

Laura Spengler

# Sufficiency as Policy

Necessity, Possibilities and Limitations



Nomos

Umweltsoziologie

Edited by

Prof. Dr. Matthias Groß, Helmholtz-Zentrum für Umweltforschung, Leipzig und Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena

Prof. Dr. Stefanie Hiß, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena

Prof. Dr. Harald Heinrichs, Leuphana Universität Lüneburg

Prof. Dr. Ortwin Renn, Institut für transformative

Nachhaltigkeitsforschung e. V. (IASS), Potsdam

Volume 5

Laura Spengler

# **Sufficiency as Policy**

Necessity, Possibilities and Limitations



**Nomos**

**The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek** lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>

a.t.: Lüneburg, Universität, Dissertation, 2017

Original title: Sufficiency as Policy: A Theoretical Analysis of the Necessity, Possibilities and Limitations of a Political Implementation of the Sufficiency Strategy

ISBN 978-3-8487-4205-9 (Print)  
978-3-8452-8474-3 (ePDF)

#### **British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-3-8487-4205-9 (Print)  
978-3-8452-8474-3 (ePDF)

#### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Spengler, Laura  
Sufficiency as Policy  
Necessity, Possibilities and Limitations  
Laura Spengler  
327 p.  
Includes bibliographic references.

ISBN 978-3-8487-4205-9 (Print)  
978-3-8452-8474-3 (ePDF)

1st Edition 2018

© Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, Baden-Baden, Germany 2018. Printed and bound in Germany.

This work is subject to copyright. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers. Under § 54 of the German Copyright Law where copies are made for other than private use a fee is payable to "Verwertungsgesellschaft Wort", Munich.

No responsibility for loss caused to any individual or organization acting on or refraining from action as a result of the material in this publication can be accepted by Nomos or the author.

## Overview of contents

1.	Introduction	17
2.	Theoretical framework: liberal democracy and sustainability	33
2.1	Liberalism	34
2.2	Democracy	43
2.3	Sustainability	54
2.4	Interim summary	103
3.	Sufficiency and technical solutions	105
3.1	Technology and technical solutions	106
3.2	Sufficiency	127
3.3	Interim summary	157
4.	The individual and the political	160
4.1	Sufficiency as an individual and as a political approach	164
4.2	Justification of state interventions to protect the environment	182
4.3	Consumption levels, accumulative harm, and interference	197
4.4	Potential toe-holds for criticism	219
4.5	Interim summary	230
5.	Sufficiency as policy: potential solutions	234
5.1	Overview of policy instruments	234
5.2	Selected policy examples	254
5.3	A “political conception” of sufficiency	272
6.	Summary and conclusions	284
	References	291

## Detailed List of Contents

1.	Introduction	17
	Aim and framework of this study	19
	Status quo regarding selected environmental issues and their potential harmful consequences	21
	Greenhouse gas emissions and climate change	23
	Use of natural resources	26
	Biodiversity loss	29
	Structure of the study	31
2.	Theoretical framework: liberal democracy and sustainability	33
	Introduction	33
2.1	Liberalism	34
	2.1.1 Liberty	34
	2.1.2 Equality	36
	2.1.3 Liberalism and neutrality towards the good	37
	2.1.4 Categories of liberalism	40
	2.1.5 Liberalism and Green Political Theory	42
2.2	Democracy	43
	2.2.1 Democracy and Liberalism	43
	2.2.2 Empirical characteristics and theories of the democratic state	45
	2.2.3 Deliberative democracy	46
	2.2.4 Democracy and Green Political Theory	50
2.3	Sustainability	54
	2.3.1 Introduction	54
	Dimensions and “Three Pillars Model”	56
	Other models and theories of sustainability	58
	An objective or normative concept?	59
	Relevant aspects of sustainability	60
	2.3.2 Anthropocentrism and physiocentrism	60
	2.3.3 Intra and intergenerational distributive justice	62
	Comparative and absolute standards	63
	Particular challenges of global justice	70

*Detailed List of Contents*

Particular challenges of intergenerational justice	72
A just distribution pattern internationally and towards the future	74
Synthesis	77
2.3.4 Weak and strong sustainability—the role of natural capital	77
“Critical” sustainability	83
Planetary boundaries	85
2.3.5 Sustainability, development and economic growth	90
Development	90
Economic growth	91
Compatibility of sustainability and different paths of economic development	96
Synthesis	102
2.4 Interim summary	103
3. Sufficiency and technical solutions	105
Introduction	105
3.1 Technology and technical solutions	106
3.1.1 Technology in environmental discourse	106
3.1.2 The term “technology”	111
3.1.3 Technical solutions: efficiency and environmentally adapted technologies	112
3.1.4 Limitations of technical solutions	114
Scale	115
No sustainable and no 100% environmentally sound technologies	116
Rebound effect	118
“ <i>No technical solution problems</i> ”	120
Available time and the cost involved	120
3.1.5 Theories and political programmes with a focus on technology	121
Ecological Modernisation	122
Industrial Ecology	123
Political programmes with a focus on technology	124

