestyles. With the right kind of exhibition, this clientele could be confronted with issues of sustainability and future survival. The situation is similar in respect of ethnology, technology and other museums.

#### 4.3 Knowledge and skills needed to embrace non-material lifestyles

Less material lifestyles call for knowledge and skills which few people have acquired. These include:

- Housekeeping skills like caring for and extended use of consumer goods, recycling left-overs and sparing use of energy. These not only reduce the impact of stagnating or dwindling incomes on people's spending power. They also spare the natural resources vital to human survival.
- More knowledge on the interrelationships between industry, nature and society, and the environmental and social impacts from the use of certain goods and services.
- Greater civic engagement and the willingness to accept responsibility for oneself and others. This raises satisfaction with life in general, and can compensate for the reduction in state provision and collective social security schemes, and thus foster cultural change.
- The ability and the willingness to structure everyday life and recreation time through one's own activities.

Ideally, such knowledge and skills should be acquired from an early age. But because parents usually pass on their own traits to their children, they also pass on prevailing material values. This heightens the importance of schools and non-school education institutions. While these cannot and should not replace either the parental home or the social environment, they must make a targeted effort to equip children and young people with

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<sup>46</sup> See [www.spread2050.ning.com](http://www.spread2050.ning.com)

the knowledge and skills that are indispensable in adopting less material economic practices and lifestyles. This can have a backlash on the adult world. When children come home with newly acquired knowledge, it is likely to effect a change in their parents' thoughts and actions.<sup>47</sup> This highlights the need for targeted education and training for parents.

### *Holistic education*

If people are to acquire knowledge and skills that help them lead less material lifestyles, they will need an holistic education. At present, the education system focuses on preparing young people for working life. Most teachers would cite learning the German language and foreign languages, mathematics, and working with computers and the new media as the most important subjects to be taught. Sport, art and music, literature, ethics, philosophy and future-focused skills all play a comparatively unimportant role.<sup>48</sup> University studies and research also focus strongly on knowledge that can be used in the workplace and in industry. Many of the structural reforms in education seen in recent years, such as shortening the number of years of education at Gymnasium-level secondary schools and the adoption of more concentrated bachelors degree courses have helped foster these trends.

As ever, the education system places pure communication of knowledge at the forefront. But less material societies often need not a 'perfect copy of the blueprint',<sup>49</sup> but people who are creative, can think in a broader context, embrace challenge, solve complex problems and accept responsibility. Holistic education shapes personalities.

How these skills might be best communicated depends on the respective educational institution and the social environment. It is all reliant on

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<sup>47</sup> A prime example is that in many migrant families, children help their parents and pass on skills to help them hold their own in German society.

<sup>48</sup> See Microsoft/Focus (2007), p. 5.

<sup>49</sup> Kommission für Zukunftsfragen der Freistaaten Bayern und Sachsen (1998), p. 119.

whether society and parents call for a broader understanding of education, assisting the process themselves wherever possible, and whether state and non-state education institutions along with childcare and teaching staff are given the opportunity and the freedom to shape the new approach.

### *New educational content*

Holistic education could be supported by new school subjects that take in happiness and contentment. Where this has already been introduced,<sup>50</sup> young people learn with measurable success to develop a sense of community and self-esteem, to manage creative tasks, work as part of a team and help others.<sup>51</sup> Sustainable development, health and cooking are further subjects whose introduction is often called for or which are already being offered in schools.

There is, however, a limit to the number of new subjects that can be introduced. This is why certain knowledge and skills should be taught as part of the general curriculum. Natural science subjects are predestined for use in educating schoolchildren about the risks of materialistic lifestyles. In chemistry lessons, the environmental impacts of plastics could be illustrated in experiments, while physics classes could be used to explore the problem of storing nuclear waste.

### *Promoting the arts and (inter)active learning*

School subjects such as music, art, literature and sport all provide opportunities to acquire knowledge and skills that promote non-material lifestyles. These subjects have been neglected in the past. Yet studies show that children and youths who play an instrument or who regularly engage

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<sup>50</sup> One example is the Willy Helpach school in Heidelberg, where lessons on happiness are a firm fixture in the timetable.

<sup>51</sup> See Fritz-Schubert (2008).

in sporting activities are more active in their free time, are more likely to be involved in the community and have better powers of concentration.<sup>52</sup>

In addition, these subjects enable children and teenagers to experience the world beyond the consumer society. A prerequisite here, however, is that they not only be provided with knowledge of, say, important eras in art history, but that they be encouraged to become active themselves. Interests and curiosity are not sparked by learning things off by heart. They are awakened and fostered through learning by doing. If children and teenagers have an early opportunity to paint, sing, write poetry, act in plays, take up photography and play sport, the enrichment they experience could remain with them for a lifetime. In Germany's Ruhr district, the *Jedem Kind ein Instrument* (One Instrument per Child) project gives primary school children a chance to play different instruments and find out which one they like most. They are then taught to play their chosen instrument.<sup>53</sup>

#### *Working groups, project weeks and extra-curricular activities*

Active and interactive learning lends itself to almost all school subjects and educational content. With instruction, children and teenagers can plan and conduct their own chemical experiments, repair equipment, find solutions to environmental problems, cook, do gardening and help out in senior citizens' residences. Because this is not always possible as part of the regular school curriculum, working groups, workshops and project weeks have to be arranged in the afternoons once school is over for the day.<sup>54</sup> A broad field of activity is available for older volunteers who have accrued vast knowledge and experience and have time on their hands. The current nation-wide expansion of Germany's all-day schools programme offers a wide variety of options.

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<sup>52</sup> See HWZ (2010), Hofer Symphoniker (2009), and Focus Schule (2008).

<sup>53</sup> See <http://www.jedemkind.de/> (in German only).

<sup>54</sup> See de Haan (2010), p. 30 f.

