CENTRE FOR RESEARCH INTO
ENERGY DEMAND SOLUTIONS

Energy sufficiency in policy and practice: the question of needs and wants

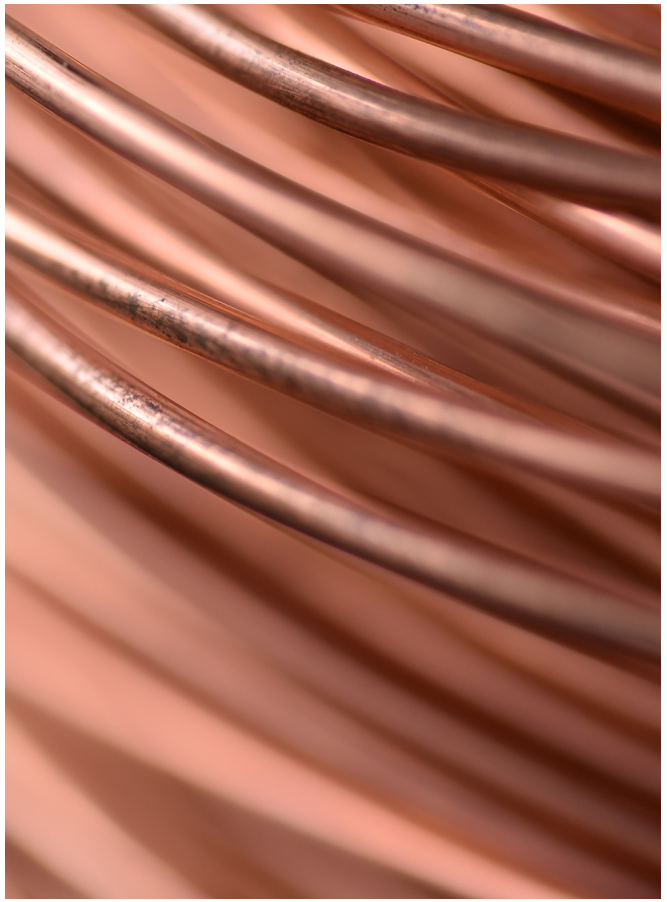
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5 JUNE 2019

ECEEE Sufficiency project

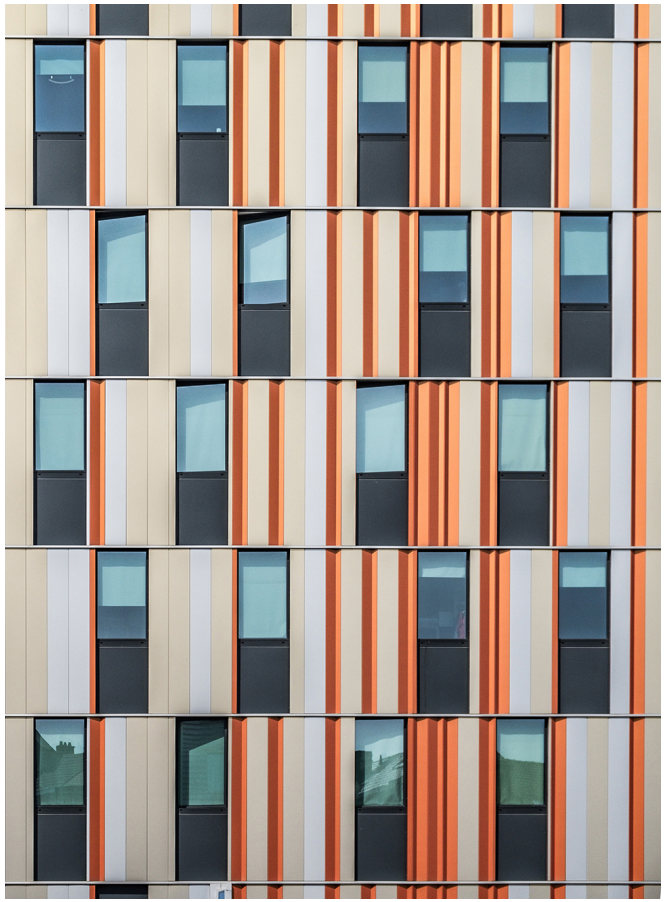
Purpose: exploring the idea of energy sufficiency in more detail, with the aim of explaining to policy makers how we can go beyond energy efficiency policy to encourage greater energy sufficiency.

