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The role of learning in the shift to more sufficient energy–consuming practices

Chiara Tellarini and Toke Haunstrup Christensen (Aalborg University, Copenhagen)

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Importance of targeting households' energy consuming– practices as a way to combat climate change

- Energy consumed in households constitutes a large toll on the total of the carbon emissions. For this reason, it is important to develop strategies of sufficiency to limit everyday consumption, by bringing changes to practices. How?



Outline of the presentation

- Research questions of our study
- Practice theories as a way to understand consumption and dynamics of energy use in everyday life
- Sufficiency – and why we need to focus on *learning for sufficiency*?
- Theories on learning
- Tentative attempts to develop a framework for learning and sufficiency
- Conclusion

Why learning for a green transition?

- **“**As Anthony Giddens pleaded at the World Climate Solutions conference in Copenhagen in September 2010, **addressing climate change, energy and consumption issues is not only a question of developing the right technologies; we also need sociological innovation and creativity.** Maybe we should not only focus, for example, on developing EVs that give us better versions of the old transport system; maybe we should start thinking ‘beyond the car’ **” (Nyborg and Røpke 2011: 1858).**

Research questions leading our presentation

- In which ways can learning contribute to achieve sufficiency?

- Can learning developed through a practice theoretical approach help us in this transition?



Practice theories

- There are several authors that developed this theoretical approach, by focusing on and highlighting different aspects of it.
- They place the origin of social order and social change in practices (social located in practices).
- Practices are routinized types of behaviours (Reckwitz 2002), that constitute peoples' daily lives through discourses, actions, beliefs, worldviews, as well as objects and meanings.








Practice theories

- “A ‘practice’ (Praktik) is a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of **bodily activities**, **forms of mental activities**, **‘things’ and their use**, a **background knowledge in the form of understanding**, **know–how**, **states of emotion** and **motivational knowledge**” (Reckwitz 2002: 249).



Cooking as an example of a practice

- **Cooking** is a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: it is **a bodily activity;** it is also a form of **mental** activity; it needs **things and their** use; it implies **a background** knowledge, an **understanding** and **know–how**; it involves also **states of emotion** and **motivational knowledge**.



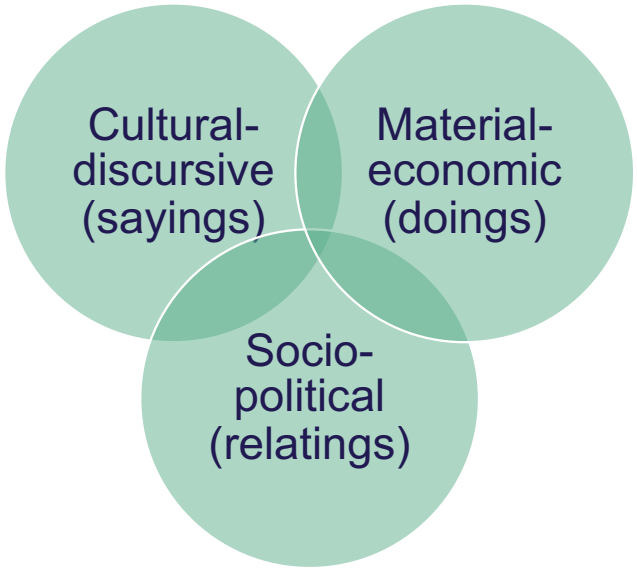


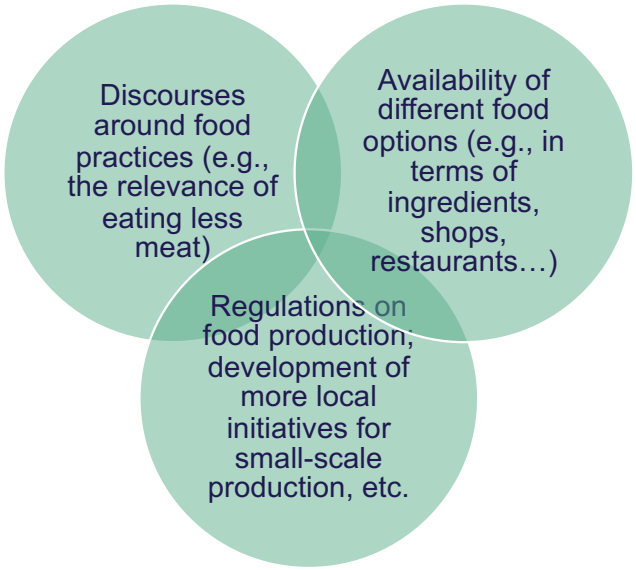
- As Shove (2010: 1278) writes, “certain forms of demand are unavoidably inscribed, for example, in the design and operation of electricity and water infrastructures and in the architecture of the home itself”, so conditions and factors that do not depend on individuals and that need to be changed too!

