

Sustainable consumption needs visions

position paper by the Institute for
Applied Ecology (Öko-Institut)

Freiburg/Darmstadt/Berlin, August 2004

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The present position paper “Sustainable consumption needs visions” was elaborated by the authors in a process of debate with numerous staff members of the Institute for Applied Ecology (Öko-Institut), building upon the findings gained through numerous studies and projects. It stakes out the Institute’s position on sustainable consumption patterns and explores the need for action.

Table of contents

Summary	4
1 Introduction	5
2 State of play	6
3 Defining sustainable consumption	7
4 Getting there	9
5 Research agenda	11
 Annex 1:	
Towards sustainable consumption patterns – The Institute’s contributions	12
A 1.1 Outcomes of the Institute’s projects	13
A 1.2 Required actions and proposed measures	15
 Annex 2:	
Projects and publications by the Institute relating to the thematic area of sustainable consumption patterns	18
A 2.1 Projects carried out by the Institute	18
A 2.2 Articles and papers by Institute staff	21

Summary

To foster sustainable patterns of consumption and production, it is essential to develop a new understanding of sustainable consumption:

Until now, the debate on sustainable consumption has suffered above all from a prevalent narrowing to environmentally sound consumption. This, however, may be precisely the factor that has limited the success of past activities. To implement sustainable consumption successfully, it will be essential to address all three classic dimensions of sustainability – resource and environmental conservation, social equity and economic viability. It will also be valuable to harness institutional change. In concrete terms, this means starting out with alternatives for the everyday rationalities of actors and the opportunities such actors have to embark upon change. One precondition of such a strategy will be that sustainable consumption is recognized as a societal activity area, involving formation of new actor constellations and not merely following an – environmentally extended – market rationality.

It is further important to note that, in the political context, sustainable consumption is a cross-cutting task and needs to be understood and implemented as such. This means that sustainable consumption must be viewed not only as a theme of environmental policy and consumer protection, but equally as an aspect of economic, fiscal, transport, health and social policy, while at the same time keeping the international dimension of sustainability in view. In terms of implementation, this presents a need to foster previously unexploited alliances and networks.

In the opinion of the Institute for Applied Ecology (Öko-Institut), the addressees of efforts to implement sustainable consumption should not only be final consumers. It is essential to involve procurement decision-makers in the public sector and in industry, in order to harness the great potential available there for innovative products, new strategies of use, pioneering procedures and participatory processes.

Given the great importance of sustainable consumption for sustained economic dynamics, any seriously intentioned innovation policy needs to initiate and foster consumption innovations that are in line with sustainability principles.

In that context, innovation must embrace not only technologies and “hard” products, but also social (soft) innovations. This presents a need for verifiable sustainability targets as well as communicable visions. A structured process to promote sustainable patterns of consumption and production further requires binding agreements with relevant market players and consumers. Furthermore, appropriate indicators need to be developed that permit participatory monitoring of the process.

The task of the policy realm is to develop a “Plan of Action for Sustainable Consumption” that builds upon short-, medium- and long-term, dovetailing strategies and identifies priority activity areas. The criteria for this plan of action should be:

- Particular effectiveness, i.e. a high potential for broad-scale implementation (e.g. through high levels of acceptance for measures among consumers, procurers or producers);
- High impact reduction, meaning that, due to high materials intensity of products and services or due to high levels of socio-economic impact, major reductions in such pressures are to be expected;
- Major political relevance, meaning that, due to certain societal developments such as demographic change, measures have substantial political relevance.

Based upon these criteria, and following the overall goal of fostering sustainable patterns of consumption and production, the following priority activity areas should be addressed:

- Agriculture / food
- Energy
- Health

Thematic areas and areas of human need must be reviewed with regard to the framework conditions required in each area, and a catalogue of measures should be adopted by which to overcome structural barriers.

Specific support strategies will need to be developed in the above activity areas. Such strategies can build upon the following general approaches and tools:

- Appropriate analysis tools (PROSA, eco-efficiency analysis; for social aspects, a need for tool development remains);
- Consideration of social or societal conditions of production and use, including for complex industrial products;
- Linked information campaigns, and the initiation or support of communication platforms;
- Sustainability labelling;
- Increased support for consumer organizations instead of their dismantling;
- Market basket monitoring and further such tools, making use of appropriate indicators.

Furthermore, the development of consumer research focussing on sustainability aspects will deliver an improved understanding of marketing approaches that follow ethical principles and foster communal well-being.

1 Introduction

In the policy arena, the process towards sustainable consumption patterns is advancing scarcely and has a very low profile. Debate has centred mainly on isolated measures and instruments. To make the process more targeted and raise its profile in the future, it will be essential that all relevant actors embark upon new strategies in their various spheres of responsibility. This applies equally to consumers, corporate actors, and state and political actors, as well as actors in broader society such as consumer and environmental organizations or church institutions. Sustainable consumption is a process involving negotiation and the building of consensus – in some areas this process competes with conventional market operations. This means that if new consumption strategies are to be achieved all actors must be willing to engage in discourse and to coordinate their actions, at least in specific strategic and/or thematic areas. This applies equally to regional or sectoral networks, to the overarching structures at national level that yet remain to be institutionalized, and to the various research agencies at federal and regional state (in Germany: Land) level.

Sustainable consumption is a field of action characterized by social processes, determined by three different arenas that interact, each influencing the other: the individual arena, the supply-side and structural arena and the sociopolitical arena (cf. Section 3).

One task of the Institute for Applied Ecology (Öko-Institut) is to identify thematic and strategic priorities and to inject them into the policy process in a well-substantiated manner. In the opinion of the Institute, in order to advance the process towards sustainable patterns of consumption and production there is a need to:

- Agree concrete consumption-related sustainability targets in the sociopolitical arena;
- Formulate, in the policy context, a Plan of Action for Sustainable Consumption comprising coordinated strategies and measures, and implement this together with decision-makers and actors in all arenas;
- Introduce more binding commitments to the process towards greater sustainability, both in terms of consumer behaviour and with regard to production processes and the provision of products and services: It is the task of the policy arena to make the process more binding;
- Put forward and agree criteria and indicators for strategy development and monitoring: There is a need to establish continuous monitoring to make measurable the implementation of sustainable consumption in all fields of action: It then becomes possible to track progress;
- Develop and implement lifestyle-specific strategies;
- Develop communicable visions and exert a motivating effect upon the supply side and the demand side.

