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The Politics of Sufficiency

MAKING IT EASIER TO LIVE
THE GOOD LIFE



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Making It Easier To Live The Good Life
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Foreword

What this book is for

This book is intended to provoke discussion. It outlines a new field of politics, one which today's politicians still steer well clear of: the politics of 'the Good Life'. What we mean by this is policies which make it easier to practise a sustainable lifestyle and thus to fulfil our global responsibilities at the beginning of the 21st century. We call this field 'the politics of sufficiency'. So this is a political book.

It is at the same time a book based on scientific research and analysis, because the detailed configuration of our consumption habits and lifestyles is influenced by many different cultural and institutional factors. It is important to understand this, and to recognise how many of the hard-won achievements of modernity – from political freedom and participation to social solidarity – are jeopardised by the reduction of politics to a blinkered and exclusive focus on the support of economic growth.

A book promoting policies to make it easier to live the Good Life must do two things. Firstly, it must demon-

strate that such policies are necessary; secondly, it must set out how such a policy programme is to be implemented. In other words, it has to show that the politics of sufficiency is feasible. It is often claimed in the wider debate that neither of these preconditions can be met. On the first, the objection is that consumption and lifestyle habits are purely individual choices, outside the domain of legitimate state intervention, and that politics must therefore not intrude. On the second, the argument is that a politics of sufficiency cannot be implemented in practice.

This book deals with both of these preconditions, or claims of feasibility, and with the objections to them. It demonstrates that a politics of the Good Life can be both justified and legitimated in modern free democratic societies – indeed, that it is an essential condition of such societies. The main section of the book sets out in detail how such a politics can be implemented, organised along four political dimensions.

At the same time, this book can only represent a beginning, and that is its aim – a starting-point for a broad discussion over the coming years. It is an invitation to join the debate. It is addressed to a range of very different readers: to people already practising lifestyles based on sufficiency, who want to link these with the political dimension of their lives; to activists for sustainability, in communities, in politics and in business, who are looking for ecological

and social perspectives beyond ‘green growth’; to people in civil society organisations, in companies and in science and research, and especially to politicians, who want to make an active contribution to the creation of the political conditions for the Good Life.

This book was originally written as a contribution to the German debate on sufficiency and the Good Life. Many of the examples in this book are therefore taken from or apply to the specific German context. We have been encouraged to make this book accessible to an international audience as well, since sufficiency and the Good Life are discussed all over Europe as well as in Bhutan, in Latin and North America. The politics of sufficiency is a global programme, and we hope you will enjoy reading this book.

*Angelika Zahrrnt and Uwe Schneidewind,
Wuppertal/Neckargemund, June 2014*