The closer the curriculum is linked to project content, the greater the learning effect. Take the *Lernen durch Engagement* (Learning through Engagement) project: in biology lessons that focus on the Central Europe ecosystem, school children create nature trails in the local environment, while in German lessons they learn how to read out loud with feeling and read stories to small children. In sports, they teach primary school children to play football. This gives the young people involved a stronger sense of community and enhances their social skills.<sup>55</sup>

In general, schools should use the capacities of non-school stakeholders and institutions to support their afternoon programmes and project weeks.<sup>56</sup> At local music schools, theatre groups, universities, sports clubs and the voluntary fire brigade, and among cubs and boy scouts, brownies and girl guides – not to mention parents – there are many committed, skilled people who are often more than willing to introduce children and youths to their particular activities and the issues they involve. Unless people show an interest in their offerings, at some time or other, theatres and concert halls will remain empty, cultural science professors will lecture to an ever-decreasing number of students and cultural heritage associations will see their memberships decline.

Businesses and non-governmental organisations can also encourage young people to get involved in science, art and community projects by awarding prizes and organising competitions.<sup>57</sup> Unfortunately, this happens all too infrequently at local and at regional level.

### *Further education for teachers*

Cooperation with non-school institutions and stakeholders is also important because not all teachers have the professional skills needed to communicate diverse, practice-related activities in an interactive manner.

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<sup>55</sup> See <http://www.service-learning.de/>.

<sup>56</sup> See Thio/Göll (2011), p. 81 ff.

<sup>57</sup> Examples include the Deutsche Klimapreis der Allianz Umweltstiftung and the schools competition *Bio find ich Kuh-I* run by the Federal Ministry for Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection (BMELV). See *Denkwerk Zukunft: Inspiration - Leuchttürme*.

These skills must be taught in initial teacher training and also in further education and training programmes for teachers, and can be passed on in the form of practical handouts for use in the classroom. Drama teaching qualifications are another option. At the state-run teacher training college in the German town of Meckenbeuereen, trainee teachers are taught to integrate educational material on environment protection and sustainable development into their timetables and classroom activities.<sup>58</sup> Materials and courses for teachers can also be designed and offered by private foundations, universities, clubs and associations, music schools, theatres and opera houses, and by many members of society.

In order to learn from each other, schools and their staff should establish closer ties. This would make it easier to integrate school children into working groups and project weeks at other schools. School heads and education authorities are called upon to enable teachers to demonstrate the level of engagement needed and to demand it from them.

#### *Educating adults and facilitators*

Adults must also be afforded easier access to educational offerings. While in urban areas such programmes are generally good in both quantitative and qualitative terms, only a small circle of people actually use them. Many lack the mental drive and incentive, and also the necessary funds.

To provide these groups with the skills and abilities needed for less material economic practices and lifestyles, these could be integrated into other advisory services and into further education and training. In the Food Literacy project, nutritionists work with technical college teachers, job centre employees, social workers, debt advisors and pregnancy advisory staff to provide people from low-income families with informational handouts on

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<sup>58</sup> The project is part of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (<http://www.dekade.org/datenbank/index.php?d=g&gid=1461&hLite>). With the UN Decade (2005 – 2014), the countries belonging to the United Nations have agreed to promote education models which foster sustainable thinking and action among children and adults.

good housekeeping and good nutrition.<sup>59</sup> Cookery courses in restaurants and evening schools could also be tailored to suit the needs of the less well-off.<sup>60</sup> In addition, the media could use infotainment formats to provide this group of individuals with helpful guidance and tips.<sup>61</sup>

For this to happen, however, media operators would themselves have to possess the knowledge and skills needed to embrace less material lifestyles. They do not necessarily do so. Along with other facilitators, they would need to undergo initial and further education and training. Dedicated web-based portals,<sup>62</sup> expert databases and press agencies could also provide reliable data.<sup>63</sup> Film premiers, media articles and advertising campaigns on issues such as sustainability and prosperity would increase the media's willingness to provide more sophisticated reports and programmes more often.

### *Evaluating education*

To broaden people's perceptions of education, expert evaluations should take in additional education sectors. At present, such evaluations primarily look at knowledge and qualifications that are useful in employment and industry. Social skills are rarely assessed, while artistic talent and creative abilities are almost never analysed.

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<sup>59</sup> This and many other projects are outlined in the Denkwerk Zukunft Memorandum Für eine erneuerte Esskultur (Towards New Eating Habits).

<sup>60</sup> See loc. cit.

<sup>61</sup> See Section 4.2.

<sup>62</sup> One example is the website <http://www.dieweltbewegen.de> (in German only)

<sup>63</sup> See CSCP (2010), p. 48.

## 5. Shifting state structures for altered attitudes

Given the short timeframe,<sup>64</sup> the switch from material to less material perceptions and behavioural patterns must be driven by the state. The state must create the conditions needed to push the scientific and societal search process in the direction of cultural renewal.<sup>65</sup> And it must encourage and empower its citizens to use resources wisely and adopt sustainable practices.<sup>66</sup> Environmental, economic and social sustainability must become the yardstick by which each and every state-implemented measure is assessed for its role in fostering civic engagement, protecting the environment and mitigating climate change.

And what the state must also do is break down the barriers that stand in the way of non-material living, and end promotion of resource-intensive economic practices and lifestyles. Instead, it must design policy structures so that even with dwindling material wealth, people are afforded an adequate level of security. But in doing so, the state must take account of the fact that for the purpose of addressing these issues, the financial resources at its disposal will be far less than those available today. State revenue will have shrunk not solely as a result of reduced economic power, but also due to the rising costs involved in adapting to demographic change and meeting increasing international commitments.

### *Prerequisite I: Holistic solutions from science and research*

To overcome this dual challenge, the state must be supported by the science and research sector. In providing that support, it must analyse the respective situations, highlight development options and their outcomes, and deliver holistic, practical solutions. Much has been done in this regard in recent years.<sup>67</sup> This is especially the case regarding technological inno-

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<sup>64</sup> See Section 3, p. 16

<sup>65</sup> See Section 4.1.

<sup>66</sup> See Section 4.3.