The goal of all these activities must be to present, besides guiding visions, clear strategies for action and for product/service supply that permit broad-scale sustainable consumption. Sustainable consumption is a cross-cutting societal and political task and needs to be mainstreamed and perceived as such.

2 State of play

The theme of sustainable consumption is gaining importance at both the international and national levels: At the international level, the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (Rio+10) held in September 2002 adopted a Plan of Implementation calling upon states to encourage and promote the development of a 10-year framework of programmes in support of regional and national initiatives to accelerate the shift towards sustainable consumption and production.¹ In June 2003 this agreement was concretized at an International Expert Meeting held in Marrakech: The experts mapped out a 10-year plan for developing and implementing the long-term plan agreed in Johannesburg, and turning international commitments on sustainable consumption into reality.²

In Germany, a national consensus-building process took place, involving relevant stakeholder groups. The outcome of this process was the Tutzing Declaration adopted in April 2000, which formulates seven propositions for the promotion of sustainable consumption.³ Following this up, the German Federal Envi-

1 World Summit on Sustainable Development. Plan of Implementation. Advance unedited text, 4 September 2002 (www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/documents/documents.html).

2 The Marrakech meeting identified as a key priority for the framework plan the development of policies that integrate the economic, environmental and social aspects of sustainable behaviour. Future strategies should include a mix of regulations, economic incentives and communication tools, and involve partnerships between government agencies, international organizations, private enterprise etc. (see press release "New Marrakech Process Promotes Sustainable Consumption and Production on an International Basis", New York, 20 June 2003).

3 The seven propositions of the Tutzing Declaration are concerned with: objectives; target groups; improving the setting for actors; instruments; plurality of lifestyles; fostering willingness to act; and the processual nature of sustainable consumption (title of Declaration: Erklärung "Förderung des nachhaltigen Konsums – Prozess zur nationalen Verständigung in Deutschland", cf. Umweltbundesamt (Ed.); Aktiv für die Zukunft – Wege zum nachhaltigen Konsum. Dokumentation der Tagung der Evangelischen Akademie Tutzing in Kooperation mit dem Umweltbundesamt vom 3.-5. April 2000; Berlin 2001, pp. 74-97).

ronmental Agency (Umweltbundesamt, UBA) commissioned Öko-Institut to carry out a project titled “Identification, analysis and evaluation of activities and measures to foster sustainable consumption undertaken by actors in society within the context of a nationwide consensus-building process”. This study found that past activities have involved a degree of duplication and have lacked coordination, and that no agreement has been reached until now on what sustainable consumption is to be understood to mean.

In May 2003 the German Ministry of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture (BMVEL) published its Plan of Action for Consumer Protection, one objective of which is to foster sustainable patterns of consumption by means of awareness-raising campaigns. However, there remains a lack of an overarching strategy for consumer protection that would combine already existing awareness campaigns (e.g. the sustainable market basket campaign⁴, the Biosiegel campaign, and the EcoTopTen – Innovations for Sustainable Consumption campaign⁵) or would at least permit coordination in terms of schedules and strategies. In July 2003, the Ministry’s Advisory Council for Consumer and Food Policy underscored the lack of such an overall strategic concept for consumer protection.⁶

In February 2004 the German Environment Ministry (BMU), acting together with the Federal Environmental Agency (UBA), convened a national conference on sustainable patterns of consumption and production. The conference was intended to launch a longer-term process to be maintained in the form of an ongoing dialogue. However, the conference did not produce any agreements on the further process, and debate at the conference remained noncommittal.

3 Defining sustainable consumption

In policy terms, the promotion of sustainable consumption is a generic concept encompassing many different activities and approaches (integrated product policy, clean production, sustainable households, sustainable market basket etc.). Moreover, the theme can be approached from highly disparate decision-making realms and perspectives. Strategies, both broad-scale and specific, are correspondingly diverse: They can be situated in consumer (protection) policy or environmental policy, can focus on the production side or on institutions, can be more regional or global. There continues to be a serious lack of both an overarching concept at national level and an agreed understanding of sustainable consumption that could underpin any such concept.

In the opinion of Öko-Institut, to develop strategies it will be essential that sustainable consumption is understood in its societal context with complex interlinkages, and that strategies build upon this understanding.

Sustainable consumption is a societally determined field of action

Sustainable consumption is characterized by three different, interacting arenas, each of which influences the other (cf. Fig. 1):

- 4 The sustainable market basket (Nachhaltiger Warenkorb) pilot project was initiated by the German Council for Sustainable Development (Rat für nachhaltige Entwicklung). The Council has recommended to the German government that the project be continued. Key tasks in further development of the market basket will be to coordinate proposals with relevant actors in order to ensure that the proposed market basket is in fact accepted by all parties, and to identify sustainability criteria that make the chosen composition of the market basket transparent and verifiable.
- 5 EcoTopTen is a research project being carried out by Öko-Institut in cooperation with the Institute for Social-Ecological Research, with the support of the German Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF). Within the context of the project, a campaign is being carried out to promote sustainable products and services, with the support of the German Ministry of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture (BMVEL). In addition to developing sustainable products and services in cooperation with industry, key objectives of the project are to initiate the networking of relevant actors, to support existing networks, and to develop strategies by which to foster sustainable patterns of consumption, building upon an understanding of consumer motivations.
- 6 Wissenschaftlicher Beirat für Verbraucher- und Ernährungspolitik beim BMVEL (Ed.); Strategische Grundsätze und Leitbilder einer neuen Verbraucherpolitik; 2. redaktionell überarbeitete Fassung; Stuttgart-Hohenheim / Berlin 2003

- The **individual arena**:

Here consumers act through the type of their consumption behaviour.⁷ Two sub-arenas can be distinguished:

- The **demand-side sub-arena**, in which consumers⁸ (i.e. private individuals but also procurers of large companies or of the public sector) act through their consumption behaviour: They take concrete decisions for or against a certain product or service, for or against a certain rationality, for or against a certain type of use etc.
- The **informal sub-arena**, in which private individuals act by doing informal work (above all unpaid household work) which is not oriented to markets and thus does not manifest itself on the demand side.

There is a constant flux in both directions between the two sub-arenas – household work is externalized and thus manifests itself on the market (e.g. convenience food instead of cooking oneself) while, conversely, services are internalized and thus no longer manifest themselves on markets (e.g. cleaning oneself instead of paying a cleaner).