	Inclusion of organisational aspects and “social innovations”	126
3.2	Sufficiency	127
3.2.1	History of the idea	127
3.2.2	The term “sufficiency” and its interpretation	130
	Positive versus negative understanding	131
	Narrow and broad meaning	132
	Motivation: environmental carrying capacity and the good life	132
	“Enough” as an upper and lower threshold	133
	The macro and the micro perspectives	134
	The absolute versus the relative	135
	Voluntariness and dependence on external structures	136
	Reducing not only consumption but also population size?	137
	How to distinguish sufficiency from technical sustainability strategies?	138
3.2.3	Sufficiency in this study	142
3.2.4	Limitations and obstacles to sufficiency as a sustainability strategy	144
	Macroeconomic rebound effects	144
	Acceptance and other obstacles	145
3.2.5	Related concepts and debates	147
	Sufficiency as a notion in justice theory	147
	Satisficing	148
	Consumption research and sustainable consumption	151
	Social innovations	156
3.3	Interim summary	157
4.	The individual and the political	160
	Introduction	160
	“Individual” and “political”	162
4.1	Sufficiency as an individual and as a political approach	164
4.1.1	Sufficiency on individual level: practical potential and limitations	164
	Potential	164
	Limitations	166
4.1.2	Sufficiency as a political concern: state of the debate	169



*Detailed List of Contents*

	Potential role and functions of a sufficiency policy	169
	Concerns about the impact of a sufficiency policy on liberty and according responses	171
	Practical concerns	173
4.1.3	Interdependence between the individual and collective levels	176
4.1.4	Individual and collective responsibility for sustainability	177
4.1.5	The alternative: moralising individually harmless acts?	180
4.2	Justification of state interventions to protect the environment	182
4.2.1	Justifications of political interventions in a liberal society—the harm principle	182
4.2.2	The harm principle and environmental impacts—accumulative harm	188
	Problems related to accumulative harm	189
	Typical excuses to the principle and lines of critique	191
	Conclusion on accumulative environmental harm	195
4.3	Consumption levels, accumulative harm, and interference	197
4.3.1	Consumption levels as the cause of accumulative harm?	197
4.3.2	What is the difference in terms of restrictions on liberty between technology and sufficiency policies?	198
	Production, consumption, and liberty	199
	Technical strategies, sufficiency, and liberty	201
4.3.3	When is consumption “excessive”?	202
4.3.4	Can the excessive use of resources cause harm to others?	205
4.3.5	What degree of interference is legitimate with regard to excessive consumption?	210
4.3.6	How to translate limits on “excessive” aggregate consumption into ways to reduce individual consumption?	213
	Targeting harmful pollutants and scarce resources	214
	Targeting individuals	215
	Targeting certain activities or consumption goods	217
4.4	Potential toe-holds for criticism	219
4.4.1	“Sufficiency policies violate the neutrality principle”	219
4.4.2	“What is at stake is too important”	225

4.4.3	“Without any foundation in an account of the good life sufficiency policy remains ineffective”	226
4.4.4	“In a democracy, sufficiency will never be adopted as policy”	228
4.5	Interim summary	230
5.	Sufficiency as policy: potential solutions	234
5.1	Overview of policy instruments	234
5.1.1	Categories and assessment criteria	235
5.1.2	Policy proposals in the literature	237
5.1.3	Discussion	243
	Regulatory law	244
	Planning	246
	Economic instruments	247
	Nudging	248
	Cooperation	251
	Information	252
5.2	Selected policy examples	254
5.2.1	Environmental taxes on resources and emissions	254
5.2.2	Personal carbon trading	259
5.2.3	Planning instruments for urban transport infrastructure	265
5.2.4	Conclusions from the policy examples	270
5.3	A “political conception” of sufficiency	272
5.3.1	Conception	273
	Area of application and normative basis	273
	Characterisation of sufficiency as policy	274
	Justification	275
	Environmental carrying capacity and critical limits	276
	Practical suggestions for sufficiency policies	277
5.3.2	Open questions and limitations of the conception	281
6.	Summary and conclusions	284
	References	291