



Psychological resources for sustainable lifestyles

A report from

Denkwerk Zukunft – Foundation for cultural renewal

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Introduction

The manner in which the populations of the early industrialized countries – and increasingly also those of the newly industrialized countries – produce and consume is not sustainable, as it exceeds the limits to the carrying capacity of the Earth. Sustainability therefore requires us to come back within these limits, and this in turn demands a multi-faceted transformation of individuals and society, not least in terms of culture.

As a contribution to this transformation, in the report “Altering attitudes - From a culture of consumerism to a culture of prosperity”¹, published in 2011, Denkwerk Zukunft set out suggestions as to how individuals and society can overcome outmoded but deeply-rooted patterns of thought and behaviour. These suggestions focus above all on the mobilization of individuals and groups by means of information and education as well as on changes in the regulatory framework such as reductions in environmentally damaging subsidies or providing reliable safeguards against basic risks.

But this is not enough to bring about changes in human behaviour on the scale required. In fact, such changes would require meeting psychological conditions which have been the subject of little research to date. Why, for example, can one person abandon a materialistic lifestyle with relative ease, whereas another will cling on doggedly to old habits?

A study group from the Ernst Freiberger Foundation, led by the Denkwerk Zukunft, considered these issues already in the year 2010 and published its reflections in the report "Content, despite declining material prosperity"². One of its findings was that an individual's life satisfaction depends not just on social and political conditions but is to a very substantial degree self-determined. And this also means that everyone is able to actively contribute to their own life satisfaction.

1 "Altering attitudes - From a culture of consumerism to a culture of prosperity ", Report from Denkwerk Zukunft, Bonn, August 2011, 76 pp.

(URL: <http://www.denkwerkzukunft.de/index.php/englishdocuments/index/MemoBW-Eng>)

2 "Zufrieden trotz sinkenden materiellen Wohlstands", Memorandum der Arbeitsgruppe "Zufriedenheit" des Ameranger Disputes der Ernst Freiberger-Stiftung, Amerang, März 2010, 45 S.

(URL: <http://www.denkwerkzukunft.de/index.php/aktivitaeten/index/MemoZufriedenheit>)

It is likely that a sustainable lifestyle can make an especially significant contribution to individual life satisfaction. How to support and encourage such a lifestyle is the subject of this report, written for the Denkwerk Zukunft by the environmental psychologist Marcel Hunecke. In his study, he asks what psychological resources are available to people to help them build their own personal satisfaction to a significant degree on non-material foundations, and how to access and use those resources.

Bonn, June 2013

Meinhard Miegel

Summary

Continual growth in material wealth is not compatible over the long term with the principle of sustainable development. It has long been clear now that technological innovation and organizational efficiency gains alone will not make our societies sustainable. Over and above this, a cultural transformation is necessary, one which includes changes in human experience and behaviour. These changes will not be brought about solely through the promulgation of political or economic blueprints such as sufficiency or postmaterialism; they also have to offer prospects for the enhancement of personal happiness in a sustainable society at the level of the individual. In the early industrialized countries, it is barely possible to raise subjective well-being through increases in material wealth. Within the context of a cultural transformation towards a post-growth society, therefore, people should be supported in developing their own internal psychological resources for ensuring subjective well-being independent of material wealth.

On the basis of the Pleasure-Accomplishment-Meaning theory of subjective well-being, six psychological resources – the capacity for pleasure, self-acceptance, self-efficacy, mindfulness, the construction of meaning, and solidarity - are identified and analyzed in terms of the psychological functions they can perform in a cultural transformation towards sustainable lifestyles. This analysis brings together insights from positive psychology, the resource-oriented counselling approach, environmental psychology and socio-ecological research which have not previously been brought into a systematic correlation.

The six psychological resources can be strengthened through targeted measures in different applications such as health promotion programmes or counselling and coaching settings. They can also be supported in different organizational or institutional settings such as schools, higher education institutes, firms, nonprofit organizations or in the wider community.

There is a conscious focus throughout on the individual as starting point for a cultural transformation towards sustainable lifestyles. Potential objections to this are the psychologizing of sustainable lifestyles, an insufficient scientific base and the overvaluation of individuals' experiences of happiness. The scope and the limitations for supporting psychological resources for sustainable lifestyles are subjected to a critical examination against the background of these three objections.

1. Initial situation and definition of the problem

The observations which follow proceed from four premises which are not questioned again in the subsequent course of the argument:

1. A continual growth in material wealth is not compatible over the long term with the principle of sustainable development.
2. It is barely possible to raise subjective well-being in the early industrialized countries through increases in material wealth. The ecological and social costs which thereby arise are entirely out of proportion to any achievable increase in subjective well-being.
3. The transition to sustainable lifestyles requires a cultural transformation. Short-term adaptations achieved by means of technological innovations and organizational efficiency gains will not be sufficient for this purpose.
4. A cultural transformation requires psychologically sound measures to be adopted by a majority among the populations of the early industrialized countries. The promulgation of abstract political or economic blueprints for sustainability is not an effective strategy for this purpose. Instead, self-reflexive processes have to be adopted at the individual level and embedded into concrete everyday practice.

In what follows, four fields of knowledge will be brought together in order to promote, on a sound psychological basis, a cultural transformation towards sustainable lifestyles: socio-ecological research, environmental psychology, positive psychology and the resource-oriented counselling approach. Areas of overlapping content and conceptualization have already been identified between individual knowledge fields. The reciprocal interactions between environmental psychology and socio-ecological research (Hunecke, 2003) represent one example; another is those between positive psychology and the resource-oriented approach in psychological counselling and psychotherapy (Loth, 2003). In the same way, socio-ecological research is incorporating the insights of positive psychology under the heading of happiness research (Hosang, 2007). However, until now all four knowledge areas have not been systematically related to each other either in respect of the construction of a common

theoretical approach or with a view to developing strategies for the promotion of sustainable lifestyles.

1.1 The Pleasure-Accomplishment-Meaning theory of subjective well-being as the basis for the promotion of non-material sources of life satisfaction

Subjective well-being is a central target measure for the promotion of non-material sources of life satisfaction and a cultural transformation towards sustainable lifestyles. If those living now do not believe that their future lives in a sustainable society will be good or pleasant compared with alternative life models, then we cannot expect them to undertake long-term changes in behaviour geared towards a post-material and sustainable way of life. Strategies for the promotion of sustainable lifestyles therefore first have to be developed on the basis of a theory of subjective well-being which will need to meet the following four conditions:

1. it must refer to the subjective dimensions of quality of life and thereby take account both of cognitive aspects of life satisfaction (the remembering self) as well as of emotional aspects of subjective well-being (the experiencing self),
2. it must make reference to the psychological influences on subjective well-being, which can be changed by psychological interventions in order to increase subjective well-being,
3. in so doing it must take account in different ways not only of the dangers but also of the positive effects of material wealth for subjective well-being,
4. and it must demonstrate links to the non-material sources of subjective well-being.

1.2 The Pleasure-Accomplishment-Meaning theory of subjective well-being

Among the multitude of wise doctrines and philosophical reflections, three general strategies for how to live a good life can be identified which all in specific ways support subjective well-being: the experience of pleasure, the accomplishment of aims and the construction of meaning. And these three strategies are not mutually exclusive, but can in fact quite easily be pursued in parallel. After all, subjective well-being that is founded on a three-fold base will also enhance the likelihood of a sustainable lifestyle. As the empirical findings of Brown und Kasser (2005) demonstrate, subjective well-being and ecological behaviour stand in a positive correlation to one another when each of them is buttressed by intrinsic – that is, explicitly non-material – values and by mindfulness.

The derivation of the Pleasure-Accomplishment-Meaning theory of subjective well-being from the insights of positive psychology and resource-oriented counselling is described in more detail in Hunecke (2013). The connections between the Pleasure-Accomplishment-Meaning theory and the programme of cultural transformation towards non-material sources of life satisfaction and sustainable lifestyles are also set out there.

Of particular importance are six psychological resources which can support this cultural transformation at the level of individual behaviour. Table 1 sets out the relationship between the six psychological resources and the three strategies for living a good life, and identifies their psychological functions in the cultural transformation towards sustainable lifestyles. In Chapter 2, which follows, the six psychological resources and their significance for sustainable lifestyles are described in detail.

Table 1: Strategies for leading a good life and the associated psychological resources, psychological functions and positive emotions

Strategy for leading a good life	Mental Resource	Psychological Function	Positive Emotion
Hedonism	Capacity for pleasure	Intensity of experience rather than multiplicity of experience Promotion of non-material sources of pleasure	Sensual Pleasures Aesthetic-intellectual well-being
Achieving aims	Self-acceptance Self-efficacy	Greater independence from social processes of comparison Strengthening capacity for action	Life satisfaction Pride Flow
Meaning	Mindfulness Construction of meaning Solidarity	Orientation towards goals beyond the individual Motivation to collective action	Serenity Security Belonging Trust

2. Psychological resources to increase subjective well-being

There are six psychological resources which can be expected to raise the importance of non-material sources of people's life satisfaction and thus to contribute to a sustainable lifestyle. They are (1) the capacity for pleasure, (2) mindfulness, (3) self-acceptance, (4) self-efficacy, (5) the construction of meaning, and (6) solidarity. These resources do not operate in the same way or with the same intensity in furthering subjective well-being stemming from non-material sources. The capacity for pleasure, self-acceptance and self-efficacy are resources that constitute the foundation for a strong personality, one which – as the humanistic view of human nature holds – is characterized by the pursuit and realization of one's own needs and aims. A personality strengthened in this way, however, is not restricted in terms of the aims of its activity. So it is perfectly possible for a confident person with a proper capacity for pleasure and high expectations of self-efficacy to follow a lifestyle that is very materially intensive and therefore not very ecologically sustainable.