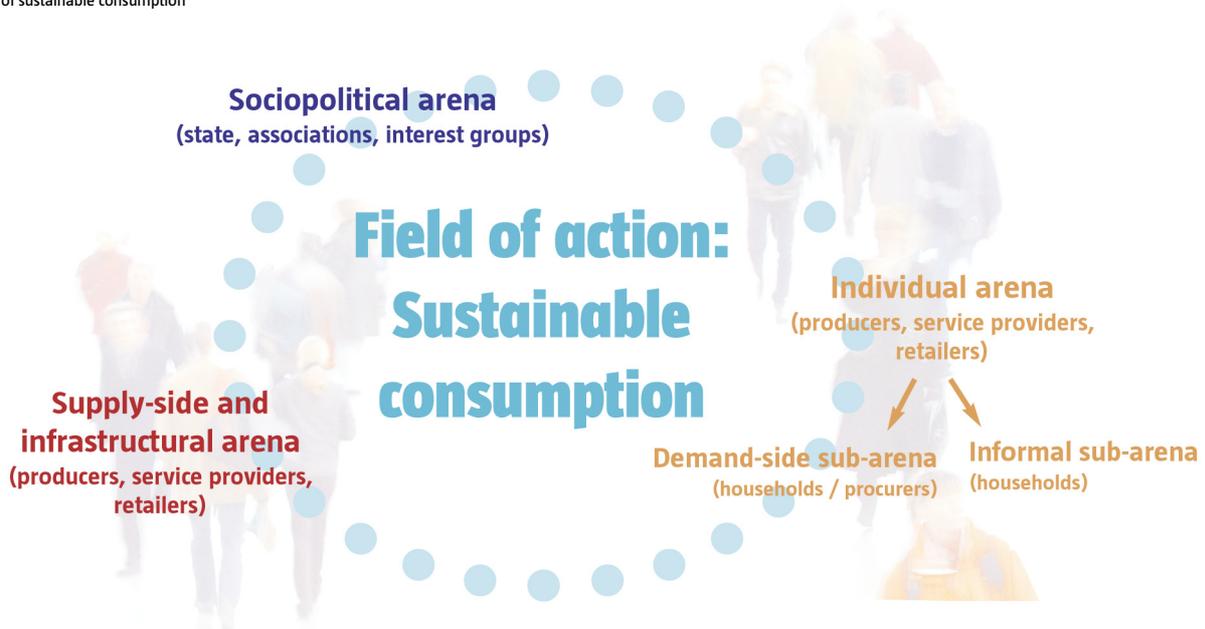
- The **supply-side and structural arena**:

Here companies (producers, service providers, retailers, etc.) – but also the state – act by “provisioning” sustainable consumption: products, services (including infrastructure), information, marketing, etc.

- The **sociopolitical arena**:

Here above all the state operates, but also associations and common-interest groups. This is mainly a matter of determining the setting in order to achieve steering effects in both the individual arena and the supply-side and structural arena. Furthermore, it is here that social factors of consumption behaviour are determined, such as cultural attitudes, guiding visions and societal values.

Fig. 1: Arenas of sustainable consumption



⁷ Consumption behaviour is a term comprising the behaviour of private consumers and procurers with regard to their purchasing wishes, purchasing decision-making, the financing of purchases and the way the goods thus purchased are used. The term also includes the procurement of services. In contrast to usage elsewhere, Öko-Institut understands this term to include, in addition to consumption behaviour that manifests itself on markets (through demand for products and services), also consumption behaviour that does not manifest itself on markets (i.e. informal activities, above all unpaid household work).

⁸ Here Öko-Institut, when referring to the demand side, does not refer exclusively to private individual consumers, but explicitly also to public-sector and corporate procurers.

4 Getting there

All previous approaches – most of which have involved isolated measures and instruments lacking coordination – have failed to produce a thoroughgoing, visible change. The conference convened by the German Environment Ministry in February 2004 was one of many events underscoring that the process towards more sustainable patterns of consumption and production is definitely in need of sociopolitical support.

The question arises of how to pursue paths towards more sustainability in consumption behaviour – but also in production processes, and for both products and services. In the following, Öko-Institut identifies key starting points.

Sustainable consumption needs concrete sustainability targets

Actors lack orientation in the shape of shared sustainability targets relating to consumption and products. One of the most urgent sociopolitical tasks of the coming months should therefore be to identify concrete sustainability targets pertaining to sustainable consumption, and to debate these with relevant actors. Success in implementing sustainable consumption will depend crucially upon a shared understanding and wide-ranging agreement on the direction the process needs to take. It needs to be kept in mind that sustainability is a developmental process. Sustainability targets will thus need to be updated in accordance with ongoing developments.

Targets for sustainable consumption

Sustainable consumption can only be achieved through patterns of behaviour which, in line with the guiding vision of sustainable development, are characterized by

- **low resource and environmental impact,**
- **social equity and**
- **economic viability.**

Debate in the past – particularly that concerned with sustainable consumption – has tended to concentrate on the environmental dimension of sustainability. This debate has focussed mainly upon production processes and projects, and to some degree upon services, and until now has sought above all to optimize the supply side (e.g. integrated product policy). Such approaches generally neglect the needs and motivations of consumers, and the requirements that arise from the exigencies of consumers' everyday lives. Thus in future the social, but also the economic and structural/institutional dimension of sustainability will need to be strengthened and taken suitably into account in the debate – on both the supply and demand side.

Building upon the general sustainability requirements set out above, the aim must be to identify the key targets of sustainable consumption and to define them in as concrete terms as possible at every level. This process should be shaped in a participatory manner, thus allowing broad-based participation.

Such targets – initially cutting across areas of human need and across product clusters – for sustainable consumption must then be broken down to individual products or product groups, services or areas of need, and concretized appropriately.⁹

⁹ For instance, a research project concerned with transforming food systems towards sustainability ("Ernährungswende"; cf. p. 20) proposes conceiving of sustainable food systems as those which are appropriate to everyday needs, are socially differentiated, promote health, generate little risk and are environmentally sound (Eberle et al. (2004): Umwelt-Ernährung-Gesundheit – Beschreibung der Dynamiken eines gesellschaftlichen Handlungsfeldes, Hamburg/Darmstadt/ Freiburg/Frankfurt/Heidelberg/Cologne).

Sustainable consumption needs commitment

If there is agreement that sustainable consumption is intimately linked with sociopolitical action (availability and access for all social groups, safeguarding of housing quality and quality of life, precautionary health-care, employment), then it is the task of the policy arena to support the various actors in achieving binding agreements in relation to the formulation and realization of the goals of sustainable consumption. For without commitment the process will have limited success.

