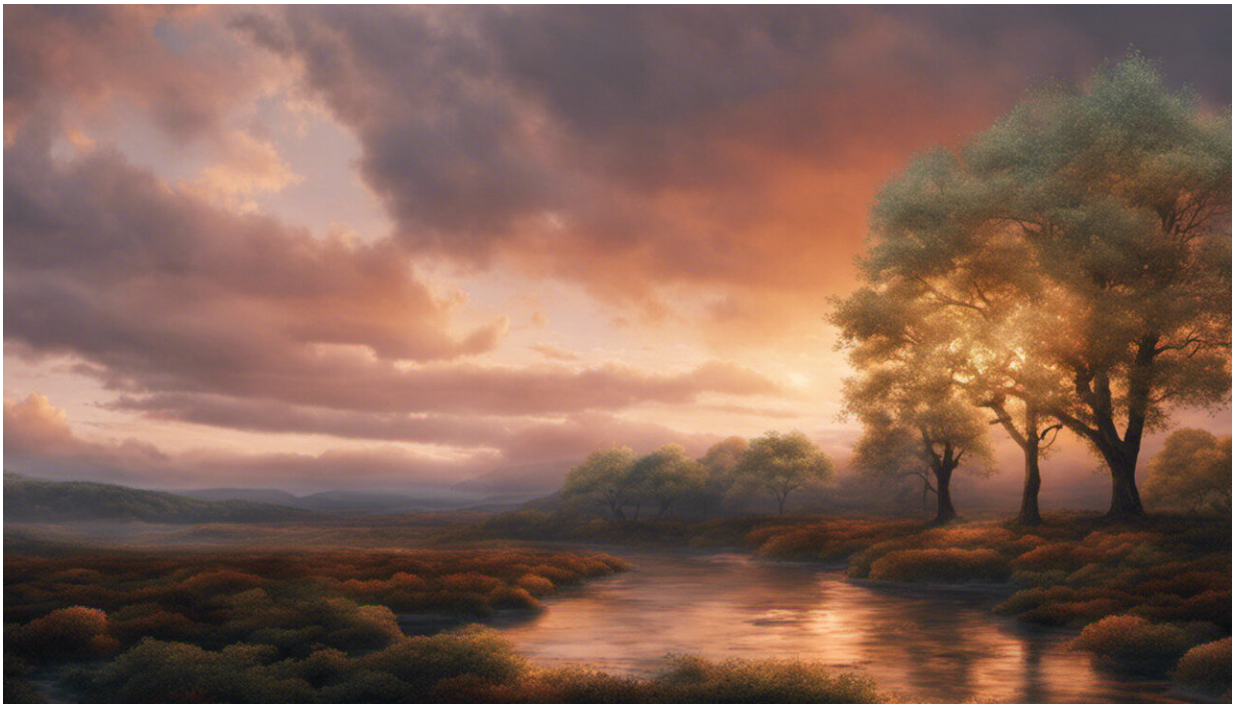


Choosing sufficiency for greater fulfillment and satisfaction

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

The consumerist economy constantly prompts people to buy new things to find happiness, even when it's unsustainable. Sufficiency is a burgeoning idea that calls for buying fewer material goods and finding fulfillment in sustainability.

Thinking of goods as circular and leaving a lighter environmental footprint are ideas that are moving from niche to norm. Growing numbers of people now buy less stuff and buy better quality, longer-lasting goods.

Some people also want to extend the lifetime of products by repurposing, repairing, reusing and recycling them.

In other words, as the European Union presses ahead with [the EU Green Deal](#) to become the first carbon-neutral continent by 2050, many ordinary people of Europe are doing their part by modifying their [lifestyle choices](#).

Yet, welcome as low-carbon choices are to mitigate the increase in greenhouse gases (GHGs), they can often be poorly understood. Two new projects supported by Horizon science funding intend to explore the area.