Foundational and directional resources

This is why the three foundational resources have to be complemented by the three directional resources of mindfulness, meaning-construction and solidarity if an orientation with non-material sources of happiness is to be achieved. The three directional resources cannot guarantee a focus on non-material sources of happiness but can only increase its likelihood. In this sense, the three directional resources do not provide specific value content either, but they set in train processes of reflection out of which new values can emerge or already extant values can be strengthened. In this, the three directional resources are distinguished by differences in the substantive focus of the reflection processes initiated. 'Meaning-construction' can be considered as largely neutral in substantive terms in this context, as it merely sets the goal of continually updating, in a lifelong process, the search for meaning in one's life. The substantive content of this meaning is entirely indeterminate and need only demonstrate a certain level of coherence in order to be able to give the individual a feeling of security.

The psychological resource of solidarity serves to strengthen collective action and thus augments feelings of social belonging. However, the goals of solidaristic action are not by any means fixed thereby, but have to be determined first via further processes of reflection. Otherwise there is a danger that the solidaristic action will be limited to the immediate social sphere rather than encompassing humanity as a whole. This universalistic perspective on humanity, together with the associated assumption of inter- and intra-generational social obligations, provides the normative basis for a sustainable development.

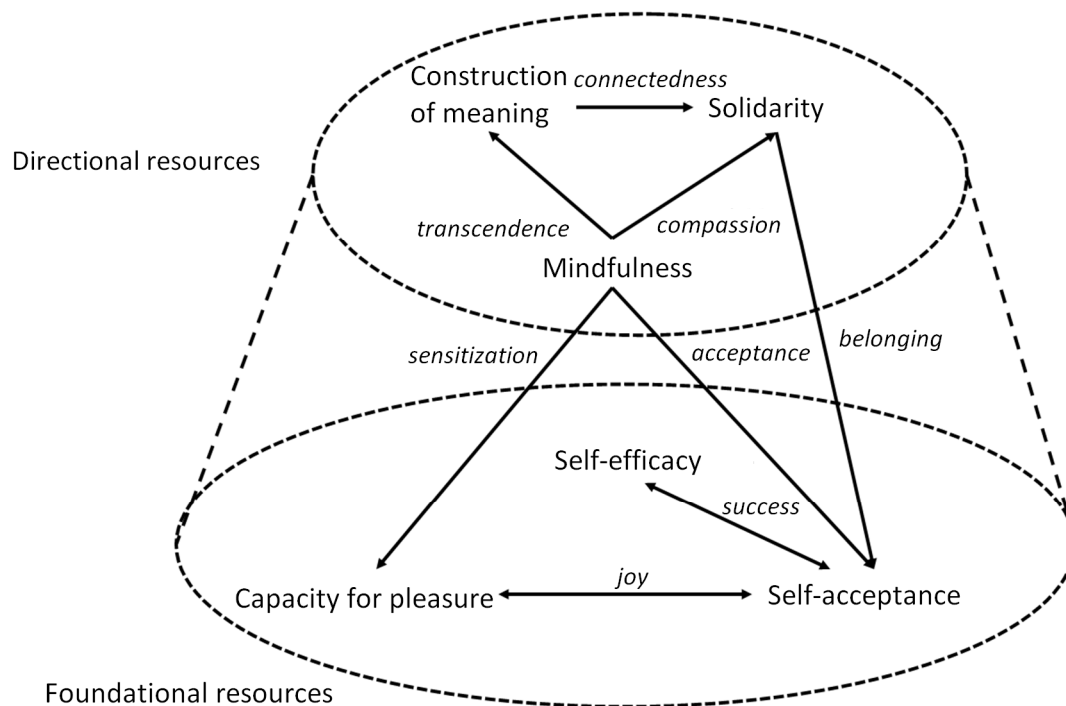
Since the two directional resources of meaning-construction and solidarity cannot by themselves ensure a focus on post-growth and sustainability goals, a special articulating function between the foundational and the directional resources is played by mindfulness. Thus, a mindful basic disposition holds the greatest potential for transcending the self-centred focus in one's behaviour and for opening it up to a universalist perspective while remaining free of specific convictions about the nature of the world. This directional function of mindfulness is initially a result of the conscious perception of one's own feelings and needs. In a second step, the perceptual perspective is then widened to take in the feelings and needs of other people and other living things. This in turn is a prerequisite for an orientation towards supra-individual aims and values which go beyond one's own interests and thus abate the striving for material wealth and social status.

The necessity for activating both groups of resources simultaneously

In the final analysis, a transformation of aims and values towards sustainability and post-materialism can be pursued in a multitude of very different ways. The approach sketched out here is not dependent on constellations of cultural and/or historical circumstances largely beyond our influence, but rather sets out a system directed towards the activation of psychological resources. The crucial characteristic of this system lies in the fact that the six selected psychological resources are mutually reinforcing. If one of the resources, for whatever reason, cannot be

activated to a sufficient degree, one or more of the other resources can compensate for it.

Figure 1: Interrelationship between the six psychological resources for the promotion of subjective well-being



As this suggests, the six psychological resources behave like nodal points in a dynamic network which can be stimulated from differing starting points and can assume different conditions of activation accordingly (see Fig. 1). It also follows that it is not absolutely essential for the foundational resources to be activated before the directional resources. More important is to take care that both groups of resources are brought forward in a balanced way. In accordance with the Pleasure-Accomplishment-Meaning theory of subjective well-being, different activation pathways for the three strategies for leading a good life, and

thus also for the six psychological resources, are available for different people, or groups of people. These differing capacities for activation must be taken into account in the planning of measures intended to help specific target groups initiate a cultural transformation towards post-growth objectives.

2.1 Capacity for pleasure

By virtue of their sensory perception systems, human beings have the capacity to process different sense stimuli arising from their environment (e.g. visual, auditory or tactile) and from internal bodily states (e.g. movement and location in space). These are generally perceived, more or less consciously, as “pleasant – unpleasant” in content. These evaluations, fundamental to our survival, can be expanded on the basis of individual experiential and learning processes which in turn are substantially influenced by cultural factors – for example, taste preferences in foods. The capacity for pleasure thus describes an individual’s ability to connect positively perceived sensory experiences with feelings of subjective well-being. The capacity for pleasure develops differentially in people. The differences can be seen not only in preferences for differing forms of perception but also with respect to the general capacity to take pleasure. The capacity for pleasure is determined by individual beliefs and attitudes acquired over the life course.

In principle, two basic sources of pleasure can be distinguished: physical-sensory pleasures and mental, or more precisely, aesthetic-intellectual pleasures.

From the resource-based perspective, psychology has concerned itself to date only with the physical-sensory pleasures, under the heading of physical well-being (Frank, 2007). Because of the many diverse problems affecting mental well-being which arise out of physical impairment through illness or disability, support for physical well-being has proved to be an effective measure for improving the quality of life. In relevant coaching settings, the specific exercises for increasing the capacity for pleasure are

directed mainly towards physical-sensory pleasures, although aesthetic-intellectual pleasures can certainly also feature.

Pleasure as physical-sensory well-being

The following remarks are largely restricted to the sphere of promotion of physical-sensory well-being. The first reason for this is the fact that the available pool of empirical research findings is much larger. The second is that the targeted promotion of aesthetic-intellectual pleasures seems to be too complex to be achieved by means of psychologically-based interventions alone. The promotion of aesthetic-intellectual pleasures is achieved by means of processes of aesthetic education which require cooperation between a great number of actors from different fields of social activity, such as educational institutions and cultural facilities. Furthermore, in highly differentiated modern societies it seems to be extremely difficult to cultivate aesthetic pleasures that appeal to everyone equally (cf. the schemata of the aesthetics of the everyday according to Schulze 1992).

By comparison, psychologically-based approaches to the promotion of physical-sensory well-being demonstrate a greater degree of conceptual and methodological convergence. The starting-point for the promotion of physical well-being is the recognition that although physical well-being is accorded central significance in the subjective self-assessment of people's state of health, this corresponds only partially with objective health criteria (e.g. medical diagnoses) (Mayring, 2003). Following on from this, physical well-being is defined as a subjective phenomenon in which sensory stimuli "arouse physical sensations which are felt throughout the whole body or in parts of the body and are perceived and evaluated positively. They are accompanied by a connection with the subject's body that is usually conscious and is experienced as vividly sensual or pleasurable and as a state of contentment [...] Finally it is important that physical contentment is not equated with physical health or fitness and not restricted to the experience of the functional viability or performance capacity of the body" (Frank, 2007, p. 133)

Perception of sources of pleasure

The most important psychological measure for the promotion of physical well-being is sensitization towards positive sensory stimuli. Often in everyday life, sensory stimuli are not properly appreciated as sources of pleasure. To (re-)discover these positive sensory stimuli and to make space to enjoy them is the best route to physical-sensory pleasure. Sensitization towards sensory stimuli is also at the centre of psychologically-based pleasure training courses, which are used in programmes for the promotion of psycho-social health resources (Kaluza, 2011b) and for stress management (Kaluza, 2011a). These programmes are targeted explicitly at groups who do not exhibit clinical indications but who are interested in improving their health. The most important methods of sensitization towards sensory pleasures are imagination exercises (Koppenhöfer, 2007) and the behaviour-oriented practice of the implementation of rules for pleasure (Koppenhöfer, 2004). Often, increased mindfulness towards one's own body is identified as a prerequisite for increasing the capacity for pleasure (Frank, 2008, p. 75ff.). However, mindfulness here refers only to the aspect of increased attentiveness; other important features of the psychological resource of mindfulness are not included. Whereas an attitude of mindfulness aims at non-judgmental acceptance and thus tends towards a neutral evaluation of all mental states, the capacity for pleasure is explicitly geared towards a strengthening of states that are pleasant to the senses. For that reason, the capacity for pleasure as a resource is clearly to be categorized as a hedonistic strategy for the promotion of subjective well-being.

Intensity rather than quantity

In the context of the promotion of sustainable lifestyles, increasing the capacity for pleasure serves to raise the intensity of positive sensory experiences. Increasing the intensity of pleasures can compensate for the frequency of pleasurable events without decreasing the aggregate hedonistic quality of lived experience. This would meet the sustainability objective of consuming less in terms of material goods and instead deriving more subjective well-being from the sensual and sensory

qualities of goods and services. This strategy has already met with some success in the area of nutrition, where it proved possible to sensitize people so that they perceived organically-grown foods as having more intense flavours.