Sustainable consumption needs guiding visions and lifestyle-specific strategies

In view of the diversity of lifestyles and arenas, there cannot be any “one” pattern of sustainable consumption, nor any one path to get there. Strategies aiming to change behavioural and purchasing routines must target the needs and motivations of consumers (i.e. their everyday rationalities) and their specific scope for action. Attention must be given in this context to the demands and requirements placed upon consumers in their everyday lives. This calls for innovative and cooperative strategies on the part of producers and/or service providers. It also demands an enabling sociopolitical environment targeting specific lifestyles or consumption styles.

To render the goals of sustainable consumption communicable, there is a need to produce readily presentable “images”. These images should relate in concrete terms to the everyday worlds of consumers and should underscore the positive aspects of sustainable consumption, for, after all, sustainable consumption means above all more quality (of life). It is important that the supply side takes up these images and, acting in concert with policy actors, uses them to motivate consumers.

Openness towards different ways of life, or the lack of it, is established very early on in personal development (families, kindergarten, school). This makes it all the more important to conceive of sustainable consumption as a cross-cutting issue and to integrate it within other policy areas (such as education policy).

Sustainable consumption must be measurable

The implementation of sustainable consumption must be measurable in all three arenas (supply-side, demand-side, sociopolitical). There is consequently a need to develop a matrix of criteria and indicators by which to capture the impacts of individual behavioural and action options. Initial sets of criteria have already been developed for specific areas of need. These must be differentiated further (for specific consumption situations) on the one hand, but also integrated (for instance in “social”, “environmental” and “economic” terms with regard to sustainability indicators) on the other.

Sustainable consumption needs a “Plan of Action for Sustainable Consumption”

Targeted activities must be launched to promote sustainable consumption. The policy realm must therefore develop a Plan of Action for Sustainable Consumption. This should contain dovetailing cross-cutting strategies, which need to be concretized for specific fields of consumption. The goal should be to initiate sustainable consumption innovations. This necessitates the identification of priority fields of action on the one hand and the integration of this theme in further policy areas (e.g. economic policy, education policy, social policy, housing construction policy, health policy etc.) on the other – for until now sustainable con-

sumption is usually addressed only in terms of environmental and consumer protection policy. The implementation of strategies needs to be fostered by appropriate measures. Furthermore, the policy arena should provide support for the formation of a strategic platform, and should foster cooperation among diverse actors and initiatives.

Priority fields of action

The selection of priority fields of action needs to be based upon verifiable criteria. In the opinion of Öko-Institut, the selection process should be based upon the following criteria:

- Priority fields of action are **particularly effective**, i.e. they are characterized by a major potential for broad-based implementation (e.g. high levels of acceptance for measures among consumers, procurers or producers).
- Priority fields of action generate **particularly large reductions in impact**, meaning that, due to high materials intensity of products / services or due to high socio-economic impacts, large reductions in such impacts can be expected.
- Priority fields of action are considered **politically pressing**, i.e. due to certain developments in society they have high political relevance, e.g. demographic change, transformation of social systems.

In the opinion of Öko-Institut, a selection based on these criteria leads to the following priority fields of action:

- **Agriculture / food**
- **Energy**
- **Health**

The proposed thematic areas and areas of need differ in terms of their product and supply structures, and in terms of their specific motivations for consumption (basic needs, leisure, luxury goods, etc.). Each thus requires different strategic approaches.

5 Research agenda

Consumer research in Germany continues to be highly segmented. The focus is placed on classic consumer policy issues, such as quality, pricing and market communication. There is some research on consumer behaviour. As a comparatively new theme, sustainable consumption patterns have until now only played a subordinate role. Thus the process towards sustainable consumption can and should be supported by systematic and thematically concentrated research activities. In the opinion of Öko-Institut, there is a particular need for research with regard to

- **analyses cutting across the various areas of need**, focussing upon the interactions between areas of human need and the resulting impacts upon sustainable consumption. Such research can help

to link the usually narrow thematic perspectives on the issues to form an overarching consumption strategy, and to establish appropriately tailored framework conditions.

- There is a need for further methodological development with regard to linking the ecology of material flows with the **economics of material flows**. It is a challenge to further develop material-flow scenario methodology in such a way that economic issues can be modelled together with ecological aspects in a long-term perspective. With regard to strategic aspects, this will provide a basis on which to produce well-substantiated advice on the internalization of external costs.
- In the same vein, there is a need for research in terms of systemic and empirical analysis of **consumption situations and consumer behaviour**. Proceeding from everyday requirements (acceptance; suitability for everyday needs) this can produce supply-side strategies as well as strategies for motivating users.
- A need also prevails for further research and development with regard to sustainable and innovative technology and product development. Key aspects in this respect include
 - analysis of the way in which society can steer desired key technological and social innovations;
 - R&D promotion for sustainable products in mass markets;
 - further development of sustainability analysis and management methods (especially sustainable product development, eco-efficiency analysis and sustainability labelling) and analysis of the social aspects of complex industrial products with global product chains (e.g. computers);
 - analysis of the sustainability of country-level and EU-wide market baskets (as an indicator of actual developments in the field of sustainable consumption);
 - analysis of the situation and potential in relation to sustainable products and consumption in the new EU member states.

Annex 1: Towards sustainable consumption patterns – The Institute's contributions

For many years now, the Institute has undertaken numerous different projects of relevance to sustainable consumption.¹⁰ These projects have a great bandwidth, ranging from methodology research (e.g. Product Sustainability Assessment – PROSA) to sustainability research in various thematic areas and areas of human need (e.g. agriculture/food, mobility, construction/housing, textiles/clothing, energy etc.). This is complemented by application-oriented research with a clear focus on implementation (e.g. EcoTopTen – Innovations for Sustainable Consumption Patterns) and policy advice (e.g. within the Advisory Council for Consumer and Food Policy of the German Ministry of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture – BMVEL).

In the following, we summarize the approaches to sustainable consumption that have been examined in the Institute's work.

¹⁰ A list of the projects and selected publications is provided in Annex 2: Projects and publications by the Institute relating to the thematic area of sustainable consumption, p. 18ff.

A 1.1 Outcomes of the Institute's projects

In the individual arena, the outcomes of the Institute's projects show that consumers behave "rationally" in situative terms according to their own rationality – and not necessarily according to sustainability criteria. Their actions are tied into a highly complex system of reciprocal dependencies, ranging from the microsystem of the family or household to the macrosystem of the cultural habits of a society. Consumption behaviour is thus driven variously by a range of individually and structurally dependent factors (time, money, availability, symbolism, available infrastructure, habits/routines etc.) and is determined by different lifestyles.