<sup>67</sup> Examples include *Welt im Wandel: Gesellschaftsvertrag für eine Große Transformation*, Wissenschaftlicher Beirat Globale Umweltveränderungen (WBGU) (Flagship Report, World in



vation for increased resource efficiency and energy switch strategies.<sup>68</sup> But what is often missing is their integration into a 'social transformation strategy'<sup>69</sup> that contains supporting measures to counteract resource-intensive lifestyles. Many initially convincing technological concepts call for a change in people's attitudes and behaviour without explaining how they might achieve it. To fill this gap, the state should make cooperation between natural sciences, engineering and social sciences a prerequisite in the award of publicly funded research contracts.

Research is also needed to explain how in times of economic stagnation or economic downturn, full employment, social security, balanced public budgets, generational equity, environmental protection and much more can be guaranteed. While considerable groundwork has been done,<sup>70</sup> the results are not yet far enough developed that they might gain general acceptance and be put in practice with ease.

Science is thus remiss in providing answers as to how the foreseeable rise in the cost of natural resources will impact on the cost of labour and the development and distribution of income. The role played by interest rates as a potential cause of the push for growth must also be clarified.<sup>71</sup> Finally, clarity is also needed as to which measures are most effective in bringing about cultural change. These research gaps must be closed if policymakers and the state are to drive cultural renewal.

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Transition – A Social Contract for Sustainability, by the German Advisory Council on Global Change), and the Wuppertal Institute study on *Zukunftsfähiges Deutschland* (Sustainable Germany in a Globalised World). Other noteworthy publications include Tim Jackson's *Prosperity without Growth* and Peter Victor's *Managing without Growth*. See WBGU (2011), Wuppertal-Institut (2008), Jackson (2009), Victor (2008).

<sup>68</sup> One example is *Faktor Fünf* (Factor Five), by Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker. See Weizsäcker et al. (2010).

<sup>69</sup> Hennicke/Samadi/Schleicher (2010), p. 8.

<sup>70</sup> For example, Herman E. Daly, Peter Victor, Niko Paech, Reinhard Loske, Lorenz Erdmann, Siegfried Behrendt and Angelika Zahrt. See Daly (2005), Victor (2008), Paech (2005), Loske (2011), Behrendt (2011) and Seidl/Zahmt (2011).

<sup>71</sup> See, for example, Binswanger (2009).

### *Prerequisite II: Grassroots support*

To effect the necessary change, the state needs not just convincing models from the science and research community. It is also reliant on support from broad sections of society, especially in a democracy.

Societies in countries like Germany are now far more open to less resource-intensive, environmentally friendly economic practices and lifestyles than they have been in the past. In fact most would like to see the state play a more active role in environmental policy by enacting stricter laws and withdrawing subsidies.<sup>72</sup> When surveyed, more than three quarters of respondents said that without such state intervention, environmental degradation would rise dramatically.<sup>73</sup> The Green party's recent election victories in Germany are also a sign that a growing number of people want the government to place greater focus on environmental protection.

It remains to be seen, however, whether people will still think this way once the price of electricity and other resources rises in the wake of such policy decisions. As seen in responses to the reform of Germany's labour market and social security scheme between 2003 and 2005, people see the need for adaptation but are not altogether willing to actually bear the financial burden it involves. This puts policymakers in an almost impossible position.<sup>74</sup>

It also places the onus on the way in which government and administration design and communicate their policy measures.<sup>75</sup> When designing policies, they must ensure that such measures are implemented in small and predictable steps, and that the ultimate aim and the overall concept

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<sup>72</sup> See UBA (2010a), p. 23.

<sup>73</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>74</sup> See Neugebauer (2007), p. 106.

<sup>75</sup> See also Section 4.2.

are readily recognisable at every step of the way.<sup>76</sup> At the same time, despite the lack of public funds, they must meet people's need for justice and security,<sup>77</sup> and promote the common good. Such measures must also be implemented at municipal level, because that is where they are most effective and more equitable, and the opportunities for public participation and opinion-shaping are greater. This increases their acceptance, not least in respect of redistributive policies.

Instead of listing the disadvantages of current economic practices and lifestyles, when communicating their policy measures, policymakers and the state would be wise to focus on the benefits of non-material perceptions and behavioural patterns, and thus place cultural renewal in the spotlight. Environmental protection, mitigating climate change and less resource-intensive economic practices and lifestyles should be communicated as an investment in individual security and as a form of provision for the future, both of which are at least as important as paying contributions into the statutory social insurance fund.

People must be involved both in policy design and communication so they can share their visions, expectations and experience. This can help them better identify with decisionmakers and their decisions. Plus, an approach of this kind is less likely to result in mistakes and require crisis management.

Given the myriad opportunities to be had in changing state policies to drive a shift in attitudes, the Foundation for Cultural Renewal sees a need for action in six areas.

## 5.1 Fostering civic engagement

Because effecting a shift to less material perceptions and behaviours is not the prime responsibility of the state, but of every individual and of society at large, these must be afforded the necessary freedom and scope to set the process in motion. This is expressly mentioned because for the

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<sup>76</sup> The introduction of retirement at age 67 can act as a model for replication, although increasing the pensionable age to 67 is probably not enough. See Sachverständigenrat (2011).

<sup>77</sup> See Neugebauer (2007), p. 119 and Section 5.5.

longest time, and especially since the mid-20th century, the state has taken over ever more responsibilities that should really have been and should still be borne by society. In countries like Germany, society has gradually been nationalised and civic engagement restricted to fringe and secondary functions.

This functional division must be actively overcome by all involved: by state institutions, individuals and social organisations. But it is not enough for the state to simply delegate those responsibilities to its citizens that it can no longer fulfil itself due to an increasing lack of funds. Instead, it must acknowledge that in the ensuing transformation, civic engagement can often be more powerful than state intervention. In the development of sustainable economic practices and lifestyles, broad and diverse forms of public participation are indispensable.