Positive emotions also support the realization of long-term and supra-individual goals which are the objectives of the activation, in parallel, of the psychological resources of the accomplishment of aims and the construction of meaning. In everyday life, the capacity for pleasure reinforces the motivation towards the abstract goals of sustainability and the post-growth society. Compared with the other resources, the capacity for pleasure has the advantage of raising subjective well-being in a relatively direct and straightforward manner. Sensual and sensory pleasure holds out the promise of immediate rewards, without which long-term goals and ideals can be pursued only with great difficulty. To do without hedonistic elements in a programme for the promotion of sustainable lifestyles means relying on the motivating power of goals and guiding principles alone. But this strategy has brought only limited success so far for the sustainability movement. Moreover, in line with Fredrickson's (2009) so-called Broaden-and-build theory, positive emotions, such as those which can most certainly arise out of pleasurable sensory experiences, provide the basis for personality growth. Such growth can be expected not to remain bound up in the experience of materialistic consumption but to reach outwards and upwards towards goals and visions. At this point, however, the capacity for pleasure as a foundational resource is in dire need of support from the directional psychological resources, which will be addressed in more detail in the following section.

2.2 Self-acceptance

The concept of self-acceptance denotes an important aspect of one's self-worth. Self-worth results from a multiplicity of positive and negative characteristics which people ascribe to themselves. The totality of the cognitive representations of these characteristics is also termed one's self-conception. Potreck-Rose and Jacob (2010), in a four-pillar model,

identify – in addition to self-acceptance – self-confidence, social skills and social networks as three other important aspects of self-worth.

High self-worth raises the capacity to resist the pressure to consume

Strengthening people's self-worth is especially important in the context of the promotion of non-material sources of life satisfaction because it raises the capacity to resist compensatory and ostentatious forms of consumption. High self-worth enables greater individual independence from processes of social comparison, and thus greater individual autonomy. The individual can thereby protect her- or himself against expectations placed on them by their peer group and social networks. One such expectation, for example, might be that of signalling membership of and rank within a social group symbolically through forms of material wealth. In the sections which follow, the strengthening of self-worth will be addressed with respect to all four aspects of the Pleasure-Accomplishment-Meaning theory of subjective well-being. Self-confidence is at the core of the resource of self-efficacy, and the social skills and networks will be dealt with in the context of the resource of solidarity.

The substantive core of self-acceptance consists of the fundamental accepting of one's own person (Schütz, 2000), with all its positive and negative qualities. The particular challenge which self-acceptance poses for the individual lies in the embracing of one's own negative qualities – and people living in those cultures characterized by an emphasis on achievement and excellence can usually attribute to themselves more than enough of such negative qualities. The counterpole to self-acceptance is thus self-doubt, which certainly has a positive function in performance-related contexts when what is important is to improve one's own results. With respect to self-worth, it is possible to distinguish between general judgements about the whole person and specific or partial judgements, e.g. with respect to social, performance-related or physical aspects (Schütz & Sellin, 2006). It is often found that people with low self-worth judge themselves negatively at a general level, and this can be seen in the use of expressions such as "loser" or "unpopular".

Accepting one's own strengths and weaknesses

So a first strategy for raising self-acceptance is to break down sweeping value-assumptions about oneself into specific ones. By informing people about psychological models of self-worth, it is possible to explain to them that they demonstrate strengths and weaknesses in different areas of their personality and that general negative judgements about themselves are usually too undifferentiated. The acknowledgement of strengths in specific areas of their personality, e.g. with respect to social or emotional characteristics, usually makes it easier for them to accept weaknesses in other areas, e.g. with respect to physical attractiveness or performance-related qualities (Potreck-Rose, 2007, p. 181f.).

The most important and fundamental strategy for the support of self-acceptance consists in working on one's own values and norms and on the beliefs derived from them. The aim of this work is to identify beliefs which one has internalized in one's own biography, to subject them to critical examination and then either to abandon them or to continue to use them, but in a more flexible way. The beliefs in question are distinguished by their normative content, derived from internalized values and expressed in sentences taking the forms "You must" or "You must not". McKay & Fanning (2010) describe these beliefs as core convictions and Potreck-Rose and Jacob (2003) as rules for life. In a first step, the normative principles that affect everyday life can be elucidated using methods based on autobiography such as monologue diaries. The second step is the most important: here, the aim is to liberate oneself from principles to which one no longer assents, or to which one no longer gives such a high priority. At the psychological level, what is needed here is a "clear-out and renovation" (Potreck-Rose & Jacob, 2003, p. 276). The flexible application in everyday life of these newly tested and renovated life rules represents the third and final task in the modification of values and norms.

What all of the strategies for the support of self-acceptance described here have in common is that they broaden the perspective available on oneself and thereby encourage the acceptance of all aspects of one's

personality. With respect to negatively-evaluated characteristics, this has the somewhat paradoxical outcome that one first has to accept one's own negative characteristics in order to be able to transform them in a positive way in the longer term. The purpose of self-acceptance, after all, is not to abandon the further development of one's personality and to remain stuck in the status quo. This would go counter to the humanistic view of human nature implicit in the resource-oriented approach, which emphasizes the need for personal growth. Similarly, support for self-acceptance is not intended to lead to a strengthening of narcissistic hubris. However, as most people in modern societies characterised by competitive and performance pressures tend rather to suffer from impairment to their self-worth, the likelihood of interventions having the opposite effect to that intended is relatively small.

2.3 Self-efficacy

According to Potreck-Rose and Jacob (2010), self-confidence based on evaluations of one's own competences and achievements represents a second inter-personal pillar of self-worth. Although the colloquial term self-confidence captures the phenomenon in question well enough, the term self-efficacy predominates in scientific terminology. It was introduced by Albert Bandura towards the end of the 1970s and plays a central role in his social cognitive theory of action (Bandura, 1991). "Self-efficacy is defined as the subjective certainty that one can master challenging situations by virtue of one's own competences. The challenging situations are not tasks that can be accomplished by means of simple routines, but which by virtue of their degree of difficulty necessitate courses of action requiring considerable effort and persistence." (Schwarzer, 2004, p. 12).

The judgement of the effectiveness of one's own actions is determined by two components: firstly, by expectations regarding the consequences, which relate to whether an action leads to the desired outcome; and secondly, by beliefs regarding competence, which include a judgement of whether one is actually able to successfully carry out the intended action (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy cannot be reduced to an optimistic attitude towards the future, which is described by a separate psychological

construct. Whereas optimism expresses the attitude of “everything will be all right”, self-efficacy is characterized by an attitude of “I will manage it”.

Options for increasing self-efficacy

Bandura (1997) identified four basic methods for increasing self-efficacy beliefs: (1) repeated and controlled experience of personal success; (2) modelling; (3) social persuasion; and (4) physiological factors. The four methods are listed here in order of effectiveness. This is why enabling repeated and controlled experience of personal success is the most important factor in increasing self-efficacy beliefs. This can be achieved by means of goal-setting based on one’s own needs and capabilities and of appropriate plans for the accomplishment of those goals (Potreck-Rose & Jacob, 2003, p. 207). The identification within this of partial or subordinate goals which are relatively easy to achieve raises the probability that the individual will experience successes which in turn motivate continued action in pursuit of the ultimate goal. This process reinforces self-confidence or self-efficacy, especially in those behavioural areas where successes in one’s own behaviour have been achieved. Such self-efficacy in specific areas, however, also increases the likelihood that confidence in one’s own capabilities will grow in related behavioural areas, for example spreading from health behaviour to environmental behaviour.

When an individual succeeds in achieving a good balance between partial goals and capabilities in a well-structured field of activity and with direct feedback from successes, then a state of consciousness can often arise which Csikszentmihalyi (1975) termed flow. The experience of flow is characterized by a melting together of actions and consciousness leading to a form of self-forgetting experienced as pleasurable. Flow thus describes a state of consciousness rather than a specific emotion. Certainly, the state of flow is closely connected with the strategy of goal accomplishment, as it can only be achieved when the underlying activity is directed towards a goal – even if the ultimate goal of the activity is no longer at the forefront of consciousness during the action itself. Flow activities are therefore not directly targeted at sensory or aesthetic

enjoyment; in fact, they can be fairly strenuous, or even associated with moderate pain. The decisive factor is that the person carrying out the flow activity is not overextended, but rather is able to move steadily towards their goal, e.g. climbing a mountain peak, or craft work. Ultimately, the experience of flow increases self-efficacy, since in the state of flow goals are generally achieved in a pleasurable manner (Frank 2008, p. 96), which in turn results in feelings of satisfaction and pride.

Strengthening self-efficacy in sustainable behaviour

It can be seen from the preceding remarks that self-efficacy is one of the most potent psychological resources, an important foundation for a strong personality.

However, as a foundational resource, self-efficacy does not prescribe the content of the goals it helps us accomplish. Thus, many people today certainly exhibit high self-efficacy beliefs in being able to increase their material wealth – if necessary, even at other people's expense. The social dream of the rise from dishwasher to millionaire has established itself not only in the culture of the USA as a collective self-efficacy expectation (Bandura, 2000).

For specific forms of environmental behaviour such as saving energy or the use of public transport, self-efficacy beliefs can be strengthened through the dissemination of practice-oriented knowledge or the creation of new possibilities of practical action. For a cultural transformation towards sustainable lifestyles, however, the appropriate self-efficacy expectations have not yet spread amongst a sufficiently large proportion of the population. What is needed here, in addition to a large number of people with sufficiently high individual self-efficacy, which in essence is the same thing as psychological empowerment, is a large number of people who believe in their capacity to influence processes of political decision-making. Thus, strengthening self-efficacy ultimately also supports political empowerment (Herriger, 2006, p. 197ff.) towards measures and initiatives promoting a social and cultural transformation. An increase in personal self-efficacy, however, cannot guarantee that the individual will become socially or culturally engaged. Similarly, at this

point the practical orientation of any political engagement remains indeterminate. For this reason, individual self-efficacy beliefs have to be given direction and substance by other goal-setting psychological resources if they are to contribute to sustainable development and a post-growth society. In the pages which follow, these goal-setting resources will be dealt with in more detail.