By examining lifestyles that shun excess and embrace "sufficiency," researchers in the newly commenced [FULFILL research project](#) will shed light on a trend that has been marked by youth climate protests, the COVID-19 pandemic and even the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Deep changes

"Interest in sustainable lifestyles is clearly rising," said Dr. Elisabeth Dütschke of the Fraunhofer Institute for Systems and Innovation Research in Germany. "However, it is still open whether this means that deep changes to our societies are actually coming."

Although a relatively new principle, the notion of sufficiency is central to the European Green Deal objectives because it calls for practices that decrease demand for natural resources and for polluting energy—the

root cause of the worsening climate crisis.

The issue gains new primacy as we are urged to reduce our consumption of oil and gas because it is in short supply as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

As it ramps up in its first year, FULFILL plans to interview households and examine initiatives in five EU countries—Denmark, France, Germany, Italy and Latvia—as well as in India.

The goal is to learn to what extent sufficiency as a way of life is possible in today's globalized world by identifying obstacles. The researchers will also examine how it affects other matters, like health or gender equality.

From there, they will draw up [policy recommendations](#)—together with citizens from varying backgrounds—and point out realistic paths to more sufficient lifestyles.

Sufficiency barriers

The early evidence is suggesting that there are many barriers to adopting sufficiency as a way of life.

"So far, our research really underlined the strong interconnections between all areas of life and how deep change needs to be," said Dr. Dütschke.

"People trying to live highly sufficient lifestyles face many challenges and are, more or less, not able to live a normal life like others do." New clothes, the latest goods and ever more consumption are central to [economic activity](#).

While significant change on this front in wealthy, [democratic societies](#)

may be tough to achieve, the challenges faced in poorer countries is different.

"In many parts of the world, people are living very sufficiently but not by choice," said Dr. Dütschke. "We need to find ways to improve their [lifestyle](#) and well-being without making the mistakes of over-consumption and its negative consequences."

Fundamental rethink

The second project—[EU 1.5 Lifestyles](#)—links the individual's transformation of habits to a fundamental rethink of economic and social institutions themselves. The project's name is inspired by the worldwide goal to limit global temperature rise to 1.5° C, coming out of [the Paris Agreement](#) made in 2015.

The risk is growing of the world crossing "tipping points" that trigger irreversible climate change. Alarm about this increasingly likely scenario has helped focus minds on understanding what types of everyday activity can contribute to meeting the temperature target.

Proponents of this largely bottom-up approach stress the carbon footprint of average households and shoppers.

Though rarely held accountable, manufacturers and retailers are as vitally important to progress as consumers are, according to Dr. Steffen Hirth, a postdoctoral researcher at the Center for Interdisciplinary Sustainability Research of the University of Münster in Germany who is working with the EU 1.5 Lifestyles consortium.

"The adoption of 'green' lifestyles and corresponding products and services are not something that should depend on consumer choices alone," said Dr. Hirth. "Producers decide how, how much and what is

produced," he said.

"We cannot consume ourselves out of a crisis of overconsumption."

As a result, decisive political regulation will be needed to discourage unviable economic activity and, by extension, reorient production practices towards environmental objectives, said Dr. Hirth.

Open to change

The project's initial findings are that mainstreaming 1.5-degree lifestyles requires overcoming "a range of very deeply ingrained structural barriers" and "an openness for fundamental change, including a good level of imagination of how a carbon neutral society would really look like."

With the researchers ultimately aiming to influence policymakers and others able to make a difference, Dr. Hirth sees reasons for both pessimism and optimism.

"It is weird to live in a society that already has enormous knowledge about this crisis and has available technology to solve it, without being able to draw the necessary political conclusions and take decisive steps towards actual social change," he said.

"At the same time, an imaginary society that has solved the climate crisis by focusing on essential needs, according to the latest research, could be a much happier society with higher welfare and well-being than in fossil fuel-based capitalism."

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