The state should expressly encourage such participation. To do so, it must make it easier for people to take on social responsibilities,<sup>78</sup> restrict statutory regulation of civic engagement to an absolute minimum, and make public administration as close to the people and as transparent as possible. Above all, it must bring the increasingly neglected principle of subsidiarity<sup>79</sup> back into the spotlight. If the state fails on this, its postulated policy of 'engagement as a cross-sectoral responsibility'<sup>80</sup> will be nothing more than a string of empty words.

### *Applying subsidiarity*

In light of diminishing public and private funds, the division of responsibilities between the state and its citizens must be rethought. This is the only way to avoid putting an excessive burden on one or other side and to prevent social unrest.

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<sup>78</sup> See also Section 4.1.

<sup>79</sup> In line with the subsidiarity principle, as the highest authority the state must fulfil only those responsibilities that cannot be met by a lower authority.

<sup>80</sup> Deutsche Bundestag (2002), p. 70.

Many people are more than willing to play a constructive role in developing this new approach. This applies both to accepting social responsibility at local level, and to taking on responsibilities in education and childcare, job placement schemes, social integration and urban planning. Even in the provision of public services, there is a growing number of people who are willing to accept more responsibility for their own wellbeing. But as the Stuttgart 21 debate and similar situations have shown, little experience has been gathered on how civic engagement can be utilised in meeting social responsibilities.<sup>81</sup> In many cases, such debates result in futile disputes regarding authority and expertise, and sometimes to out-and-out conflict. Germany's National Engagement Strategy 2010 provides few answers as to how people might be integrated into decisionmaking and problem-solving processes, or how their knowledge and skills might be put to good use.

In future, the state must take a more critical look at the social responsibilities it can accept and those it should hand back to society. In doing so, it will reveal that in many instances, it has overstepped the boundaries of its authority. The problem is that it is often difficult to recognise when borders have become blurred. It is thus wise to create space in which the state and its citizens can work with one another until such time as the people can accept full responsibility. The experience gained in the process can then be transferred to other areas. Also, the state must make an effort to encourage non-governmental organisations (NGOs) who operate alone to join forces and work together. Instead of intervening and taking action itself, the state should frequently play the role of mediator or broker.

But the state will only be successful in this role if in respect of social services provision, it refrains from giving preference to state-run or charitable organisations. For example, the management of a private childcare centre can be made difficult by prescribing unnecessary building specifications.<sup>82</sup> In additi-

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<sup>81</sup> The numerous Agenda 21 processes at municipal and regional level offer best practice examples and a pool of experience.

<sup>82</sup> See, for example, Jacobs (2011).

on, significant differences occur in the grants and subsidies afforded to state-run and charitably funded childcare centres and those that are privately run. As a result, valuable potential goes unused despite the urgent need for more childcare provision.<sup>83</sup> Further, the state must break down the bureaucratic barriers in the laws on donations and in donating practice,<sup>84</sup> and provide adequate liability and accident insurance cover.<sup>85</sup> Of extreme importance in this regard is that the legislature assesses the impact of existing and future laws on civic engagement, and that it removes any unnecessary obstructions.<sup>86</sup>

## 5.2 Increasing transparency, sending signals

To make it easier for people to develop less material lifestyles, both the state and society in general must induce industry to ensure the greatest possible transparency in terms of the environmental and social sustainability of products and services. In addition, they must themselves act as role models and place far greater focus on prosperity criteria and goals.

### *Labelling resource use in products and services*

To enable people to recognise the extent of their materialistic consumption patterns and lifestyles, and for them to make conscious decisions to purchase environmentally and socially sustainable products and services, they must be provided with detailed, targeted information on the resources used and the environmental impact caused during the lifecycle of the

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<sup>83</sup> An estimated 400,000 places are needed between now and 2013. See Welt Online, 3 September 2010.

<sup>84</sup> For example, the Deutscher Verein für Öffentliche und Private Fürsorge (German Association for Public and Private Welfare) calls for more flexible use of the multi-year principle by which all expenditure must be made by the end of a year or by the end of February in the following year, and that more use be made of fixed-sum financing. See Deutscher Bundestag (2010), p. 6 f.

<sup>85</sup> For example, not all German states provide comprehensive insurance coverage for voluntary workers. And in some cases, the insured amount is too low. See BBE (2011).

<sup>86</sup> See also the special vote by the Commission of Inquiry on the future of civil engagement (Zukunft des Bürgerschaftlichen Engagements) put forward by the CDU/CSU, Deutscher Bundestag (2002), p. 329 ff.

products and services they buy. Despite the wide range of labels that help the consumer judge a product's environmental soundness, energy efficiency, recyclability of packaging, and carbon emission levels, the information these labels provide<sup>87</sup> is not always enough to alter consumer behaviour within a given time.<sup>88</sup> Nor are such labels used universally. In some cases labelling such as the planned colour-coding which will indicate the carbon emissions of passenger cars only adds to consumers' confusion.<sup>89</sup>

This why the state must lobby industry for better product labelling and prescribe standard labelling requirements<sup>90</sup> for things like carbon footprint,<sup>91</sup> integrated technology roadmapping and the sustainable value approach.<sup>92</sup> In some cases, a suitable labelling system has yet to be developed. It is thus important for Germany to at least coordinate its efforts with other EU member states to ensure that a set of EU-wide standards results. While the calculation of environmental data calls for considerable effort on the part of businesses, associations and statistics offices, as initial experience has shown, labelling leads to changed evaluations and thus to altered perceptions and behaviours.<sup>93</sup> In the long term, a labelling system of this kind could even be made binding across the EU.

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<sup>87</sup> The best-known are the Blue Angel eco-label, the Bio label for organic produce, and the Fair Trade label for products produced under fair trade conditions.

<sup>88</sup> See BMLFUW (2009).

<sup>89</sup> The German government's plans require labelling to show a vehicle's carbon emissions in relation to its weight. In some cases, heavy saloons do better than energy-efficient small cars. See FTD (2011).

<sup>90</sup> See also RNE (2010), p. 8.

<sup>91</sup> The carbon footprint is a sustainability indicator that shows the per capita area of biologically productive land and water that is needed to produce consumer goods and services and take up the associated residual products (waste, greenhouse gas emissions, etc.). See Global Footprint Network (2010).