There is therefore no "one-dimensional" consumer behaviour – such behaviour rather results from a "diverse and interdependent mix of roles as citizen, market participant and employee, and as member of a household or family performing coordination, repair, provisioning and purchasing functions".¹¹ One outcome of this is that one and the same consumer can act on his/her own responsibility in certain areas, as s/he is well informed and can take a well-thought-through decision on his/her own responsibility on the basis of his/her knowledge, while in other areas the same consumer is in need of protection and requires corresponding protective mechanisms. This can be viewed as a characteristic of the "patchwork consumer".

A further outcome is that knowledge and action frequently diverge widely, with the result that even well informed consumers only act sustainably to a limited extent although – a prevailing need for improvement in supplies and framework conditions notwithstanding – action towards more sustainable consumption would be possible for the individual. Besides the price of a product, the transaction costs (accessibility, procurement) play a key role in relation to the acceptance or rejection of products or services. The importance of the symbolism of consumption, at both the individual and interindividual levels, is growing across all spheres of consumption (driven by advertising strategies). Besides conspicuous consumption in certain "typical" product groups (e.g. clothing, mobile phones, consumer electronics, PDAs) the procurement of basic foods is also already determined by brand images and symbolic purchases serving the various goals of attaining self-congruence and elevating self-esteem. A third level is that of the intraindividual symbolic value of the (material) ownership of goods. This is highly identity-bound (as an element of the extended self) and highlights most particularly the difficulties encountered when moving towards strategies aimed at intensifying product use, such as ownership-substituting services (car-sharing, washing service).

Where knowledge and willingness to act are present, prevailing habits and routines often prevent actual changes in behaviour. Conversely, the development of new routines can promote changes in behaviour towards sustainable consumption.

Initial experience with self-organized approaches, such as cooperative purchasing of regional products, indicates the great importance of intermediary structures¹² which give consumers security in terms of quality and availability, while giving producers the security that their products will indeed be bought. In this context the aspect of social commitment and control by the "other" customers plays an important role in making newly acquired behavioural routines become a firm part of behaviour. Processes of change are hampered by the fact that the currently prevalent culture, with its individualistic-fatalistic features, is in opposition to the guiding vision of sustainable and socially responsible development. This is a part of the explanation why only a few, very specific groups in society appear to follow the postulated guiding vision.

One might expect a particularly high degree of rationality in consumption decisions on the part of the "professional" consumers – the procurers in companies or in the public sector. In fact, however, this is only the case to a limited extent. In the public sector there are procurement rules¹³ that predominantly pre-

12 In recent years, the function of intermediaries has been examined above all in urban research in the social sciences, in terms of the mediation of neighbourhood services, the assurance of the quality of "new" products, and the undertaking of negotiations between administrations, companies and consumers (cf., among others, Öko-Institut 2001: Nachhaltige Stadtteile auf innerstädtischen Konversionsflächen).

13 One fact hampering progress here is, for instance, the separation of investment budgets from administrative budgets – this is borne out by the efforts of many local authority actors to promote the procurement of green electricity.

scribe a one-sided economic orientation to the purchasing price. Although they regularly permit inclusion of environmental criteria in purchasing decisions, these opportunities are generally not utilized.

Overall, however, even within the purely economic focus of procurement criteria, decision-making has largely failed until now to proceed from full life-cycle costing. Such costing would lead to preference being given to those products and services whose environmental performance is better.¹⁴ Furthermore, certain sectors such as the construction sector are dominated by public procurers without the criteria for the award of contracts yet having been aligned to the guiding vision of sustainable development.

Here the state – but also the procurers of large companies – could assume responsibility in a way that would be highly effective in promoting the vision. Contract volumes are often so large that it would be possible to require environmental attributes as the standard without having to make economic concessions. This would also foster the new development and market penetration of such environmentally sound products. There is a discrepancy here on the part of the state between its actions and the objectives that it has itself defined – namely the guiding vision of sustainable development.

In the supply-side and structural arena sustainable consumption patterns presuppose the provision of sustainable products and services, but also of information, as well as the presentation of more sustainable options for behaviour. The intensity of efforts in this regard varies greatly across sectors and branches. Beside broad-scale provision oriented to standard quality, in some areas more sustainable, high-price product segments have been established for selected customer groups. These include, for instance, household appliances, small cars, green electricity and financial services. The products and services on offer until now thus only contribute to sustainable consumption in narrow areas and are over-compensated by mass goods of poorer quality. This shows clearly the absence of a comprehensive provision of sustainable, reasonably priced products and services for the mass market. A further aspect is that it is often not clear to consumers which product or service might be considered sustainable, or which type of user behaviour would support sustainability.

Deficits prevail in product development and sustainable corporate management (instrument development and implementation) on the one side, as well as in the optimization of structural-institutional conditions such as the dissemination of information, improved pricing through improved logistics, availability, or the utilization of network structures. On the supply side, too, the degree and form of implementation of sustainable product policy varies greatly across sectors and branches: On the one hand, targets are formulated and agreed (CSR, WBCSD, Global Compact, etc.), while on the other hand product policies are only actually reconfigured in selected segments. In many areas – e.g. infrastructure – there continues to be a lack of preconditions and/or willingness to act in accordance with sustainability principles. Besides sectoral product policy, local authorities, regional governments and national government need to be involved in the debate on consumption patterns in their capacity as the providers of services (infrastructure, supply and disposal, local public transport).

It is essential to note that sustainable products and services will only then be successful and will only then be “good products” if they correspond to the system of values and basic assumptions of the dominant culture.¹⁵ In this respect careful account needs to be taken of the specific area of need and consumption segment in which one is operating. In a number of areas, the symbolic aspects and identity-creating functions represent the predominant purchasing motivation, not so much the postulated core utility of a product. Therefore, “sustainable” products must do justice to the specific motivations of consumers as a function of their various lifestyles (or ignore them with an educational intent) and, in order to improve their acceptance among consumers, need to make use of diverse points of access (institutions) and instruments.

14 An example of this is the inclusion in cost calculations of the costs of the stand-by energy consumption of electrical appliances. Here, low energy consumption, which is also environmentally beneficial, would be associated at the same time with lower costs on the economic side. This aspect, however, is not manifested by the purchasing price of the product. Further examples include: car purchase versus car-sharing; computers with and without service package, etc.