2.4 Mindfulness

The principle of mindfulness is distinguished by three features: intent, attentiveness to the present moment, and a non-judgmental mindset. Thus, to be mindful means focusing attention fully, intentionally and non-judgementally on the present moment. When understood in this way, mindfulness describes both a process (the practice of mindfulness) and an outcome (mindful awareness) (Shapiro & Carlson, 2011, p.22).

"The historical roots of the principle of mindfulness lie in the eastern meditation techniques. Particularly for Buddhism with its different traditions the development of mindfulness is an essential principle, and many different practices for the cultivation of mindfulness were developed within it. But mindfulness is not necessarily linked to one cultural or religious context. Mindfulness teachers always stress that every human being has the potential to cultivate mindfulness regardless of their cultural and religious background" (Michalak & Heidenreich, 2008, p. 67). Despite their differing historical origins, the principle of mindfulness is essentially very close to the humanistic perspective within western psychology, as both approaches assume that human beings can liberate development potential within themselves which can ultimately have a positive impact on their subjective well-being and by extension on the way people live together.

At this point, however, it is necessary to elaborate briefly on the meaning of the eastern tradition of mindfulness in order to avoid confusion with the western-influenced interpretation of subjective well-being. "The essential core of Buddhist conceptions of well-being is formed by a very central distinction between two different sources of well-being. On the one hand, the term is used to denote an emotional state which arises from

pleasurable sensory, aesthetic or intellectual stimulation. But it is also used to describe a state characterized by psychological balance and insight into nature ("Sukha"). The goal is not to achieve the first form of well-being, which is dependent on external circumstances, but to cultivate Sukha as a deeper form of well-being. To achieve Sukha is generally regarded as difficult, as it demands a sustained and intensive training in mindfulness as a prerequisite" (Heidenreich, Junghanns-Royack & Michalak, 2007, p.71).

Mindfulness – switching off the inner autopilot

Mindfulness training is practised by means of meditation-based and physically-based mindfulness exercises, such as breathing meditations, seated meditations and exercises in body awareness. The practice of mindfulness requires considerable discipline and stamina and is not aimed directly at increasing pleasure in the hedonistic sense. "Mindfulness meditation observes the things of everyday life, but not for the purposes of sensory pleasure, but rather as a guard at the gateway to the senses" (Brenner, 2011, p.99). The vigilance of mindfulness serves to restrict as much as possible the "autopilot mode" of everyday consciousness, which suppresses perception of one's own feelings and immediate surroundings in favour of automatically activated memories, fantasies and other distractions. Switching off the inner autopilot is especially effective at increasing subjective well-being when automatic thoughts are full of negative content.

The deautomatization effect of mindfulness has now been successfully applied in many therapeutic fields. The first field in which the mindfulness approach was used was that of stress management, where John Kabat-Zinn (1990) was the most important pioneer with his "mindful based stress reduction" programme (MBSR). The effectiveness of the MBSR approach has been empirically confirmed by several meta-analyses (e.g. Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt & Wallach, 2004). Therapeutic techniques based on mindfulness have similarly been used successfully in the treatment of depression and anxiety (Hofmann, Sawyer, Witt & Oh, 2010) as well as for borderline personality disorders (Kliem, Kröger & Kosfelder,

2010). In these therapeutic fields, it is above all the distancing of negative patterns of thought and the associated reduction of negative self-examination which is thought to be the central effective component of mindfulness.

Expanding consciousness by focussing on direct experience and well-being

An important prerequisite for the success of interventions based on mindfulness is that their methodological implementation must be of a very high quality. This is ensured by means of rigorous standardization of the mindfulness training programmes, usually carried out in group settings. In addition, therapists are properly trained and have several years' experience themselves in the practice of mindfulness exercises (Heidenreich & Michalak, 2008, p. 561).

The principle of mindfulness, however, was not developed for psychotherapeutic purposes, even though it finds successful application there. Rather, mindfulness is directed primarily at the everyday lived experience of the here and now, and has thus proved itself to be also a fundamental psychological resource for non-clinical target groups. So the stress-reducing or stress-preventing effects of the exercise of mindfulness are of practical benefit to groups subject to very challenging and demanding situations at work or in their private lives, e.g. counsellors and psychotherapists (Zarbock, Ammann & Ringer, 2012), and make a direct contribution to raising subjective well-being. Moreover, the exercise of mindfulness can lead to a longer-term process of change in people which goes beyond improvement of their current condition. Changes have been observed for example in people's motivation for practising meditation, such that an initial interest in aspects of self-regulation and self-discovery developed later in the direction of self-liberation and selfless engagement (Shapiro & Carlson, 2011, p. 29).

Mindfulness opens one's eyes to values beyond the self

Shapiro und Carlson summarize their findings, derived from studies of cancer patients among other sources, as follows. The practice of

mindfulness helps “a) to make people aware of unconscious and preconscious values; and b) to decide whether these values really are the ones they aspire to, that is, whether they are beneficial or whether they are only based on biological reactions or cultural conditioning; c) to evolve beneficial and meaningful values and to diminish non-beneficial ones” (op.cit. p. 30). This summary expresses the paradoxical effect of mindfulness: it increases the awareness of questions of meaning via a focus on direct experience and well-being. Thereby consciousness is expanded – which is accompanied by an increased capacity for compassion – beyond the subjective well-being of the individual to include the welfare of others or much broader transcendental connections. Seen in this way, it is also clear why mindfulness is a directional resource for a post-growth society. The exercise of mindfulness releases people from the stressful thought patterns of everyday life and opens their eyes to the needs and values that are truly important to them.

In a study of practising Buddhists, mindfulness was found to be an important predictor of a “quiet” Ego - that is, one which is not so strongly self-centred; and this in turn is linked with better self-reported health (Wayment & Wiist, 2011). Another study addressed the connection between mindfulness, discrepancies between desired and actual financial status, and subjective well-being (Brown, Kasser, Ryan, Linley & Orzech, 2009). Within this study, it was demonstrated by means of a sample of 69 people practising meditation that mindfulness is an effective intervention for strengthening people’s conviction that they “have enough material wealth”. This effect of mindfulness in the study by Brown and colleagues was consistent independent of the subjects’ income, although naturally none of those questioned were in material deprivation. This last study provides empirical evidence of the potential of mindfulness as a directional psychological resource for subjective well-being in post-growth societies: mindfulness restricts the striving for ever more material possessions and opens the eyes to other values beyond the self. Furthermore, mindfulness sensitizes the individual to questions of meaning and thus paves the way for the activation of another directional psychological resource – the construction of meaning.

2.5 Construction of meaning

If one agrees with Friedrich Nietzsche's comment in the *Twilight of the Idols* that "If one has the Why? of life, then one can accept almost any How?" (Nietzsche, 1984), then the attribution of meaning represents one of the most powerful human psychological resources. Viktor Frankl places meaning experiences at the centre of his therapeutic work and used them as the starting point for the development of his logotherapy or existential analysis (Frankl, 1982). The positive effect on health of a sense of coherence has been described in health research, and a partial aspect of this (sense of meaningfulness) is explicitly related to relations of meaning (Antonovsky, 1987). Meanwhile, empirical studies from the field of positive psychology also point to reciprocal links between the experience of meaning and subjective well-being. Thus, on the one hand, positive emotions reinforce the experience of meaning (King, Hicks, Krull, & Del Gaiso, 2006); at the same time, meaningfulness increases subjective well-being. The experience of crises of meaning, by contrast, reduces subjective well-being and increases the likelihood of experiencing negative emotions (Schnell, 2009).

Tausch (2008, p.100) provides a definition of the complex phenomenon of meaning ('Sinn') as "the meaning or evaluation we perceive or experience during an activity, an incident or event, which we produce or give to the event or activity. Usually the meaning/evaluation for the individual person is supportive, positive, affirmative, accepting, connected with a characteristic and usually positive feeling. A construction of meaning experience therefore consists of a cognition (evaluation) and an associated feeling". Tausch additionally points out that meaning can be derived from many different sources and can be experienced both as a temporary phenomenon and also over longer time periods. Meaning experiences therefore by no means always refer to an overarching meaning or purpose to life, but can most certainly also be experienced in single events of daily life. However, it is important at this point to distinguish between meaning experiences and the physical-sensory experience of pleasure. Physical-sensory pleasure experiences namely

produce a positive feeling, but do not enable a cognitive evaluation pointing to a wider coherent connection.

Creating relations of meaning at the level of the individual through the questioning of one's own values and life goals

Furthermore, in the conception of the construction of meaning as a psychological resource proposed here, the active element of meaning-construction is emphasized. The attribution or construction of a meaning indicates a process in which the individual has to produce their own meaning. For this purpose they can fall back on different options provided by cultural and religious traditions. But the selection and adaptation or re-combination of relations of meaning always has to take place actively and at the level of the individual. Frankl's view that "meaning cannot be given, but must be found" (Frankl, 2006. p. 155) is also compatible with the view advanced here, because it still expresses the necessity for an active search for meaning. At times of biographical transition like the birth of a child or retirement, it becomes particularly clear whether a person already has access to the construction of meaning, and to strategies for reflection leading to the creation of meaning relations, as one of their psychological resources, or whether they now have to develop this resource for themselves out of the new challenge they face. The process of meaning-construction is in fact possible at any time, including in the absence of critical life events, through self-chosen processes of reflection. We have already noted here, in connection with the two resources of self-acceptance and mindfulness, how the re-evaluation of one's own life goals which can sometimes be necessary for this process can be set in train by a critical examination of one's values and beliefs.