<sup>92</sup> The sustainable value approach is the first value-focused approach to assess a company's sustainability. Hahn et al. (2009), p.6. Apart from economic capital, the use of environmental and social capital is also taken into account. Use of Integrated Technology Roadmapping allows the development of economic, environmental, social and political challenges. See Behrendt et al. (2007).

<sup>93</sup> Sport article manufacturer Puma is one of the first companies to develop an environmental profit and loss index, which it can use to pinpoint the environmental impact of its activities along the entire value chain. The company aims to use the index to prepare for potential statutory regulations, and to

### *Aligning social prosperity and policy action to non-material criteria*

Social awareness is also largely shaped by goals that the state pursues, and by the way it communicates its achievements. In Germany, as in many other countries, economic growth ranks above everything else.<sup>94</sup> The Stability and Growth Act of 1967<sup>95</sup> still applies, requiring that the government maintain stable price levels, high employment, a healthy foreign trade balance, and adequate and steady levels of economic growth.<sup>96</sup> In fulfilling this obligation, a range of legislative measures have been implemented over the decades, as with the Growth Acceleration Act of 2009,<sup>97</sup> which used tax concessions to combat the slump in economic growth following the global financial and economic crisis of 2007 and 2008.<sup>98</sup>

Whether growth targets are met is measured against gross domestic product (GDP), the sum of all goods and services provided in a national economy over a given period of time. That this measurement process has considerable deficits goes uncontested. On the one hand it treats prosperity losses like accidents and illness, environmental degradation and the use of resources as prosperity gains, while at the same time negating prosperity gains not achieved via the market, such as the fruits of work performed in the household and voluntary work. But despite these serious deficits, GDP – contrary to its purpose – is used not only as a growth indicator, but as a de facto prosperity indicator. This gives rise to the notion that economic growth boosts not only a country's prosperity but also that

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heighten awareness to new business models that minimise resource use. See Puma (2011) and FAZ (2011). Companies with similar indexes include Faber Castell, Otto Versand, GLS Bank, and BASF.

<sup>94</sup> As indicated by Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel in February 2011 at the Stiftung Ordnungspolitik in Freiburg: "A fatal mistake in this regard, was that everything focused on growth. Growth was the main objective. All other goals, like a balanced budget, were secondary." Bundesregierung (2011a).

<sup>95</sup> See BMJ (1967), Gesetz zur Förderung der Stabilität und des Wachstums der Wirtschaft (StabG) vom 8. Juni 1967 (Act Promoting Stability and Economic Growth of 8 June 1967).

<sup>96</sup> At the time, three to four percent real GDP growth was considered reasonable.

<sup>97</sup> See BMF (2009a), Gesetz zur Beschleunigung des Wirtschaftswachstums (Wachstumsbeschleunigungsgesetz) (Act to Accelerate Economic Growth) of 22 December 2009.

<sup>98</sup> Among other things, the value added tax rate for hotel accommodation was reduced, depreciation rules for companies were improved, inheritance tax was reduced for certain groups and businesses, and tax abatements for dependent children were raised. See BMF (2009a and 2009b).



of its people, and that it enhances their quality of life. By setting economic growth, prosperity and quality of life all on an equal footing, perceptions of prosperity in early industrialised countries have narrowed over several generations to focus purely on material wealth. This narrow-mindedness must be erased.

To do this, policymakers must significantly broaden their catalogue of targets. When setting targets, they must not only take account of economic trends, but give greater weight to environmental and social factors and issue regular reports on target performance. Above all, they must add environmental and social variables to wealth measurement. Numerous proposals have been put forward showing how this might be done,<sup>99</sup> one being the Prosperity Quartet developed by the Foundation for Cultural Renewal.<sup>100</sup> It is hoped that the Commission of Inquiry set up by the German Bundestag in December 2010 will present its proposal on measuring wealth in Germany by 2013. That the Commission has been called upon to do so indicates the urgent need for action seen in some government circles.

### 5.3 Curbing state promotion of environmentally harmful, resource-intensive economic practices and lifestyles

The state promotes economic activity in many ways, not least in the provision of billions of euros of tax revenue. But it is not very selective as to where the money goes. While the government uses myriad steering mechanisms to encourage producers and consumers to cut consumption of natural resources and adopt more environmentally compatible practices, it also subsidises resource waste or at minimum materialistic attitudes. In doing so, it distorts competition at the cost of environmentally

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<sup>99</sup> Worthy of note are the Nationaler Wohlfartsindex (NWI) by Defenbach and Zieschank (2019), the indicator system developed by the Sachverständigenrat zur Begutachtung der Gesamtwirtschaftlichen Entwicklung (2010) and the Fortschrittsindex vom Zentrum für Gesellschaftlichen Fortschritt (2010). For an overview on various indicators and measuring instruments see Denkwerk Zukunft (2010c).

<sup>100</sup> See Denkwerk Zukunft (2010d).

sound production and holds back the development of sustainable economic practices and lifestyles.

According to estimates issued by the Federal Environmental Agency (UBA), environmentally harmful subsidies in the form of direct financial assistance, tax concessions and 'implicit' subsidies<sup>101</sup> amounted to more than €48 billion in 2008.<sup>102</sup> This figure would be significantly higher if the subsidies provided by the German states and municipalities, and by the European Union, were also taken into account.<sup>103</sup> At €23 billion, the largest subsidy goes to the transport sector, with almost half of the environmentally damaging subsidies falling to aviation. Environmentally harmful energy generation and consumption is subsidised to the tune of €17.7 billion. The construction and housing sector received €7.2 billion in 2008, while close to €300 million went to agriculture.<sup>104</sup>

#### *Example I: Commuting allowance*

One example of environmentally harmful subsidies in the transport sector involves Germany's commuting allowance. Employees who drive to work may claim a tax deduction in an amount of 30 cents for each kilometre travelled between their home and their place of employment. As a result, the government collected some €4.4 billion less in tax revenue in 2008.<sup>105</sup>

Over time, these rules have partly been responsible for people choosing to live further and further away from their places of work.<sup>106</sup> For many

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<sup>101</sup> This includes hidden concessions like guarantees which do not directly affect the budget, and the economic benefits derived from free allocation of emission permits. See UBA (2010b), p. 2.

