

From the Editors-in-Chief

TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE SUFFICIENCY NARRATIVE

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Abstract: In this Editorial, we tackle perhaps the most urgent issue of our time – the need to orient lives more towards sufficiency. Achieving such a transformation also requires a parallel paradigm shift in science. In this Editorial, we have two guest authors, Teemu Koskimäki and Aleksi Neuvonen, who are members of the SISU Consortium doing research on sufficiency transition in Finland.

Keywords: *sufficiency, inclusive society, green transition, cultural transformation*



Sufficiency solutions to wicked problems

“Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast,” wrote Lewis Carroll in *Alice in Wonderland*. Therein may lie the answer to solving the multiple intertwined ecological and societal crises facing us today. Climate change, overconsumption and biodiversity loss already affect lives in various ways and at various stages. These have even been called *wicked problems* (e.g., Peters, 2017), exceedingly complicated to understand and difficult to solve. Some may even think this is impossible. However, recent research has started to increasingly focus on the potential of sufficiency as a cross-cutting solution (Laurent, 2024).

Sufficiency refers to a sense of “enoughness”, both from the perspective of having enough and not too much (Lage, 2022). From an ecological perspective, sufficiency can define a maximum level of consumption that is environmentally sustainable, but it also needs to consider historical and cultural contexts (Sandberg, 2021). It, therefore, implies not only a reassessment of needs but also a normative shift and a cultural transition.

How humans, technology and sufficiency intersect

Human-technology relations can be seen as part of the cultural sufficiency transformation. The transition towards life within planetary boundaries implies a fundamental shift from the current way of living, altering both consumption and production-related policies and practices (Siivonen 2022). From a cultural and societal point of view, a successful green transition requires a concurrent cultural sustainability transformation, where anticipations of the future shift, novel values and worldviews are co-created in a way that are both intellectually and emotionally supportive of new sufficiency policies and practices (Brosch & Steg, 2021; Siivonen, 2022; Koskimäki, 2021; Jungell-Michelsson & Heikkurinen, 2022).

In the pursuit of a sufficiency transformation within socio-ecological systems, several leverage points emerge as crucial for guiding systemic change (Koskimäki, 2021). Aligning societal goals can lead and motivate sufficiency practices and worldviews. Structural goals of the system can be altered by reorganising incentive systems to guide reductions in overconsumption and in excess or wasteful forms of production — both essential for maintaining ecological and social balance. Revising economic parameters, such as subsidies and taxes, can promote resource equity, discourage unsustainable practices and foster the development of new social innovations and sufficiency-facilitating technologies. Information flows are powerful avenues to influence system behaviour, and this can be tapped into with new policies and techniques that improve the awareness of sufficiency solutions and the problems of overconsumption. Altering system feedbacks — both positive (self-reinforcing) and negative (self-controlling) — can ensure responsiveness to human and ecological requirements, avoiding overshoot and countering potential obstacles to change. Broad engagement in transformation processes can facilitate collective sufficiency innovations, such as through new sharing practices.

By embedding technological advancements, new practices and social innovations within this sufficiency transformation framework, the potential for significant shifts in the levels and

patterns of consumption and resource use increases, paving the way for a transformative redefinition of progress and success in our societies. Together, these elements could enable societies to more quickly adapt to ecological and social limits and to experiment with alternative economic and social structures that are sustainable, resilient and adaptive to future challenges.

Sufficiency narrative of human-technology relations

To tackle the wicked problems, the sufficiency transition also needs a new narrative (Hoekstra et al, 2024). People – both decision-makers and ordinary citizens – tend to think narratively. Narratives are pathways that help humans make sense of the world, and they are influenced by values and actions. Sometimes people seem stuck with old ways of seeing and thinking, which implies a deep-seated fondness with our current ways of narrating the world. To imagine, create and implement new solutions, more inclusive narratives are needed.

The currently emerging context of forward-looking cultural narratives offers a novel perspective for studying anticipatory attitudes and anticipatory systems guiding present-day behaviours. Anticipatory attitudes refer to the psychological and cultural aspects of how individuals and societies conceptualise and react to the future. In other words, they are practices of ‘using-the-future’ in the present. Anticipatory systems are culturally constructed narrative structures that guide these assumptions about the future, thus limiting the inherent uncertainty associated with the future into a more manageable, operational form (Miller, 2018). The rise of new future-oriented narratives in politics and economics signifies a shift in the landscape of these systems.

There is, therefore, a need for building a notion on images of the future that affect human behaviour and initiatives through which societies and organisations direct their collective actions. At present, relatively little is known about the changes in anticipatory attitudes and the underlying anticipatory systems.

In this context, technology, as a tool, can be part of the solution or part of the problem – often it is both. On the one hand, technology creates possibilities to implement sufficiency solutions, to reduce consumption or share our resources more wisely. On the other hand, technology demands natural resources and energy, and these mechanisms can be rather invisible. For example, a shift to a technologically advanced digital economy can seem immaterial, because we do not see how much energy our activity in social media demands or the amount of precious earth minerals that are wasted with each new generation of short-lived devices. Thus, it is necessary to deepen our understanding of the role of human agency and user contributions in technological change, as well as future anticipations guiding them, while also emphasising the need for a more comprehensive approach to human-technology interactions (see, for example, Wiggins et al., 2020).

There is no time to waste. Introducing a new narrative – and future anticipations derived from it - may help us to create visions of what a good life could look like, and the leverage points can help us harness all our potential and skills for the betterment of a shared future guided by the concept of sufficiency. The Human Technology Journal has yet to feature many

articles on sufficiency or the green transition. We encourage consideration of these interconnected topics in future publications.

About the guest writers

The theme of this editorial has been inspired by the project Sufficiency Solutions for a Resilient, Green, and Just Finland (SISU), on which Teemu Koskimäki, Aleksi Neuvonen and Kristiina Korjonen-Kuusipuro currently work. SISU is funded by the Strategic Research Council of Finland (Grant No. STN/2023/358763), and it seeks to harness the untapped potential of sufficiency solutions. The project aims to develop a new ecological macro-economic model to simulate resilient green transition and sufficiency scenarios, examine the attitudes toward the future of vulnerable groups and identify ways to maintain citizens' trust in societal institutions during a green transition. Furthermore, the project co-creates new anticipatory beliefs to drive sufficiency and engages key societal stakeholders in Finland in a discussion of sufficiency solutions. The project's overall aim is to ensure that the green transition and basic welfare state promises can be realised even in conditions where the economy does not grow. (<https://sisu-stn.fi/en/>)

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