Compared with the activation of the resources described earlier, support for meaning experiences is less easy to systematize and standardize. Here, it is making meaning-experiences conscious, and the initiation of processes of reflection on one's own values and life goals, which are at the centre of the process. Of particular importance here is the creation of narratives by means of which we try to build up a meaningful reconstruction of our own life story (Kaimer, 2008). People who have

experienced their lives up to that point as a sequence of random events can increase the sense of cognitive control, and with that of subjective well-being, by means of the creation of biographical texture.

Transcendent or socially-directed values facilitate the overcoming of an individualistic-materialistic lifestyle

It has been argued up until now that the process of the construction of meaning must be open-ended. That is, there must be no attempt to convey a specific system of meaning, as this would give rise to a suspicion of ideological bias. Nevertheless, the likelihood is greater that in the course of processes for the construction of meaning either transcendent or socially-directed values will be discovered or strengthened which run counter to the individualistic materialism which is at the basis of modern consumer societies – usually in an unexamined form at the level of the individual. In principle, it is possible that the process of the construction of meaning could reflexively validate an individualistic-materialistic way of living, which of course would make the transition into a sustainable lifestyle considerably harder. But it is relatively difficult to derive lasting networks of meaning through a reflective manner of thinking from a basis of individualistic materialism alone. This is not only demonstrated by philosophical-ethical reflection on the good life, but is also confirmed by the empirical findings of positive psychology. These attribute particular importance to the cultivation of social relations, which ultimately conflicts with the long-term pursuit of an individualistic lifestyle. The cultivation of social relations, and the associated feelings of social belongingness, require social interactions which are based on shared values and convictions within a society and thus encompass more than an optimized mutual coordination of individual interests. An analysis of psychological resources for sustainable lifestyles must by this point at the latest leave the level of individual behaviour behind and step into the realm of collective action. This brings the different types of solidarity, or of solidaristic behaviour, into focus.

2.6 Solidarity

As interpreted here, solidarity as a psychological resource encompasses two aspects of collective action: firstly, an acknowledgement of a responsibility for the welfare of other people; and secondly the conviction that by acting one can bring about a real increase in well-being in interaction with others acting towards the same ends. To put it formulaically, solidarity can be understood as a combination of social responsibility and positive self-efficacy beliefs towards collective action. This interpretation corresponds in outline with a definition of solidarity given by Bierhoff and Fetchenhauer as "an emotionally-charged pattern of action motivated by altruism and based on the idea of social justice, to which the actors are committed" (Bierhoff, 2008, S. 186). This definition also includes not only normative aspects (social justice, altruism) associated with social responsibility but also a behavioural context (pattern of actions) in the sense of empowerment. Both concepts – social responsibility and empowerment – demonstrate cross-cutting links to other psychological resources of the Pleasure-Accomplishment-Meaning theory of subjective well-being. Thus, social responsibility can result from individual experiences of meaning-construction in which not only the individual's welfare but also that of other people is taken into account as a guiding principle for behaviour. Similarly, self-efficacy represents a substantial psychological resource for enabling the participation of individuals in collective processes of opinion-forming and decision-making. Nevertheless, solidaristic behaviour is not an automatic result of the activation of the two resources of meaning-construction and self-efficacy. Thus the combination of an intricate process of construction of meaning in a person with high self-efficacy can lead just as easily to an underlying attitude of contemplativeness which aspires to transcendental experiences and a withdrawal from social activity. The activation of solidarity as an additional psychological resource can nevertheless ensure the orientation of action towards other people. This gives solidarity a central role in the cultural transformation towards sustainable lifestyles, as this will not come about solely on the basis of internal reflection at the level of individuals.

Solidarity encourages well-being that is not based on material wealth

In Bierhoff and Fetschenhauer's definition, cited above, solidarity is described as an emotionally-charged pattern of action. To this should be added at this point that the experience of solidaristic action arouses in the individual above all the positive feeling of belongingness, which in turn is closely connected to the positively-charged emotions of security and trust. This activation of positive emotions underpins the status of solidarity as a psychological resource which can support subjective well-being not based on material wealth.

However, generating positive emotions is not the primary purpose of solidaristic action. Solidaristic action helps above all to achieve aims which can arise out of common but also out of differing interests (Bierhoff, 2008). Solidarity arising out of common interests corresponds broadly with the colloquial understanding of solidarity. In such cases the actors pursue aims together in an interaction which is largely rational. In micro-economic theory this form of solidaristic action is also referred to as cooperative behaviour (Axelrod & Hamilton, 1981) and is principally studied from a game theory perspective. Problem scenarios such as the prisoner's dilemma or eco-social dilemmas which illustrate the difficulties of interactive cooperation processes are analysed via game theory approaches, under assumptions of limited resources and restricted communications. However, there are plenty of historical cases which demonstrate the potential of solidaristic behaviour from a resource-oriented perspective, such as the labour movement or the anti-globalization movement. The concept of empowerment is also closely associated with this form of solidarity (Lenz, 2011). According to Herriger's (2006) distinction between psychological and political empowerment, solidarity arising out of common interests corresponds broadly with political empowerment. Both concepts thus stress the necessity on the one hand for assuming personal social responsibility and of carrying it over into collective action. At the same time, the transformation of social responsibility into practical action requires high self-efficacy beliefs to influence political decision-making processes (Herriger, 2006, p. 204).

To be sure, the resource of solidarity includes other facets in addition to political empowerment. One further aspect derives from a solidarity of differing interests, one that is more closely aligned with prosocial and altruistic values and not so much with selfish aims. Here, givers and recipients of social support are distinguished by differing interests, for example with respect to voluntary engagement and to helping behaviour. The primary aim of the help-giver is to increase the recipient's well-being. If this induces positive emotions in the giver, this is not unusual but in fact rather the rule and represents a decidedly welcome side-effect. For the recipient, on the other hand, the improvement of their own well-being is at the centre of the solidaristic interaction with the giver. Solidarity of differing interests is thus more strongly oriented to prosocial values than solidarity of common interests. In order for solidarity of differing interests to give rise to a motivation capable of effective action, other pre-conditions must be met, such as the presence of a feeling of personal moral obligation and of a belief in one's competence to help (Schwartz, 1977).

Cultivating solidarity in organizations

It should be self-evident that solidarity in the sense used here, with a particular emphasis on social responsibility and political empowerment, is a necessary condition for a cultural transformation towards sustainable lifestyles. But this raises the question of how solidarity of this kind can be actively promoted. In comparison with the five resources presented so far, it is apparent that a methodological distinction applies to solidarity, namely that it cannot be supported solely on the basis of processes of self-reflection. The development of solidarity and the accompanying turn away from individualistic behaviour not only have to happen at a cognitive level, but also have to be learnt through repeated practice in concrete interaction with others in groups or in organizations, e.g. in working with children in experiential or theatre education or in the context of the promotion of a corporate identity in business companies. However, not only solidarity but also the other five psychological resources for

sustainable lifestyles can be actively supported in social settings; this will be considered in more detail in Chapter 3, which follows.

3. Strategies for the support of psychological resources for sustainable lifestyles

Measures for strengthening the psychological resources of the capacity for pleasure, self-acceptance, self-efficacy, mindfulness, construction of meaning and solidarity are directed towards bringing about changes in the individual's processing and evaluation of information, changes intended to increase the attraction of non-material sources of life satisfaction. These measures can be applied to individuals, for example through counselling or coaching. Alternatively, they can be applied to groups of people in differing organizational or institutional settings such as schools or firms. What all the measures have in common is that they must be accompanied by communicative processes and can in no way be replaced by technological means or by pharmaceutical drugs. Within the ensemble of six psychological resources, solidarity is an exception in that in addition to the possibility of interpersonal communication it requires the possibility of interactive action. This is because it is only through relating one's own actions to those of others that interpersonal trust can arise, and this is an important foundation for solidaristic behaviour. The following section will outline how changes in individual attitudes and behaviours can be initiated in several fields of application. Table 2 summarizes the information regarding which of the psychological resources for sustainable lifestyles can be strengthened in which fields of application.

Table 2: Fields of application for the support of the psychological resources for sustainable lifestyles

Field of application	Mental resource
Health promotion	Capacity for pleasure Self-acceptance Mindfulness
Coaching	Construction of meaning Self-efficacy Mindfulness Capacity for pleasure
Schools	Self-efficacy Solidarity Construction of meaning
Firms and nonprofit organizations	Self-efficacy Solidarity Construction of meaning
Community life	Self-efficacy Solidarity

3.1 Individual level

Measures directed at individuals are most common in the health promotion field and in situations of biographical transition. Both require self-reflective analysis of one's own patterns of belief and behaviour which can be supported by counselling and coaching.

3.1.1 Health promotion

A concern with one's own health can arise from two impulses. Firstly, as a reaction to health problems that are already present, and secondly, in order to prevent such problems arising. Three of the psychological resources we have identified for the support of a sustainable development exhibit an explicit connection to the field of health promotion. Strengthening the capacity for pleasure, for example, is an established

ingredient of stress management programmes which ultimately aim at improving self-care. Increasing self-acceptance serves to raise low self-esteem and can reduce at the same time the negative secondary symptoms of many mental illnesses which are usually accompanied by a reduction in self-worth. The connection with health promotion is clearest with respect to the psychological resource of mindfulness. Its promotion is an explicit central element of stress prevention programmes (Kabat-Zinn, 1990), therapies for the treatment of depression (Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2008) and borderline personality disorders (Linehan, 1996). In addition, the psychological resource of meaning-construction strengthens powers of resistance against mental and physical illness through its positive influence on the formation of what Antonovsky (1987) calls a “sense of coherence” with respect to health.

Increasing the well-being of broad sections of the population through health promotion

The advantage of health promotion measures over therapeutic procedures lies in the fact that the former are targeted at relatively large population groups not suffering the symptoms of illness. In such non-clinical groups there is a greater likelihood that the activation of psychological resources will not only reduce the psychological stress caused by illness but will lead to real changes in patterns of thought and behaviour relevant to everyday life. Health promotion measures based on a resource-oriented health model can help not only in the prevention of physical and mental illness but can help to stabilize the individual's health at such a high level that a high degree of subjective well-being can be ensured on a lasting basis (Snyder, Lopez & Teramoto Pedrotti, 2011, p. 368ff.).