Co-funded by ECEEE, KR Foundation, UKERC, CREDS

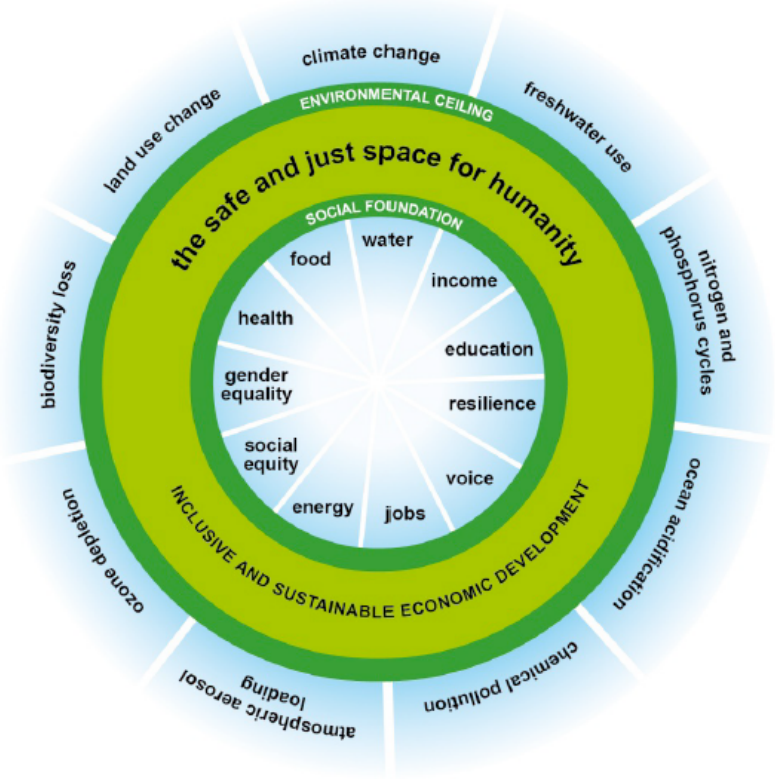


ECEEE sufficiency project: details

- Sarah Darby and I wrote the ‘conceptual’ paper of the series.
- Other papers include: energy sufficiency and rebound effects; energy sufficiency in products; energy sufficiency in buildings. www.energysufficiency.org
- Ongoing series of international workshops
- We will be leading a Solutions Workshop on sufficiency 15.00-16.00 Thursday to explore some of our work in an interactive way.



The Raworth/Oxfam sustainable development 'doughnut'



Raworth, K. (2017) *Doughnut economics: Seven ways to think like a 21st-Century economist*. London, Random House Business Books