<sup>102</sup> See loc. cit., p. 2. Estimates by Greenpeace indicate almost €35 billion for 2007. See Greenpeace (2008).

<sup>103</sup> See UBA (2010b), p. 2.

<sup>104</sup> The biggest share of agricultural subsidies flows, however, from the EU and is not accounted for in the sum stated.

<sup>105</sup> See BMF (2010).

<sup>106</sup> While in 1996, 52 percent of employees travelled less than 10 km between home and work, that figure had dropped to 46 percent in 2008. At the same time, the number of people whose workplace was at least 25 km from their home rose from 13 to a good 16 percent. See Statistisches Bundesamt (2009).

employees, there is no financial incentive for them to live in close proximity to their workplace. This increases the volume of traffic on the roads and thus transport-related pollution. It also fosters the trend towards using private cars because public transport services are generally poor in less populated areas. In addition, the commuting allowance increases land use and contributes to urban sprawl, which in turn threatens biodiversity. If these negative environmental impacts were integrated into housing costs,<sup>107</sup> it would deflate the argument that living in the suburbs or even out in the country is cheaper than in the city.

For this reason, the commuting allowance should be gradually reduced and completely withdrawn in the longer term. For a limited period, employees who travel long distances for either work-related or social reasons and incur high travel costs as a result could be treated as hardship cases.<sup>108</sup>

*Example II: Electricity and energy-related tax abatements for the manufacturing industry and for farming and forestry*

To avoid harming their international competitiveness, businesses in manufacturing industry and in farming and forestry are taxed at 60 percent of the regular taxation rate for electricity, natural gas and liquefied gas. They are charged 73 percent of the prevailing tax rate for heating oil. In 2008, this resulted in a loss of tax revenue amounting to no less than €2.4 billion.<sup>109</sup> For the 120,000 businesses that enjoyed these tax concessions, they lessened any incentive to reduce energy consumption.

This is why energy tax concessions should also be gradually withdrawn<sup>110</sup> – all the more so because many of the recipient businesses incur neither high specific energy costs nor do they operate in international markets.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> See also Section 5.4.

<sup>108</sup> The Federal Environmental Office (UBA) has proposed that under certain circumstances, travel costs could be recognised as exceptional expenses and be deducted from income tax. See UBA (2010b), p. 9.

<sup>109</sup> See loc. cit., p. 4.

<sup>110</sup> See also loc. cit., p. 7.

The current provision of subsidies burdens the public purse in two ways: through greater expenditure and reduced revenue at the time the subsidies are paid out, and in the form of damage caused by environmentally harmful practices. Environmentally damaging subsidies and state promotion of materialistic lifestyles must thus be curbed and eventually withdrawn altogether. In addition, new laws and amendments to existing laws must be assessed for their environmental impact and any unavoidable negative impacts must be justified in detail.

#### 5.4 Reducing resource consumption

The state must also create the conditions needed to ensure that industry and society use fewer resources. On the one hand, it must call for the development of products and processes that use existing resources in the most efficient way possible. On the other, it must make resource use more expensive. But above all, it must set an example and, in its own procurement policy, give preference to resource-conserving products and processes and ensure that products are used for as long as reasonably possible.

##### *Public procurement as a role model*

Together, the German government, German states and municipalities spend an annual €260 billion on the procurement of goods and services.<sup>112</sup> Of that, some €50 billion goes to environment-focused growth markets.<sup>113</sup> The most important of these are transport and traffic, building construction and refurbishment, the energy and water sector, and information technology and electrical appliances.<sup>114</sup> To use the state's consi-

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<sup>111</sup> See Thöne et al. (2010), p. 224.

<sup>112</sup> See BMU (2008a), p. 1.

<sup>113</sup> See McKinsey (2008), p. 12.

<sup>114</sup> See loc. cit.

derable market power<sup>115</sup> for environmentally sound, climate-friendly products and services, and to reduce resource consumption, stricter criteria must be introduced for environmentally friendly, resource-conserving procurement and compliance with those criteria must be regularly monitored.<sup>116</sup> Further, lighthouse projects are needed, such as the nation-wide use of hybrid buses in public transport.<sup>117</sup> In addition, the vehicles in the fleets operated by the government, the German states and the municipalities could gradually be replaced with low-carbon, resource-sparing models. The use of organic, regionally produced and fairly-traded foodstuffs<sup>118</sup> could also be prescribed for all publicly subsidised canteens and cafeterias. This might make procurement more expensive for a brief initial period, but in the longer term it would ease the public purse – and the higher costs would be offset by withdrawing environmentally harmful subsidies.<sup>119</sup>

### *Increased energy and resource efficiency*

Although in Germany the use of energy and of other natural resources is now far more efficient than it used to be,<sup>120</sup> there is still huge potential for increased efficiency.<sup>121</sup> To exploit this potential, binding EU-wide efficiency standards must be introduced for buildings, vehicles and energy-intensive products,<sup>122</sup> and ambitious energy saving targets must be presc-

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<sup>115</sup> For example, over 50 percent of passenger buses sold in Germany are bought by public transport firms. See McKinsey (2008), p. 3 (summary).

<sup>116</sup> In early June 2011, the German cabinet agreed to amend the regulations on the award of public contracts (Vergabeverordnung) to ensure the procurement of only the most energy-efficient products in terms of production and use. See Bundesregierung (2011b).

<sup>117</sup> See McKinsey (2008).

<sup>118</sup> The latter was called for, for example, by the German Advisory Council for Sustainable Development in 2010. See RNE (2010), p. 6.

<sup>119</sup> See Section 5.3.

<sup>120</sup> Since 1990, energy productivity has risen by almost 39 percent, while raw materials productivity has risen by almost 47 percent since 1994. See Statistisches Bundesamt (2011).