The widespread desire to eat more healthily, to be more active, or to take more rest represents for many people an important motivational starting point to take more care of their own health. Similarly, critical life events such as the loss of someone near, or biographical transitions such as retirement, can provide the impetus to take more care of oneself, including one's own health. At these points in time, or “windows of

change”, those affected are likely to be more open to measures supporting the four psychological resources of capacity for pleasure, self-acceptance, mindfulness and meaning-construction.

From the perspective of strengthening non-material sources of life satisfaction, the promotion of individual health is one of the most important target measures (e.g. Arbeitsgruppe Zufriedenheit, 2010, p. 11). However, it is not essential in this context for health behaviour to be linked with sustainable patterns of thought and behaviour. The delegation of responsibility for one’s own health to a wide variety of health experts and health services providers can result in a new form of consumer behaviour. However, the promotion of the three psychological resources already discussed, that is, the capacity for pleasure, self-acceptance and mindfulness, generally leads individuals to recognize and acknowledge their own role and responsibility in maintaining their health. Whether this motivation can be translated into long-term healthy behaviour depends not only on the strength of the motivation but also on a number of contextual factors.

3.1.2 Coaching

Coaching can be defined as “intensive and systematic support of a results-oriented process of reflection on the self and on problems together with counselling of individuals or groups towards improved achievement of self-congruent goals or towards conscious self-transformation or self-development” (Greif, 2008, p. 59). Coaching thus represents a specific form of psycho-social counselling not aimed at the treatment of mental disorders but at the personal development of the person to be coached. In general the people to be coached have a range of resources and competences and are therefore functioning at a different level to people with mental illness, who are usually only capable of coping to a limited degree with their everyday lives. As a specific form of counselling, coaching is closely linked to one’s employment situation, but is not circumscribed by it. For example, career development issues are in most cases linked to issues around personal goals and the organization of everyday life. Typical task fields in coaching courses are the building up

of competences, work-life balance, meaning-construction in one's own life, and achieving one's own goals and projects (Biswas-Diener, 2010, p. 148). Problems in these areas can be located at the level of individual competences, schemata, or motives, or at the level of social interaction (Collatz & Sachse, 2011, p. 15).

As an open-ended process, coaching can initiate voluntary and autonomous processes of change

The particular significance of coaching for the support of cultural transformation towards sustainable lifestyles derives not least from its target groups. Generally speaking, people who take coaching are seeking on their own initiative to develop their careers. This applies above all to those in business, politics and public administration who either are or aspire to be in leadership roles. In this context, going on a coaching course is less likely to be stigmatized as a sign of trouble or of weakness, as it becomes ever more apparent that the increasing complexity of everyday work and private life makes it virtually impossible for anyone to make competent decisions without some kind of support.

The work context of coaching courses means on the one hand that they are often shaped by efficiency requirements, aiming for further, higher, faster, which can of course conflict with a sustainable lifestyle. On the other hand, coaching also stimulates self-reflective processes in which personal life goals and perspectives can be critically scrutinized without the risk of falling into pathological self-interpretation. Furthermore, performance maximization coaching is designed not only for leaders in business or public institutions but also for employees in the caring professions such as doctors, therapists or social workers. Such people – just as much as leadership cadres in enterprises and institutions – are important multipliers for cultural transformation, as they interact with many others and can be role models for them in terms of their knowledge and personal behaviour.

In the context of the approach developed here for supporting sustainable development, coaching offers an opportunity for the activation and strengthening of the four psychological resources of meaning-

construction, self-efficacy, mindfulness and capacity for pleasure. It is of crucial importance that the orientation towards non-material sources of life satisfaction or towards sustainable behaviour is not seen either as an explicit or implicit goal of the coaching. In content terms, coaching courses must remain as open-ended as possible and should not convey specific values or ideologies. It can be expected however that by supporting the psychological resources of capacity for pleasure, self-efficacy, mindfulness and meaning-construction, coaching will bring into focus non-material sources of life satisfaction which had previously been relatively underused. There are few spaces for reflection in adult life where values can be discussed, changed, or perhaps reinforced, free from stress and pressures. So the advantages that coaching can bring lie above all in its capacity to initiate processes of change which are voluntary and autonomous and which reach people who, following Rogers' (2003) social diffusion theory, can act as innovative multipliers or "change agents" to kick off and support cultural transformation.

3.2 Organizational level

In the fields of applied psychology, such as environmental psychology or organizational psychology, the contexts for individual action are taken fully into account in the planning for new processes of change. Positive psychology too proclaims its intention not only to change psychological variables such as emotions and character traits but also to re-shape institutions in a more philanthropic direction (Seligman, 2002, p. XI). Thus, the social fields of application of positive psychology such as education, work, and the structure of organizations, institutions and community life are always examined in anthologies and textbooks on the subject (e.g. Lopez & Snyder, 2009; Donaldson, Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2011; Snyder, Lopez & Teramoto Pedrotti, 2011). In what follows, a distinction will be drawn within the category of organizations/institutions between schools, higher education institutions, business companies, and nonprofit organizations, which are distinguished by discrete organizational goals and characteristics.

3.2.1 School

For most people, school is not experienced as a place of well-being, but is much more commonly associated with feelings of anxiety or boredom. So the inclusion in the curriculum of teaching content relevant to happiness will not suffice to raise the subjective well-being of students unless at the same time changes are made to the organization of the school day which are aligned with the findings of resource-based educational research. To this end, teaching staff in all subjects should both adopt a resource-activating approach and also live and incorporate it as a social model.

Above all, schools should promote the well-being of students

Resource-based or positive education is based on a humanistic view of human nature which stresses the individual's capacity for development. In this view the desire to learn is a fundamental human characteristic – provided the teaching content furthers personal development and the educational settings support this objective. Starting from this humanistic perspective, school education which is based on positive psychology aims above all to promote the subjective well-being of students. Naturally, the acquisition of skills also remains a relevant goal for the school, but it is subordinate to the well-being of the students because skills are best acquired and retained over the long term by students who feel happy. Altogether, schools which align themselves with the insights of positive psychology demonstrate four general characteristics: (1) an orientation towards students' subjective well-being; (2) they create a good fit between the individual abilities and needs of the students and the educational provision; (3) they promote positive interactions between staff and students; and (4) challenging, interesting and freely-chosen learning activities (Huebner, Gillmann, Reschly & Hall, 2009, p. 565f.).

Special relevance of self-efficacy, meaning-construction and solidarity

Among the six psychological resources we have identified for the promotion of non-material sources of life satisfaction, self-efficacy, the construction of meaning, and solidarity have a special relevance in school

settings. On the one hand, schools as institutions can hardly function without any form of audit of performance and achievement. Good performance at school should be appropriately rewarded, especially when an anti-intellectual attitude prevails amongst young people. However, as far as possible every student should experience successes, within the bounds set by their abilities, so that their self-efficacy expectations are raised. This is only practicable through the use of individualized learning programmes and learning environments. The testing of performance by means of standardized test procedures in which only a few can ever emerge as the best makes it more difficult to develop positive self-efficacy expectations among the many who are not the best. It is clear that a one-sided education emphasising performance and competition pressure can only be made compatible with the aims of resource-based learning with great difficulty.

Youth is regarded as a central life-stage for the development of identity. During this stage each individual develops their own system of norms and values as well as their understanding of their role with regard to their own gender, to forms of partnership and to working life. School represents the dominant institution of this phase. It is therefore clear that schools should be considered as playing a special role in the development of identity. So from a resource-based perspective it is above all the processes of construction of meaning which should be supported in the school phase. School is the only place where young people are able to reflect together with their peers, under the professional and as far as possible value-neutral supervision of the teaching staff, on proven sources for the construction of meaning drawn from the cultural history of humankind. In general there is great demand for this amongst young people. School curricula should therefore allow sufficient free space for reflection on relations of meaning and thus for the formation of values beyond the teaching of religion or philosophy.

Solidaristic action counters aggressive individualistic consumption

Beyond this, school provides an organizational framework which is particularly well-suited to the promotion of the psychological resource of

solidarity. But the practice of interest-driven communal action will only succeed if trust has already been established between students and teachers. Performance and competition pressures create unpromising conditions for it. The same applies to forms of interpersonal communication such as e-learning which rely too much on technology and which reduce the opportunity for face-to-face communication.

In fact, the initial conditions in schools for the learning and development of solidaristic behaviour are excellent if this is undertaken as a common task by a whole class. The pursuit of self-selected goals, the mastering of self-organization processes of group dynamics and the experience of positive consequences of common action provide the best foundation for an ongoing engagement for common goals and values. So for the long-term promotion of non-material sources of life satisfaction in schools, values will need to be communicated which run counter to the ceaseless competitive struggle for social status (Layard, 2009, p. 245) which may be considered one of the main causes of the perceived need for material consumption. Solidaristic behaviour works against this aggressive consumption-based individualism, which has been propagated ever more strongly in western societies in recent decades. Schools could be the first organizations to usher in the change to a new, more solidaristic behaviour. Certainly, other organizations with comparable potential as multipliers are not yet in sight.

Examples of positive education

A number of model projects have now been carried out in which the positive psychology approach has been applied in schools. In his latest book publication, Seligman (2012) devotes a chapter entitled 'Positive Education' to this topic, and in it he outlines the results of evaluations and experiences from practice. Seligman describes in most detail here the experience of organizing the entire teaching programme of Geelong Grammar School in Australia in accordance with the tenets of positive psychology. In the course of this school project, self-standing courses have been given in aspects of positive psychology since 2005, and as far as possible the content of these courses has been fed into all other

subject areas. Seligman describes the model project as a great success, but he is also aware that he cannot generalize from his impressions because there is no other school to act as a control group with which to compare the changes in Geelong Grammar School (Seligman, 2012, p. 139).