Definitions

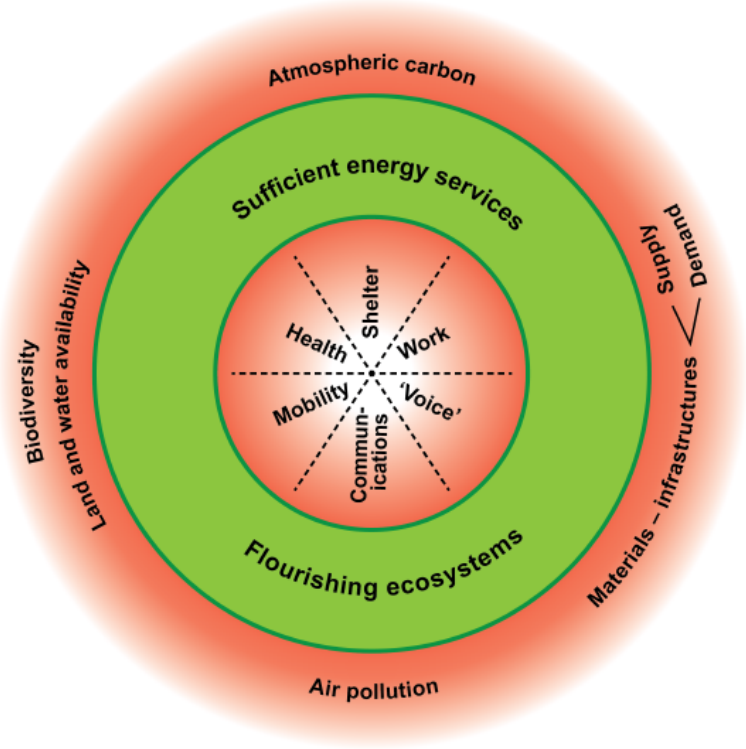
Sufficiency is an amount of something that is enough for a particular purpose.

Energy sufficiency is a state in which people's basic needs for energy services are met equitably and ecological limits are respected

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Energy sufficiency is an organising principle for achieving that state

The doughnut, adapted for thinking about energy sufficiency



That definition again…

Energy sufficiency is a state in which people's basic needs for energy services are met equitably and ecological limits are respected

All of these concepts can be argued about!

Distinguishing between needs and wants

There are complex and long-standing debates as to whether there is a distinction between human needs and wants, and if so, how this can be defined.

Themes:

- whether human needs have any universal or objective features;
- what an account of human need should look like, with different approaches to
  - material and non-material necessities
  - absolute and relative norms
  - expert and public/'lay' judgement about what are necessities.

A theory of need

Doyal and Gough (1991) theorised that human need are universal, with objective features, and include both material and non-material needs.

They argue that a sound theory of need provides firm foundations on which to build sustainability targets for public policy.

They identified two basic needs: physical health and autonomy

They proposed eleven 'intermediate needs' including nutritious food and water, protective housing, appropriate health care, security in childhood, significant primary relationships.

Empirical research on needs and wants

The ‘Minimum Income Standard’ is calculated by specifying ‘baskets’ of goods and services required by different types of household.

“A minimum standard of living in the UK today includes, but is more than just, food, clothes and shelter. It is about having what you need in order to have the opportunities and choices necessary to participate in society.”

A participatory method is used to determine what is necessary for different groups in society, and this is revisited every two years. Most items regarded as ‘needs’ have been stable since 2008.

Transport needs

MIS discussions about transport identified the following as needs:

- a (second hand) car for families with children, but not for single people or couples without children.
- bus fares
- modest amount of taxi fares for those without cars
- bicycles for pensioners, children and the man in parent couples (!)
- UK holidays – so no international travel

Reflections

- Change of tone – ‘basic needs’ vs wants is very different language from ‘efficiency’ – widely perceived as neutral (even if things are really more complex than this).
- Talking about needs and wants does make me feel rather uncomfortable – I’m an energy expert not a philosopher
- It is probably necessary as part of the sufficiency agenda
- There are methods around for gaining consensus on this
- These should be expanded and used in the climate change and energy transition context (have been used primarily to think about social policy)

Final thoughts

Sufficiency is an important concept which fits well with global agreements on climate change and sustainable development goals.

Sufficiency is a challenging concept which does not fit with economic thinking or (much of) current culture.

This idea, or something like it, is necessary to move policy beyond energy and material efficiency.

We hope to continue to work on the idea, to enhance the conceptual basis and to move into policy development.

In the wise words of the Rolling Stones

No, you can't always get what you want
You can't always get what you want
You can't always get what you want
But if you try sometime you find
You get what need

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