15 This can lead to substantial contradictions in sub-markets.

Finally, the Institute has found in its research that in the sociopolitical arena moves towards sustainable consumption have until now involved a plethora of uncoordinated individual activities. There is a lack both of a common understanding of the process and of a central actor which has a broad overview of the various processes towards more sustainable consumption, can provide moderation and mediation in the necessary consultation processes, and would assume responsibility at state level for a sustainable consumption process. Until now efforts to strengthen the goals of sustainable consumption and make them attractive on both the supplier and consumer sides have not been successful.

A 1.2 Required actions and proposed measures

The following proposals build upon the findings derived from the Institute's projects and research.

As a general point, measures to promote sustainable consumption need to be highly diverse and closely coordinated. They should tackle the local, regional, supraregional and national levels.¹⁶ They can range from measures situated in the realm of urban planning over information and education activities through to fiscal instruments.

The Institute's projects show that in order to provide orientation, sustainable consumption needs both concrete sustainability targets and communicable guiding visions. Furthermore, a structured process to foster sustainable patterns of consumption and production requires binding agreements among relevant actors. To track progress towards sustainable consumption and production patterns, appropriate indicators need to be developed that permit monitoring of the process. The strategies to be developed must take into account the specific action context of the actors to be addressed. They must thus encompass the various different lifestyles and everyday rationalities and must adequately address the various market rationalities.

The task of the policy realm is to develop, in accordance with the above requirements, a "Plan of Action for Sustainable Consumption", comprising a package of integrated strategies. The principal goal of this should be to initiate sustainable consumption innovations. To this end, priority fields of action must be identified and evaluated in terms of their effectiveness, impact reduction and political relevance. Finally, suitable measures then need to be identified for strategic implementation.

Within that setting, a "Plan of Action for Sustainable Consumption" should contain the following measures as key elements:

- **Promoting the guiding vision of sustainable consumption / sustainable development:**
Here a particular focus needs to be placed upon communicating the guiding vision or visions, and upon concrete measures to implement the goals.¹⁷
- **Internalizing sustainable consumption in the policy realm:**
In the view of the Institute, the cross-cutting function of sustainable consumption needs to be realized and coordinated as closely as possible with the relevant policy departments (above all industry, research & development, education, environment, social affairs, health etc.) and policy fields (above all consumer policy, sustainable development and integrated product policy).
- **Establishing appropriate framework conditions for the promotion of sustainable consumption:**
This involves introducing new steering measures or strengthening existing ones, such as fiscal in-

¹⁶ taking global goals into account

¹⁷ The Institute has compiled recommendations for improved communication within a project that it carried out on behalf of the German Federal Environmental Agency (UBA): "Erfassung, Analyse und Auswertung der Aktionen und Maßnahmen zur Förderung des nachhaltigen Konsums durch gesellschaftliche Akteure im Rahmen der nationalen Verständigung" (Identification, analysis and evaluation of activities and measures to foster sustainable consumption undertaken by actors in society within the context of a nationwide consensus-building process).

struments, the removal of unsustainable subsidies, and engaging in promotion policies. These steering measures must be situated within the context of a political strategy for sustainable consumption. They must further be coordinated with each other and, above all, with the sustainability policy objectives set by the national government.¹⁸ This further includes the promotion and initiation of institutional innovations¹⁹ that strengthen the realization of sustainable consumption. Regardless of the concrete thematic area or area of need, there are two generic “steering” strategies:

- **Sufficiency strategy:** Restrictions or restraint in the dissemination and utilization of goods and services (savings appeal, quality appeal, restrictive access, changing needs, intensifying use);
- **Efficiency strategy:** Optimizing products and narrowing their range to sustainability-oriented “premium products” – maximum dissemination of these high-quality products.²⁰

The sustainability discourses and political strategies of recent years have contained elements of both generic strategies. The Institute considers both approaches necessary – in a fashion appropriate to the specific context and in a coordinated mix.

- **Promoting a correspondingly sustainable supply of products and services:**

In the opinion of the Institute this necessitates above all

- advancing the development of instruments for sustainable product development and sustainable corporate management²¹ and trialling and supporting their implementation; coordination with product policy measures within an integrated product policy (IPP) context is a key aspect in this connection;
- establishing sustainability-focussed consumption research in order to gather information specific to areas of need and specific to products, which can then be used early on in product development, but also for later communication with consumers.²²

- **Informing and motivating consumers:**

Essential activities in this regard include

- providing information, through appropriate channels, on products and their use and on services, and disseminating knowledge (here sustainability-focussed action models that mediate between information, knowledge and action yet need to be developed);
- strengthening sustainability-focussed motivation strategies, above all advancing the development of campaigns that make sustainable consumer behaviour attractive, in order to motivate consumers.

- **Supporting and advancing the networking of actors and activities:**

- On the one hand, the networking of existing individual activities²³ needs to be supported, e.g. through a platform that provides information and methodological tools and can provide a framework, possibly in the form of an umbrella campaign;
- On the other hand, the formation of new actor constellations and actor networks should also be promoted.

18 Proposals: e.g. further expand ecotaxation and deploy the revenue for measures targeted at achieving the sustainability objectives; remove unsustainable subsidies (e.g. coal subsidies, or the agricultural subsidies of the past) and permit, at most, subsidies to promote the introduction of sustainable products and patterns of production; adjust existing promotion instruments to the objectives of sustainability policy, i.e. remove tax deductibility of commuting costs, remove the grants paid to first-time homeowners, and establish instead appropriate instruments to promote rehabilitation of the housing stock and the building of new housing on vacant plots in towns and cities.

19 Cf. on this Öko-Institut (2001): “Institutionelle Innovationen im Bereich Energie- und Stoffströme”, funded by the German Research Ministry (BMBF), Freiburg/Darmstadt

20 “The mix of regulatory, economic and information tools deployed until now has above all succeeded in promoting eco-efficiency, but has not influenced the societal trend towards increasing saturation of private households with consumer goods” (Öko-Institut (2003): Erfassung, Analyse und Auswertung der Aktionen und Maßnahmen zur Förderung des nachhaltigen Konsums durch gesellschaftliche Akteure im Rahmen der nationalen Verständigung; Freiburg/Darmstadt, p.6).

21 To this end the Institute has developed the Product Sustainability Assessment (PROSA) tool (cf. Öko-Institut (1997): Produktlinienanalyse Waschen und Waschmittel, UBA-Texte 01/97, Freiburg, and the project currently in progress: “Product Sustainability Assessment (PROSA) – Methodology development and dissemination”)

22 Cf. on this the conception and approaches used in the project “EcoTopTen – Innovations for Sustainable Consumption Patterns” (in progress).