“Happiness” was first taught as a school subject in Germany in 2007 at the Willy Hellpach School; in fact, it was taught to school students of economics over a two-year course for final years students on a grammar school pathway with a focus on economics. The course content included the tenets of positive psychology as well as the skills of healthy eating and the link between exercise and well-being. In a comparison with a control group of other students of the same age, the economics students who had taken the two-year course in Happiness gave higher ratings for the general learning and schooling environment, for their subjective well-being and for solidaristic behaviour in the class (Schubert, 2008, p. 172).

However, looking at the results of evaluation exercises makes it equally clear that it is difficult to find evidence of the impact of such new elements in the school curriculum. The model projects carried out to date involving happiness as teaching content either lack proper control groups or have evaluation timescales that are too short to allow the capture of long-term effects. Further studies applying appropriate methodological standards are required if generalizable insights are to be achieved in future.

3.2.2 Higher education

Knowledge concerning the teaching of psychological resources in higher education institutions is further advanced. Psychological resources are a part of the standard teaching content in courses on clinical psychology and counselling psychology. Here the focus is on interventions for the activation and support of psychological resources in clients. A further aim of teaching about psychological resources is to demonstrate to the counsellors and therapists possibilities for the reinforcement of their own psychological resources and thus to improve their capacity for self-management. Specific course elements on positive psychology are now included in Master’s degree courses at universities including

Pennsylvania and Claremont in the USA, London and Buckinghamshire in Great Britain and Aarhus in Denmark.

One particularity of higher education compared with schools is that the graduates need to be trained for leadership positions in their subsequent careers. This means that authentic leadership qualities must be seen as a significant factor of organizational success. Authentic leadership requires one to be able to recognize and regulate one's own emotions, to be mindful of the other people contributing to the process of leadership, to stress the capacity for change and for growth within people and organizations and while doing so to concentrate on the strengths of those people and organizations (Schreiner, Hulme, Hetzel & Lopez, 2009, p. 575f.).

Evaluation of resource-based teaching approaches still lacking

Seen from the outside, the guiding ideas for resource-based higher education are still strongly shaped by normative content (Oades, Robinson, Green & Spence, 2011; McGovern, 2011). There are enough measures in existence for the assessment of the components of well-being among higher education students (Lopez & Calderon, 2011), and there are many reports on examples of specific curriculum components for the teaching of positive psychology (Biswas-Diener & Patterson, 2011; Magyar-Moe, 2011). But for higher education just as for schools, a comprehensive evaluation of the impacts of resource-based learning environments is still lacking.

The Bologna Process is hindering education in solidaristic behaviour

In the context of the promotion of psychological resources, a special comment needs to be made with regard to the Bologna Process of reforms in the European higher education area. At the centre of this process is the standardization and modularization of knowledge and competences with the aim of establishing the international comparability of educational qualifications. The Bologna Process clearly runs counter to the aim of promoting the psychological resource of construction of meaning, and possibly other resources as well. Working one's way

through discrete teaching modules and the acquisition of the points awarded for them can of course raise the subjective well-being of successful students temporarily. But the construction of meaning is not possible via the acquisition of modularized and therefore usually fragmented knowledge, as it requires both the integration of different kinds of knowledge and a process of reflection on it from a value-based perspective. Furthermore, the objective of standardizing knowledge and competences necessitates the constant monitoring of learning, which is reflected in a continual examination and testing process. This builds up into permanent exam and performance stress on the students, which is exacerbated by the competition for jobs and for places on further courses of study. Such pressure represents the worst imaginable initial conditions for the teaching and development of solidaristic behaviour. So a cultural transformation towards a post-growth society needs not only to be proclaimed by the institutions of higher education but to take place within them as well.

3.2.3 *Firms*

The objective of commercial firms is to achieve maximum productivity at minimum cost. Firms are therefore significantly influenced in their decisions by efficiency criteria. Following this logic, the subjective well-being of employees becomes a focus of attention for firms when it impacts positively on productivity. The workforce is now an important productive factor for firms in highly developed industrial and service economies: employees who feel happy perform better and thus increase firm productivity (Ruckriegel, 2012). Against this background, employees' psychological resources can be seen as psychological capital, investment in which for the purposes of maintaining or raising efficiency will be worthwhile for a firm. An individual's attitude to work, however, is not only determined by psychological resources or personal characteristics but also and very substantially by the organizational structure of the firm. And organizational structures can be shaped in such a way that they support the development of psychological resources.

Shaping organizational structures so that they support self-efficacy, meaning-construction and solidaristic behaviour

The most comprehensive systematic analysis of organizational psychology measures developed from the perspective of positive psychology was undertaken by Donaldson and Ko (2010). In their review they identify 19 thematic foci in 172 peer-reviewed research articles published on this topic between 2001 and 2009 in 70 different academic journals. None of the six psychological resources for the promotion of non-material sources of life satisfaction is directly cited as a measurement of positive organizational development here. However, the resource of self-efficacy is considered indirectly, as one component of psychological capital. Even if the psychological resources for the promotion of non-material sources of life satisfaction are not at the centre of the measures for organizational development, two further psychological resources in addition to that of self-efficacy can be identified as being supported by firms in the context of personnel development: construction of meaning and solidaristic behaviour.

However, measures for the support of construction of meaning and solidaristic behaviour will only serve to further sustainable development if they are not exclusively intended to pursue the goals of the individual firm in its competitive struggle with other firms. These psychological resources acquire their significance when they are linked to objectives which go beyond the goals of the firm. Self-efficacy should therefore be strengthened not only with respect to purely technical or firm-specific skills but with respect to all areas of the conduct of life, e.g. communicative or social skills. Construction of meaning should not only be applied to the goal of profit maximization for the firm, but should be used to locate the work of the firm in a broader social or transcendent context. And solidaristic behaviour should be taken to apply not just to colleagues in the firm but beyond them to as many groups of people as possible, and as large as possible. The impulse to extend the perspective of the psychological resources beyond the interests of the firm comes usually not from within the firm itself but is brought into the firm from the outside through societal and cultural processes of reflection. An example

is the Corporate Social Responsibility approach, which stresses the responsibility of the firm to the whole of society, including to the objective of sustainable development (Hahn, 2012).

Work-life balance can prevent compensatory forms of material consumption

Above all it is the work-life balance of employees which is particularly significant for the promotion of non-material sources of life satisfaction. People who in the organization of their daily lives are substantially constrained by the demands of paid work and who can find little time for relaxation and self-reflection will find self-development in the psychological sense very difficult to achieve. The consequences of a continuous high level of psychological stress at work are alienation and a sense of meaninglessness. The lack of autonomy and purpose they feel then increases the likelihood that people will fall back on compensatory forms of consumption in order to give themselves at least a short experience of subjective well-being. However, if they have enough time outside work to cultivate social relations and purposeful activities, then compensatory material consumption decreases in importance. The most important of such activities for the regulation of work-life balance are caring for children and relatives, cultivating friendships, civic engagement and voluntary work, and looking after one's health.

Coaching courses, in which aspects of work-life balance and health promotion are addressed within the wider context of personal career development, represent an especially valuable form of personnel development in firms. Until now such courses have been offered by firms only to senior management. However, processes of reflection like these can be arranged for broader groups of employees, and thus on a less cost-intensive basis, in the context of personnel development strategies. As a prerequisite for a positive uptake from the workforce, such courses should be open-ended and not designed to raise firm productivity, so as not to be perceived as manipulative.

3.2.4 Nonprofit organizations

Nonprofit organizations (NPOs) pursue social, cultural or scientific objectives for the benefit of the community and in contrast to firms do not aim to make financial profit. As a rule, the employees of nonprofit organizations identify more strongly with the values and aims of their organization, because they feel a personal commitment to those aims and values. They have a stronger intrinsic motivation than workers in commercial firms whose work motivation is substantially determined by external incentives such as pay rates or favourable working conditions. Forms of unpaid work are also more common in nonprofit organizations, which points to the high degree of identification of the workforce with the values and aims of their organizations. Nonprofit organizations are particularly important actors for the cultural transformation towards sustainable development, firstly because they are usually the pioneers for the implementation of innovative sustainability ideas and concepts, long before they are taken up by commercial companies and transformed into lucrative business models. Additionally, nonprofit organizations have high credibility in the implementation of sustainability objectives precisely because they are committed only to the values and aims of the organization and can operate free of the requirement for financial profit.

Promising conditions for meaning-construction and solidaristic behaviour

Construction of meaning is an important motivating factor for members' engagement in nonprofit organizations. For this reason, meaning-construction processes should be continually supported through organization methods such as regular collegial retreats or workshops in which the corporate goals and the commitment to those goals can be repeatedly communicated and brought up to date. In addition, the values and goals must be lived and cultivated in everyday organizational practice, e.g. in the area of sustainability, through the use of renewable energy sources or cooperation with banks committed to eco-social goals.

Nonprofit organizations also generally offer good possibilities for the support of the psychological resource of solidarity. The fact that their goals are aligned with community benefit provides a sufficient value basis for communal and goal-oriented action. Members can be drawn into the community activities of NPOs through transparent communication structures and communal decision-making processes. By these means, every employee can be made to feel involved in the accomplishment of a common goal. Since NPOs by virtue of their limited size usually still allow members direct contact with each other and do not exhibit extreme forms of organizational division of labour, it is easier for them to communicate a sense of solidaristic behaviour than is the case in complex and highly differentiated commercial firms or public institutions. And when cooperative activities bring success, then collective self-efficacy is also raised. For it is only when environmental activists believe that they can make a personal contribution to the achievement of corporate goals that they will make a long-term commitment for intrinsic reasons to a NPO (Hunecke & Ziesenitz, 2011).

3.3 Community level

The term 'community' does not describe a setting that can be precisely defined. Rather, a number of settings can be identified at the community level which can all be characterized by a specific socio-spatial association, like a district or a recreation park. In this section it will not be possible to go into all the numerous community settings, in each of which the specific social dynamic is the result of the interplay of the particular spatial, social, organizational and individual characteristics of the participants. Instead, two broad strategies will be identified which can contribute to an alignment with non-material sources of life satisfaction at the community level regardless of the specific setting.

