

Transition road maps – an investigative approach to map the daily life consumption of individuals

Keywords: social practice, consumer behaviour, sufficiency, sustainable consumption, transition,

Abstract

The present paper aims at investigating an innovative approach to guide consumers' daily life choices in Germany towards a more sustainable way of acting. This should be achieved by introducing a new concept: transition road maps. Transition road maps bear the capability of illustrating courses of consumption behaviour without being prohibitive. These schemes foster self-determined behaviour and encourage the consumer to rethink and restructure his or her habits of consumption, with a focus on sustainability. The innovative thought is, not to simply stick to the usual triad of spheres of activity, consisting of nutrition, mobility and housing. Instead further aspects of consumers' daily routines are considered, such as leisure activities, time usage or financial activities.

Moreover the transition road maps are based on a new ideology of combining and connecting the qualitative algorithm of time use, financial spending and resource impact of social practices in the area of private consumption. In the long-term, the transition road maps could e.g. be used in sustainability communication or consumer counselling.

Introduction

Within decades of industrialisation and globalisation, industrial economies become efficient in their use of materials, while environmental pressure is continuously growing [1,2,3]. Therefore strategies of a transition to sustainability have become more and more relevant [1,4]. In a micro-perspective this arises the question of how people in their everyday lives are aware of connections between their personal consumption practices and global environmental change [4,5,6,7]. To unlock the sustainability potential of individuals, clear identification of spheres of activity as well as recommendations for alternative behaviour must be presented to the people. However, regarding socialisation and the current status quo, such strategies will not work without substantially rebuilding the society and its socio-technical regimes, such as e.g. industry including product-service innovation and user preferences [8,9].

Methodological background

The analysis of dynamics in social practices [6,9,10,11] and the differentiation of several levels of sustainable acting in the settings of private activities are necessary to rebuild the model of a target-oriented behaviour scheme. This scheme is expected to be helpful for developing a more realistic approach of research in the context of sustainable consumption and sufficiency. Therefore the understanding of social practice schemes as systems of consumption is essential.

The analysis is trying to demonstrate that private consumption patterns are often affected by several avoidance or management strategies, to maximize the individual's profit in the dimensions of time or monetary savings. The transition road map approach entails the advantage of stressing the time-, health- and monetary benefits, instead of being prohibitive.

In order to provide empirical data on these aspects, the concept is based on a mixed-method approach. At first, a very detailed literature review has been carried out to identify basic methods to map and identify resource intensity, individual spending and further consumption routines of different life styles in Germany [12]. As a second step, these findings were validated with the help of eleven interdisciplinary expert interviews. Thirdly, to validate the approach of transition road maps, an interdisciplinary expert workshop has been carried out in March 2014.

Results: Mapping transition roads

The transition road maps provide a profound approach within the mapping of daily routines and social practices. Following the results of the mixed-method strategy and the conceptual approach made by Kristof & Süßbauer (2011), the tools try to cover several spheres of activities in everyday life, which are perceived as relevant, such as nutrition, mobility, work, leisure activities etc. [13]. Based on this approach three basic strategies (longer useful life, sparing use, usage without owning) are applied for the evaluation and the recommendation regarding the identified practices.

The innovation of the advisory tools, three different ones were developed in this project, lies in the possibility for the consumer, to “map” his or her activities in the first step. In this way the individual figures out for himself or herself, which activities in everyday life are altogether relevant. In the following these activities are categorised under resource use, expenditure and time usage. In accordance with these assessments, advice for action or a change in social practice will be developed, based on the recommendations for sustainable consumption and self-sufficiency [12,13]. Moreover potential rebound effects can be disclosed and evaluated in this step. Another distinctive feature of the road map approach is that the consumer in the next step again gains a genuine choice over implementing or rejecting the recommendations for action. By this means the transition road maps can function as catalysts for social innovation [14,15,16].

These assessment and advisory tools will be presented during the session in a non-virtual form. They serve as a conceptual draft, which after further elaboration can be transferred into an “online version” for the usage in e.g. sustainability communication or counselling (in Germany counselling for private individuals is typically conducted by consumer centres).

Moreover potentials and barriers of this approach will be investigated. During the presentation the drafts will be presented and discussed with the participants in an interactive setting. Finally we would like to use the DeGrowth conference as a platform to further development the results and to discuss the outcomes.

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