23 The Institute has carried out a study of existing sustainable consumption initiatives and has produced an overview of such initiatives (cf. Öko-Institut (2003): Erfassung, Analyse und Auswertung der Aktionen und Maßnahmen zur Förderung des nachhaltigen Konsums durch gesellschaftliche Akteure im Rahmen der nationalen Verständigung; Freiburg/Darmstadt).

- **Promoting research on sustainable consumption:**

In the opinion of the Institute, two approaches should be pursued here:

- On the one hand, research on the fundamentals of sustainable consumption (above all sustainable consumption research, sustainable action models relating to information, knowledge, action, motivation research, methodology research) should be fostered.
- On the other hand, sustainability aspects and the requirements presented by sustainable consumption should be made a key element of R&D programmes in technology and product development.

In pursuit of the above, existing instruments must be reviewed as to their contribution to attaining sustainability objectives and examined with regard to their concrete contribution to promoting sustainable patterns of consumption and production, and adjusted appropriately according to the outcomes of this review. In addition, it can be expedient to establish new instruments. In the opinion of the Institute this means specifically:

- Introducing appropriate information tools that make sustainability manageable for consumers and place them in a position to take informed decisions; e.g. the “ok-power” label in Germany²⁴, or the introduction of a sustainability label.²⁵
- Carrying out dovetailing image and information campaigns to promote sustainable consumption (e.g. the EcoTopTen image campaign) and underpinning these with decentralized alternatives for action (e.g. availability of high-efficiency appliances and equipment, transportation services or innovative products in a target-group-specific context);
- Further expanding decentralized, innovative consumer advice as a neutral information source that is already widely established, instead of dismantling this across the country;
- Stimulating and supporting the organization of product panels for the user-appropriate development and design of products (“proactive consumers” approach);
- Urging and advancing the networking of SMEs (e.g. pooled marketing, etc.) with regard to sustainability aspects (knowledge transfer, customer proximity, integrated services and products) and initiating networking among actors within a thematic area;
- Advancing the establishment of strategic tools for sustainability for companies (e.g. PROSA), i.e. providing information on these tools and actively promoting their introduction, which can be fostered by showcasing best-practice companies;
- Developing and institutionalizing a set of indicators or at least a set of criteria by which to evaluate the tools and strategies deployed.

²⁴ The “ok-power” label is awarded to green electricity by Energievision e.V., an institution established by Öko-Institut together with WWF and the consumer advocacy centre of North-Rhine/Westphalia (cf. www.energievision.de).

²⁵ Cf. on this the Institute’s proposals on sustainability labelling (Öko-Institut (2001): Das Nachhaltigkeitszeichen – ein Instrument zur Umsetzung einer nachhaltigen Entwicklung? Dissertationsvorhaben an der Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen; Freiburg).

Annex 2: Projects and publications by the Institute relating to the thematic area of sustainable consumption patterns

A 2.1 Projects carried out by the Institute

Projects in progress:

- Öko-Institut - Institute for Applied Ecology (in progress): Eberle, U.; Fritsche, U. et al.: Ernährungswende - Strategien für sozial-ökologische Transformationen im gesellschaftlichen Handlungsfeld Umwelt-Ernährung-Gesundheit (**Food change (Ernährungswende) – Strategies for social-ecological transformation in the societal action space relating to environment-food-health**); in cooperation with the Institute for Social-Ecological Research, the Institute for Ecological Economy Research and KATALYSE-Institute for Applied Environmental Research, funded by German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung – BMBF), Freiburg/Darmstadt
- Öko-Institut - Institute for Applied Ecology (in progress): Gensch, C.O.; Reuter, W.: Nachhaltige Aromatenchemie, Teilprojekt Bewertung der Nachhaltigkeit (**Sustainable aromatic chemistry: Sustainability assessment sub-project**); funded by BMBF, Freiburg
- Öko-Institut - Institute for Applied Ecology (in progress): Grießhammer, R.; Gensch, C.O.; Rüdener, I.; Hochfeld, C.; Buchert, M.: Produkt-Nachhaltigkeits-Analyse (PROSA/PLA) – Methodenentwicklung und Diffusion (**Product Sustainability Assessment (PROSA) – Methodology development and dissemination**); funded by BMBF, Freiburg/Darmstadt/Berlin
- Öko-Institut - Institute for Applied Ecology (in progress): Grießhammer, R.; Graulich, K.; Gensch, C.O.; Quack, D.; Eberle, U.; Bunke, D.: EcoTopTen - Innovationen für einen nachhaltigen Konsum (**EcoTopTen – Innovations for sustainable consumption patterns**); funded by BMBF, Freiburg
- Öko-Institut - Institute for Applied Ecology (in progress): Schmied, M. et al.: Innovative Vermarktungskonzepte nachhaltiger Tourismusangebote (INVENT) (**Sustainable production and consumption in the tourism sector: Innovative marketing approaches for sustainable tourism products (INVENT)**); funded by BMBF, Berlin
- Öko-Institut - Institute for Applied Ecology (in progress): Barth, R.; Bunke, D.; Fischer, A.: Nachhaltig Beschaffen – Bedingungen, Potentiale und Instrumente einer Strategie, Produkt- und Dienstleistungsinnovationen durch öffentliche Nachfrage am Markt zu etablieren (**Sustainable procurement – Conditions, potential and tools of a strategy for establishing product and service innovations on the market by means of public-sector demand**); in cooperation with ICLEI and the Business Management Department of Dresden Technical University; funded by BMBF; Darmstadt/Freiburg
- Öko-Institut - Institute for Applied Ecology (in progress): Hochfeld, C.; Graulich, K.; Schmitt, B.: Umwelt- und Nachhaltigkeitstransparenz für Finanzmärkte (**Environmental and sustainability transparency for financial markets**); in cooperation with the Institute for Environmental Management and Business Administration of the European Business School - ebs, Oestrich-Winkel and the Centre for European Economic Research - ZEW, Mannheim; funded by BMBF, Berlin/Freiburg/Darmstadt
- Öko-Institut - Institute for Applied Ecology (in progress): Timpe, C.; Bürger, V.; Roos, W.: Operative Vergabe des Gütesiegels des EnergieVision e.V. für Ökostrom (**Operative awarding of the green electricity quality seal ok-power on behalf of EnergieVision e.V.**) commissioned by EnergieVision e.V. - Verein zur Förderung von Nachhaltigkeit und Markttransparenz in der Energiewirtschaft
- Öko-Institut - Institute for Applied Ecology (in progress): Eberle, U.: Machbarkeitsstudien, Expertisen und Markterhebungen für die Entwicklung neuer und die Weiterentwicklung bestehender Umweltzeichen in ausgewählten Produktgruppen als Abrufdienstleistung (Globalansatz) (**Feasibility studies, expertises and market surveys for the development of new ecolabels and refinement of existing schemes in selected product groups as a service upon demand**); in cooperation with Ökopol Hamburg, by order of the German Federal Environmental Agency [Umweltbundesamt - UBA], Berlin
- Öko-Institut - Institute for Applied Ecology (in progress): Hochfeld, C.; Rheinberger, U.: Wie kann E-Commerce verantwortungsvolle Produktion und nachhaltigen Konsum fördern (**E-Commerce, responsible production and sustainable consumption**); own project of Öko-Institut supported by Stiftung Zukunftserbe