Subjective indicators must be taken into account in the measurement of prosperity and quality of life

The first strategy includes the consideration of subjective indicators in assessments of quality of life at the community level. There is now a sufficient number of reliable criteria available for the measurement of subjective life satisfaction, or subjective well-being, in standardized surveys (Bucher, 2009, p. 18ff.; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008, p. 234ff.). The quality of life in a city, a region or an entire country can only be adequately evaluated for purposes of social reporting if the subjective perspective of the people involved can be included. Until now, quantifiable indicators have dominated evaluations of quality of life. But what prosperity is cannot be defined solely on the basis of economic indicators such as gross domestic product (GDP) or of environmental indicators like the ecological footprint. Prosperity also includes the subjective perception and evaluation of the prevailing life situation and must therefore be viewed as a cultural construct that cannot be reduced to the quantification of material processes. If such a reductive procedure is chosen in spite of this, then this is indicative of a conscious decision to ignore the individual's aspiration towards a contented or happy life. This disregard for subjective evaluation is in fact part of a cultural tradition which defines prosperity by means of economic and easily measurable indicators and thereby perpetuates, knowingly or unknowingly, an understanding of good economic management as being based on continuous economic growth. Recently, however, this definition of prosperity has begun to exhibit signs of erosion and there have been a growing number of attempts to include the subjective dimension of prosperity in the measurement of quality of life. Germany failed to take the opportunity to do this in the Bundestag's 'Enquete' study commission on "Growth, Wellbeing and Quality of Life" and continues to limit prosperity to economic indicators with the addition of some environmental ones (Institut für Gesellschaftsforschung und Sozialpolitik, 2011). A better example in this context is provided by the state of Bhutan, where subjective and objective indicators are brought together, in a way which has been fully thought through in terms of methodology, to create a

national happiness index (Ura, Alkire, Zangmo & Wangdi, 2012). After all, comparable data are already being collected in Germany in various studies and surveys, e.g. in Deutsche Post's happiness atlas (Raffelhüschen & Schöppner, 2012). But the aim here should also be to feed the findings into political decision-making processes rather than simply using them for marketing or research purposes.

Giving citizens a say in political-administrative decisions

The second strategy for the promotion of non-material sources of life satisfaction relates to citizens' involvement in political-administrative decisions of civic or community life, whether at local, regional or national level. The effects of a greater involvement of citizens in decision-making processes, however, can only be properly evaluated if there is at least some way of registering citizens' subjective well-being, as described above. Furthermore, the methodological design of research capable of unambiguously demonstrating the effects of citizens' participation processes is very difficult. Yet exactly that was achieved by a unique quasi-experimental field study carried out by Frey and Stutzer (2000) and covering the whole of Switzerland. Referenda are an established element of political decision-making in Switzerland. Within this federally-structured country there are 26 cantons which differ in terms of the options for direct democratic participation their citizens enjoy. By controlling for spatial and socio-demographic factors, Frey and Stutzer were able to empirically demonstrate that the varying capacity for participation represented an independent factor affecting life satisfaction among Swiss citizens. As this effect shows up for citizens' participation in Switzerland, where this is at a globally uniquely high level, it can be expected that the influence of citizens' participation possibilities on life satisfaction will be even higher in countries where the degree of democratization is much lower.

4. Scope and limits for the promotion of psychological resources for sustainable lifestyles

The two most important theoretical elements of the approach developed here for the promotion of sustainable lifestyles are the Pleasure-Accomplishment-Meaning theory of subjective well-being and the six psychological resources deriving from that – the capacity for pleasure, self-acceptance, self-efficacy, mindfulness, the construction of meaning, and solidarity. The perspective chosen here focuses quite consciously on the individual as the starting point for a cultural transformation towards sustainable lifestyles. Within this person-based perspective weight is given above all to the insights of positive psychology and of resource-oriented counselling. This thematic focus is principally analytical in purpose and it excludes many other relevant aspects of social and behavioural science. In consequence, three lines of argument can be used against the approach developed here: (1) that of a psychologistic narrowness of perspective; (2) gaps in the scientific foundation; and (3) an overestimation of the significance of individual experiences of happiness for efforts to initiate a cultural transformation towards sustainability.

4.1 Psychologistic narrowness of perspective

The starting point for the identification of psychological resources lies in the recognition that a cultural transformation towards sustainable lifestyles has taken place, if at all, only in the realms of theoretical discussion. A considerable body of knowledge about what this transformation should look like has now been brought together – but the great challenge lies in the translation of this knowledge into practice. Neither the formulation of guiding principles for sustainability and sufficiency, nor technological efficiency improvements, nor the creation of new markets for emissions trading have yet managed to bring about sustainable resource use in the early industrialized countries. It is becoming ever more apparent that political and economic regulation alone is not enough to reduce resource use to a sustainable level. For that, a cultural transformation is necessary, one that cannot be directed from the centre but can only be initiated by the participation of as many

citizens as possible – actively, spontaneously, and above all thinking and acting independently. The transformation of values which is a prerequisite for this can only take place at the level of the individual on the basis of processes of self-reflection – and only if they are acting of their own free will, before the pressures built up by the constrictions and deprivations inflicted by processes of change beyond their control become insupportable.

Supplementing the activation of psychological resources by shifting the political framework in a sustainable direction

At this point it may be worthwhile identifying triggers for individual processes of reflection which are not born of desperation but instead aim directly at an increase in individual well-being. The activation and support of the six psychological resources identified here provide the individual with the immediate benefit of raising her or his powers of resistance against the demands and burdens of everyday life. The focus on the processing and evaluation of information at the level of the individual, however, should not suggest that it is possible to establish a sustainable lifestyle solely on the basis of decisions made at that level. Strengthening and empowering individual members of society cannot replace the political and economic configuration of that society through binding norms and institutions, but can at best complement or supplement it. To behave correctly inside faulty structures usually costs so much time and energy that an individual cannot maintain such behaviour over the long term. So alongside the individual-level perspective developed here it remains necessary to continue the attempt to influence the development of social and natural structural relations in a sustainable direction. In this context it is especially important to safeguard or if necessary to expand the space available to individuals within democratic societies for making decisions relevant to the management of their own lives. This includes keeping the gap between rich and poor as small as possible in order to guarantee equality of opportunity for all members of society to participate in the political and economic life of the community.

4.2 Gaps in the scientific foundation

Because of its theoretical links to positive psychology, the concept developed in this essay might be considered vulnerable to the charge of lacking a rigorous scientific foundation. This can be attributed mainly to two causes. Firstly, the ideas behind positive psychology have been widely popularized, which is explained by the intense interest for the general public of its main themes – happiness and subjective well-being. This has led inevitably to a trivialization of its findings in popular discourse, which in turn has led to an impression of superficiality among both the wider public and the academic community insofar as they have remained unaware of the variety and depth of the empirical findings of positive psychology. However, a detailed examination of the research literature on positive psychology makes it clear that the standards of academic rigour expected within the discipline itself are certainly being met.

Similarly, it can be argued in defence of the approach developed here that none of the six psychological resources for sustainable lifestyles identified here really originates in positive psychology. All six were developed in other theoretical branches of psychology before the advent of positive psychology. The only thing they have in common is that they contribute to people's subjective well-being and have therefore and understandably been taken up by positive psychology as theoretically relevant measures. The new methods of positive psychology which have been shown to be effective support the activation of individual strengths and are based on rituals of gratitude and forgiveness (Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson, 2005; Sheldon & Lyubormirsky, 2006). However, these are not considered sufficiently relevant to be able to contribute to the desired cultural transformation towards sustainability.

Correcting the individualistic values of positive psychology

A second criticism of the scientific underpinning is directed at the values of positive psychology, which (it is argued) are not critically examined and therefore remain implicit. The strong emphasis on the ability to influence one's own lifestyle, especially in the popular science publications of positive psychology (Seligman, 2002, 2012; Lyubomirsky, 2008; Frederickson, 2011), conveys a western and in particular a US American perspective based on liberal individualism. This positive bias towards individualistic values is only rarely reflected in the literature (e.g. in Joseph & Linley, 2011, p. 187). In the programme to initiate a cultural transformation towards sustainable lifestyles, this bias must be corrected by ensuring that alongside aspects of individual behaviour and experience above all the influence and potential of political and economic relations are taken into account. After all, positive psychology has explicitly declared that its goals include the beneficial development of institutions and of the community. This guarantees it good options for interdisciplinary connections to other fields of study within the social sciences.

4.3 No enforcement of happiness, but the right measure of happiness and life satisfaction

Another criticism of positive psychology, one mainly encountered in public debate, is that it focuses too much on raising the individual's feelings of happiness. This can quickly lead to a perceived normative pressure that one ought to feel happy. Otherwise one can often be regarded by others as a loser, a failure in one's own life-project. This obligation to be happy allows individuals only the choice between seeing oneself as the victim of one's own inability to achieve happiness or never-ending efforts to finally succeed in reaching the summit of happiness.

The situation at present with regard to the obligation to be happy is not quite as dramatic as the critics of positive psychology suggest. In fact it has long been clear that the blinkered pursuit of perpetual happiness leads down the wrong track, and that the true art of life consists in "sometimes seeing things positively but nonetheless recognizing and

acknowledging unreservedly the negative things” (Schmidt, 2012, p. 45). Supporters of positive psychology, too, do acknowledge that it is possible to have too much happiness (Diener & Biswas Diener, 2008 p. 209ff.). According to this view, change and growth in all areas of life also require feelings of dissatisfaction, scepticism and frustration. As biological creatures, people are not designed to remain permanently fixed in a physiological state of excitement brought on by extreme happiness. Happiness is always also a phenomenon of contrast, which requires, in addition to the cultivation of the positive, the counterpole of negative emotions as well. The Pleasure-Accomplishment-Meaning theory of subjective well-being can act as a guide for people to enable them to identify those areas where they can best cultivate their positive emotions. The greatest art of living however consists in then achieving that balance between positive and negative emotions which meets one’s own needs.

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