<sup>121</sup> This applies, for example, to building insulation. See WBGU (2011), p. 148.

<sup>122</sup> See WBGU (2011), p. 16.

ribed for the period beyond 2020.<sup>123</sup> To make these targets more achievable, funding for research on efficient technology must be stepped up. Care must be taken, however, to ensure that the social implications of such technology are taken into account.<sup>124</sup> This also applies for all state-funded research programmes aimed at increased resource efficiency and improved environment protection.

*Internalising external costs to make resource consumption more expensive*

In relation to production factors like capital and employment, natural resources are cheap. This is especially the case regarding non-renewable energy. Consideration is given neither to the fact that sooner or later a substitute must be found, nor to the considerable burden its use places on the environment.<sup>125</sup> If these costs were taken into account in full, resource prices would tangibly rise and less resource-intensive products and processes would become more attractive to the consumer. If, for example, the external costs of electricity generation from coal and nuclear power were included in the price of energy, such electricity would become twice as expensive (at 10.5 cents per kilowatt hour) and thus exceed by around 3 cents the price of electricity generated from wind energy and hydropower.<sup>126</sup> Timely calculation and publication of these costs would help inform consumers about the consequences of their economic activities, both for the environment and for themselves.

The state can factor in these external costs via either taxation or emissions trading. The latter has the advantage that it can be linked to volume restrictions.<sup>127</sup> It should, however, be developed at EU level. And it must be made simple to administer, and be equipped with clear emission cei-

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<sup>123</sup> This applies, for example, to the EU requirement to increase energy efficiency by 20 percent by 2020.

<sup>124</sup> See also p. 44.

<sup>125</sup> See Miegel (2010), p. 122.

<sup>126</sup> See Denkwerk Zukunft (2011b), Denzähl May.

<sup>127</sup> See also WBGU (2011), p. 11.

lings. In the longer term, a global emissions trading scheme must be striven for in which the allocation of emissions permits to individual member states occurs relative to the size of their populations. National allowances could be swapped for tradable certificates and be traded both bilaterally and multilaterally.<sup>128</sup>

### *Banning extremely environmentally harmful products*

Further, efforts must also be made to ban extremely environmentally harmful or symbolic products like plastic carrier bags.<sup>129</sup> The use of environmentally damaging plastic bags can also be reduced by a system like the one used in Germany, where producers of plastic bags are required to pay into the country's Dual System<sup>130</sup> for recycling and reuse. This pushes the price of a plastic bag up to as much as 30 cents. As a result, the annual 65 plastic bags per person used by shoppers in Germany are far less than the EU average.<sup>131</sup> Nonetheless, behavioural patterns can be altered significantly faster by actually banning a product rather than making it more expensive.

## 5.5 Assuring material security

For people to adopt less materialistic lifestyles, both the state and society must assure that the loss of material wealth is borne by everyone and poses no threat to an individual's existence. In practical terms, this means

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<sup>128</sup> See WBGU (2009), p. 23.

<sup>129</sup> The European Commission is also considering restricting the use of plastic bags. It has invited the public to air opinions online about how this can best be achieved. See European Commission (2011b).

<sup>130</sup> Germany's Dual System, alongside public waste management, is a supplementary waste management system for the disposal of packaging waste. Private waste management companies collect the packaging on the customer's behalf, for example through the use of yellow bags for recyclables. Customers can be both producers and retailers which, under the packaging regulation introduced in 1991, are under obligation to take back their transport packaging and to either reuse it or forward it for recycling. See DSD (2010) and BMU (2008b).

<sup>131</sup> On an EU average, some 500 plastic carrier bags are used per person per year. However, international comparisons on the use of plastic bags are subject to uncertainties. See European Commission (2011b).

that high levels of employment and fully functional social security systems must be further guaranteed, and that unreasonable social hardship be avoided. New approaches must be developed both in privately funded and state-promoted research.

*Example I: Securing high levels of employment*

Guaranteeing a high level of employment should be significantly easier in future than it has been in recent decades. This is due to three trends: changes in population structures, a growing demand for work-intensive services, and shifts in the relative cost of different production factors.

In the past, population structures were marked by a high percentage of people in employment, a constantly growing number of older people, and a gradually shrinking percentage of children and teenagers. In future, the population will shrink overall. The fastest and strongest decline will be seen in the 20 to 64 age group, while the percentage of those over 64 will rise apace. While some 61 percent of the population are aged between 20 and 64, this figure will have dropped to just under 53 percent in about 40 years' time – assuming net immigration of an annual 200,000 mostly younger people. In absolute terms, this represents a decline of 11 million employable individuals, while the number of non-employable people – particularly those over the age of 79 – will rise by 6.6 million.<sup>132</sup> An upward adjustment of the official retirement age can do little to alter the situation.

This is closely linked to growing demand for work-intensive personal services whose productivity can only be marginally increased, if at all, through more capital investment and the application of knowledge. In terms of the trends in age structures, the healthcare and long-term care

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<sup>132</sup> The figures stem from the 12th population estimates issued by the Statistisches Bundesamt, Variant 1-W2. See Statistisches Bundesamt (2009).



sector is seen as a dynamic growth market.<sup>133</sup> But what this also means is that unlike before, the economic trend goes hand in hand with a disproportionate increase in employment.

The switch to an eco-economy will have a positive impact on the labour market. In the past, knowledge and capital have displaced human labour in the production process. The reasons included comparatively strong increases in labour costs. In future, the use of knowledge and capital is likely to aim to reduce resource consumption, meaning energy use. The price of raw materials, including fossil fuels, and the cost of polluting the environment with harmful substances are expected to rise significantly faster than the costs of labour. As a consequence, labour will become comparatively cheaper and will enjoy greater use.<sup>134</sup>

This improves employment opportunities for non-skilled and low-skilled workers. However, their income opportunities will remain low in the face of a strong increase in the costs of resources and environmental protection, and they may even sink, which would in turn widen the gap between income groups.<sup>135</sup> Social tensions could severely threaten the transition to less materialistic lifestyles. This is why they must be countered at an early juncture.