Projects completed:

- Öko-Institut - Institute for Applied Ecology (2004): Barth, R.; Dross, M.; Fischer, A.; in cooperation with Prof. E. Günther and I. Klauke, Dresden Technical University, department of business management and C. Erdmenger, International Council of Local Initiatives (ICLEI): Nachhaltig Beschaffen: Potenziale nachhaltiger Beschaffung und ihrer Umsetzung (NaBesI) (**Potentials of sustainable procurement and instruments for its implementation (NaBesI)**); funded by BMBF; Darmstadt 2004
- Öko-Institut - Institute for Applied Ecology (2003): Graulich, K.; Küppers, C.; Heinrich, E.; Hainz, C.: Vorstudie für die Entwicklung von Kriterien für eine verbesserte Verbraucherinformation über Handys (**Development of criteria for improved consumer information about mobile phones**); commissioned by T-Mobile (Darmstadt), Freiburg, Darmstadt 2003
- Öko-Institut - Institute for Applied Ecology (2003): Timpe, C.; Bürger, V. in cooperation with Environmental Change Institute of Oxford University and other European partners: **Consumer Choice and Carbon Consciousness for Electricity (4C Electricity)**; project within the framework of the Altener Programme of the European Union 2003
- Öko-Institut - Institute for Applied Ecology (2003): Griebshammer, R.; Gensch, C.O.; Brohmann, B.; Henseling, C.: Erfassung, Analyse und Auswertung der Aktionen und Maßnahmen zur Förderung des nachhaltigen Konsums durch gesellschaftliche Akteure im Rahmen der nationalen Verständigung (**Identification, analysis and evaluation of activities and measures to foster sustainable consumption undertaken by actors in society within the context of a nationwide consensus-building process**); Freiburg/Darmstadt 2003
- Öko-Institut - Institute for Applied Ecology (2003): Bunke, D.; Eberle, U.; Naschke, M.; Jäger, I.: Von der Öko-Nische zum ökologischen Massenmarkt im Bedürfnisfeld Textilien (**Textiles: From green niche to green mass market**); sub-order of the Carl von Ossietzky-University Oldenburg (project management: Schneidewind, U.), funded by BMBF, Oldenburg/Freiburg 2003
- Öko-Institut - Institute for Applied Ecology/ISOE (2003): Götz, K., Loose, W., Schmied, M., Schubert, S.: Mobilitätsstile in der Freizeit – Minderung der Umweltbelastungen des Freizeit- und Tourismusverkehrs (**Mobility Styles in Leisure Time**); Freiburg/Frankfurt 2003
- Öko-Institut - Institute for Applied Ecology/Ökopool (2003): Lohse, J.; Eberle, U.; Reuter, W.; Bunke, D.: Prüfung der Übernahme von Kriterien des Europäischen Umweltzeichens für den „Blauen Engel“ (Kurzexpertise) (**Expert review of adoption for the German “Blue Angel” ecolabel scheme of criteria used by the European Union ecolabel scheme**); commissioned by German Federal Environment Agency (Umweltbundesamt - UBA); Berlin, Hamburg/Freiburg 2003
- Öko-Institut - Institute for Applied Ecology (2003): Eberle, U.; Reuter, W.: Evaluation 25 Jahre Blauer Engel (**The German “Blue Angel” ecolabel scheme 25 years on – an evaluation**); in cooperation with Ökopool (Hamburg), commissioned by German Federal Environment Agency (Umweltbundesamt - UBA), Freiburg 2003
- Öko-Institut - Institute for Applied Ecology (2003): Hochfeld, C.; Graulich, K.; Schmitt, B.: Private Altersvorsorge – auf dem Weg zur Nachhaltigkeit (**Sustainable old age provision**); own project of Öko-Institut, supported by donations; Berlin/Freiburg/Darmstadt 2003
- Öko-Institut - Institute for Applied Ecology (2003): Ebinger, F.; Griebshammer, R.; Graulich, K.: Konkretisierung der Nachhaltigen Entwicklung für Motorola (**Concretizing sustainable development for Motorola**); commissioned by Motorola GmbH (Wiesbaden), Freiburg 2003
- Öko-Institut - Institute for Applied Ecology (2003): Barth, R., Dross, M.: **Legal Opportunities for Green Purchasing through Joint Procurement and Company Complaints**; commissioned by the Institute for Environmental Studies, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, (IVM) as part of the RELIEF project, EU Contract No. EESD-EVK-2000-00723 RELIEF; Darmstadt 2003
- Öko-Institut - Institute for Applied Ecology (2002): Brohmann, B.; Cames, M.; Voß, J.: Klimaschutz durch Verhaltensänderungen – Potenziale sozialer Motivationsstrategien in Baden-Württemberg (**Climate protection through behavioural change – Potentials of socially motivating strategies in Baden-Württemberg**); funded by the Ministry for the Environment and Transport of the Federal State Baden-Württemberg (Ministerium für Umwelt und Verkehr des Landes Baden-Württemberg); Darmstadt, Berlin 2002
- Öko-Institut - Institute for Applied Ecology (2001): Eberle, U.: Das Nachhaltigkeitszeichen – ein Instrument zur Umsetzung einer nachhaltigen Entwicklung? (**Sustainability labelling – A tool for implementing sustainable development?**); doctoral thesis at the Justus-Liebig-University Gießen; Freiburg 2001

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A 2.2 Articles and papers by Institute staff

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