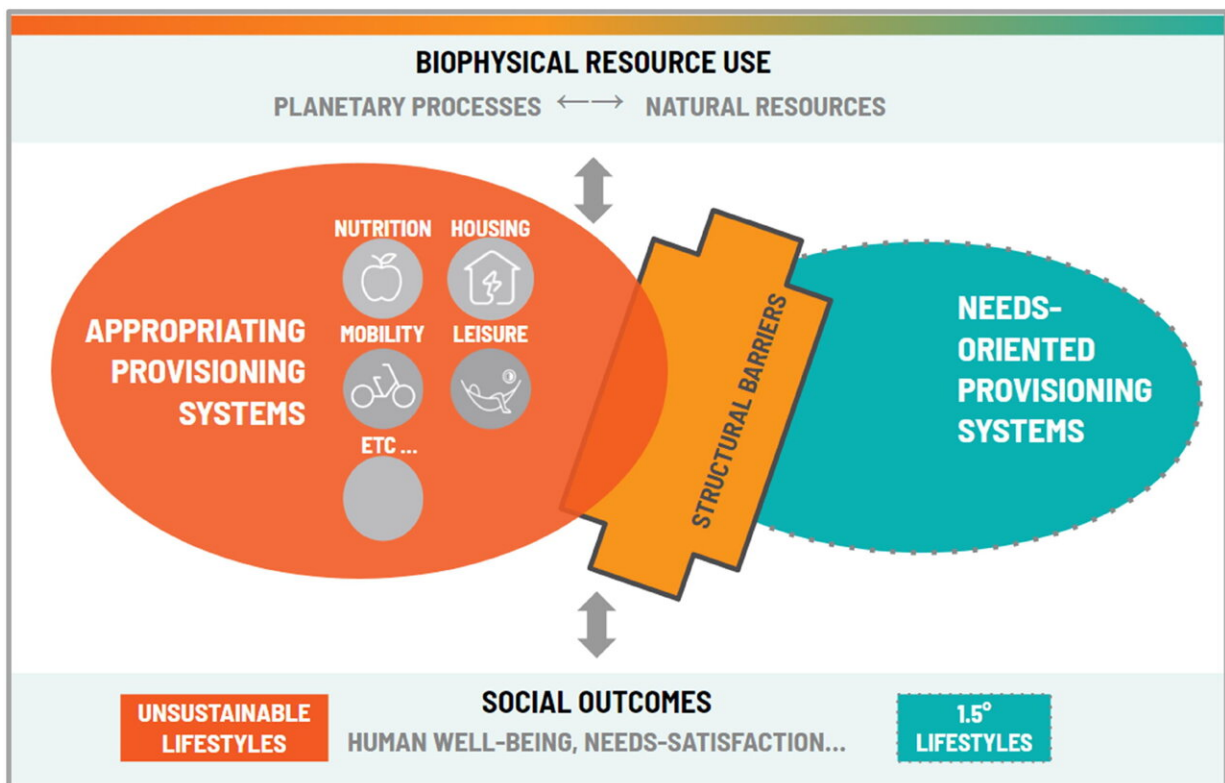


Prioritize well-being over growth: New paradigm needed for climate-friendly lifestyles

August 2 2024, by Bianca Schröder



Provisioning systems: translators of resources into needs-satisfaction (Adapted from Fanning, O’Neill, and Büchs, 2020). Credit: *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy* (2024). DOI: 10.1080/15487733.2024.2372120

Ensuring the well-being of citizens while reducing resource consumption

has proved to be a massive challenge. Policymakers in the European Union are keen to identify new approaches to provisioning that will safeguard the well-being of citizens without incurring excessive environmental burdens.

A study conducted in five EU countries concludes that rather than [economic growth](#), the satisfaction of citizens' needs should take center-stage in efforts to rethink and redesign provisioning systems.

"In order to deliver on the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement we must change the current unsustainable patterns of production and consumption across the four central provisioning systems of food, mobility, housing, and leisure. Our research sought to identify the key structural barriers to change.

"To achieve this, we conducted interviews with experts in five EU countries—Germany, Latvia, Sweden, Spain and Hungary—and held discussions in Stakeholder Think Labs with local representatives from politics, [civil society](#), media and think tanks," explains lead author Halliki Kreinin (Research Institute for Sustainability—Helmholtz Center Potsdam, RIFS).

This research was carried out through the EU 1.5° Lifestyles project consortium, which is coordinated by RIFS. The findings are [published](#) in the journal *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy*.

The interviewees identified the economic growth paradigm as the most impactful barrier to the transformation of provisioning systems. In their opinion, it is so powerful that actors in all areas of society have adopted it indiscriminately as a goal for action.

A needs-oriented approach, focused on ensuring the well-being of all, offers an alternative. Pivoting to this narrative would also help to build

acceptance for the necessary downsizing or phase-out of some harmful industries and technologies.

A holistic approach to sustainability policy is needed

Establishing individual and collective well-being as a guiding principle, offers the opportunity to pursue more consistent sustainability policies, the interviewees stated. Many people favor measures such as bans, limits and taxes where necessary.

"Restricting or strongly disincentivizing the purchase and use of extremely polluting goods and services such as private jets, private space travel or SUVs would be one important step. However, individual measures alone will not suffice; rather, interlinking policies and measures are needed. At the moment, climate and [economic policies](#) are frequently at odds with each other," says RIFS director Doris Fuchs, who co-authored the study.

In order to implement a coherent sustainability policy, governments would have to curb the influence of powerful interest groups such as the fossil fuel industry. Other important enablers for change include incentivizing investment in sustainable technologies and products and incorporating environmental costs in pricing, for example, by lowering taxes on labor and raising those on emissions/energy consumption.

Social inequality hinders change

The interviewees also mentioned various soft factors such as strengthening alternative narratives and the adoption of alternative indicators of quality of life. The problem of inequality came up repeatedly in the Stakeholder Think Labs.

Poorer population groups are most affected by [climate change](#), but also lack the resources to bring about change. Future policymaking must facilitate their participation. Issues relating to sustainability should also be included in curricula and school education to promote change.

Interviewees across all five countries emphasized that comprehensive structural change is necessary, explains Halliki Kreinin. "We cannot leave the fight against climate change to individual citizens. Instead, we must fundamentally change our provisioning systems.

"Currently, these systems are failing to meet the needs of populations and are operating at levels of resource consumption that are too high to deliver."

Developing sustainable provisioning systems that can satisfy needs and deliver on the Paris Climate Goals will require a comprehensive transformation with concerted strategic measures at the system level.

More information: Halliki Kreinin et al, Transforming provisioning systems to enable 1.5° lifestyles in Europe? Expert and stakeholder views on overcoming structural barriers, *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy* (2024). [DOI: 10.1080/15487733.2024.2372120](https://doi.org/10.1080/15487733.2024.2372120)

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