This is possible, albeit only to a limited extent, if the number of the non-skilled and low-skilled workers is reduced to the necessary minimum. This is a challenge for immigration policy and notably education policy. The latter is the key to the whole. Education policy that is in keeping with the times relies on greater permeability of the education system, which calls for greater promotion of languages, the opening of universities to people with occupational qualifications, and the expansion of job-related further

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<sup>133</sup> Estimates by IAB indicate that the demand for professional carers will rise by 60 percent, from 561,000 to 900,000, in the period 2010 to 2020. See Pohl (2010).

<sup>134</sup> See Denkwerk Zukunft (2011c).

<sup>135</sup> In a study conducted by the OECD, the income gap between the highest and the lowest decile of earners has significantly widened in most OECD countries since the beginning of the 1980s. The OECD sees no indication that this trend will be reversed in the near future. See OECD (2011a).

education and training. In addition, people from all societal groups must have access to management positions if they have the right qualifications.<sup>136</sup>

Further, the state must try to balance the growing inequality in prevailing incomes by financing social security – where possible and meaningful – from tax revenue rather than mandatory contributions. This would not only expand the tax base, but would also ensure those who are able to pay more do so via progressive income tax rates, while those on low incomes would pay less tax than they do today.<sup>137</sup> By contrast, there should be no illusion regarding higher taxes on wealth. A large part of taxable wealth is tied up in homes, offices and productive capital in businesses that provide jobs. Instead, material inequality should be combated by means of targeted asset-building, particularly among financially disadvantaged groups.

#### *Example II: Mitigating underlying risks*

In times of stagnating or dwindling public funds and rising social expenditure, the state must restrict social security provision to general, tax-financed basic benefit. This would prevent those with low incomes, especially the elderly, from slipping into poverty. It would also meet people's demands to keep income gaps as narrow as possible.<sup>138</sup> If the state restricts old-age, health, long-term care and unemployment insurance to a basic benefit, it would take in the principles of subsidiarity and make the social security system more resilient in the face of demographic change. Proposals for how to achieve this are already available.<sup>139</sup> They must,

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<sup>136</sup> See Hartmann (1995), Hartmann (2004) and Hartmann/Kopp (2001).

<sup>137</sup> In Germany, those with lower incomes are subject to higher taxation than they would be in many other early industrialised countries. In 2010, for example, single parents on low incomes had to pay 30 percent of their gross income, including the employer's social insurance contributions, in tax and social security payments, and thus 14 percentage points more than the OECD average. See OECD (2011b).

<sup>138</sup> See Ernst Freiberger Stiftung (2010), p. 30 f.

<sup>139</sup> Examples include IWG Bonn's solidarity-based basic benefit in old age, and the concept of a basic income proposed by the former Minister President of Thuringia, Dieter Althaus. And in its first pro-

however, be adapted to take account of ongoing demographic and economic trends.

*Example III: Curbing unreasonable hardship caused by rising resource prices*

Another key responsibility of the state, and also of society in general, is to curb the unreasonable hardship that would threaten social cohesion and which the financially disadvantaged would otherwise suffer if resources such as energy and food were to become more expensive. To a certain extent, this can be done by linking transfer payments to inflation, as is the case in Germany with unemployment benefit (Arbeitslosengeld II) and statutory basic benefit. But other measures will also be needed because low income households must spend a disproportionate share of their incomes on those goods that, depending on the situation, are likely to become far more expensive. For this reason, special benefit supplements will be necessary which go beyond the general payments to compensate for inflation. These must not, however, be calculated in such a way that financially disadvantaged households are not touched at all by the targeted rise in the cost of energy and other resources.<sup>140</sup> They must also restrict their resource consumption according to their abilities.

## 5.6 International cooperation

Because the negative impacts of materialistic economic practices and lifestyles have long ceased to be limited to early industrialised countries and because these countries are largely responsible for environmental degradation in less developed countries, international cooperation is key. As studies have shown, in the period 1990 to 2008, five times as much CO<sub>2</sub> was emitted in the production of export goods targeted for early in-

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posal, the Hartz Commission also suggested that unemployment benefit (Arbeitslosengeld I) be calculated in the same way for everyone and that it be subject to a cut-off date.

<sup>140</sup> See Section 5.4.

dustrialised countries than those countries had saved in their domestic production.<sup>141</sup>

At the same time, cooperation aimed at cultural renewal increases the acceptance and the effectiveness of any measures adopted. But up to now, there are few convincing global structures which serve in changing materialistic economic practices and lifestyles in early industrialised countries, in timely establishment of less resource-intensive production and consumption in late industrialised countries, and in ensuring globally equitable distribution of the costs of damage caused in late industrialised countries by the growth and material wealth-focused policies of early industrialised countries. As a result, many early industrialised countries – especially those in Europe – must be won over to the idea of cultural renewal and develop institutions, regulations and mechanisms for global cooperation.

Proposals already exist that are worthy of consideration.<sup>142</sup> Germany needs to take action at several levels: at EU level, as a G20 country, in alliance with key emerging economies like China, India and Brazil, and as a member of the United Nations. For example, Germany should take its energy switch decisions before the EU and insist that they be integrated into a sustainable EU energy strategy that stretches beyond 2020.<sup>143</sup> As for the other levels, Germany must use its influence to ensure that, as called for by the WBGU,<sup>144</sup> targets and organisational structures are agreed at the Rio+20 conference which will lead to less resource-intensive production, consumption and lifestyles.

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<sup>141</sup> See Peters et al. (2011).

<sup>142</sup> See WBGU (2011).

<sup>143</sup> Up to now, key EU agreements like to Europe 20-20-20 Strategy, which aims to reduce greenhouse gases and energy consumption by 20 percent by 2020, and to cover 20 percent of energy demand from renewable energy sources, only apply until 2020. See European Commission (2011c).

<sup>144</sup> See WBGU (2011), p. 19 ff.



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