Practice architectures



- In Kemmis, practices identified as being composed by sayings, doings and relatings.
- Kemmis (2022; 2014) introduced also the concept of “practice architectures”, which are the infrastructures where practices are embedded and carried out.



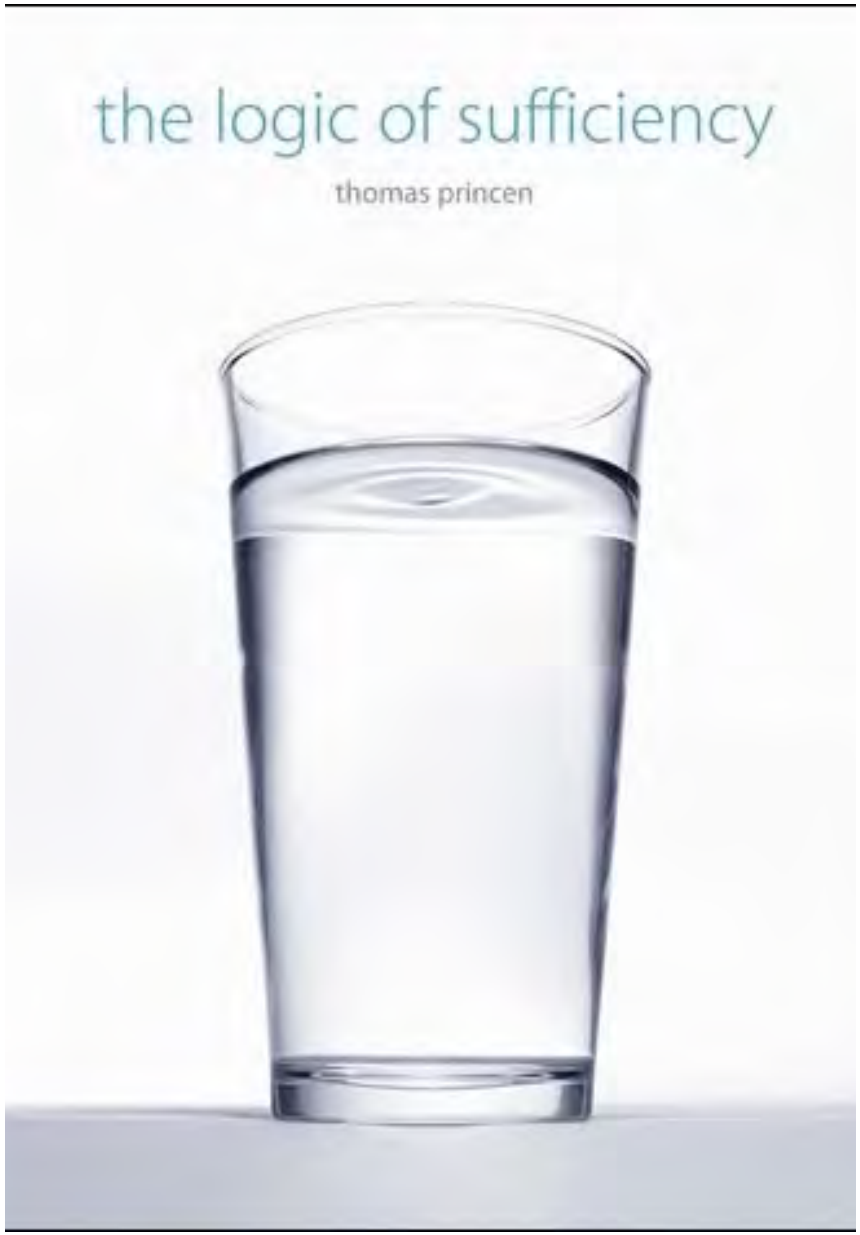


Sufficiency

- Limits to growth, planetary boundaries and the “one-planet-thinking”

- Sufficiency (Sachs 1993, Princen 2005, eceee, and others)
  1. Resource consumption should stay within the carrying capacity of Earth’s ecosystems
  2. Fair distribution of (access to) resources within and between generations – now and in the future
- “the ethics of enough” (Gough, 2017)
- Living well in a world worth living in (Kemmis, 2014)

- Consumption corridors (min & max consumption levels) (Di Giulio & Fuchs, 2014)



Why do we need learning to reach sufficiency?

- Sufficiency requires thorough changes in socio-technical structures and everyday practices
  - In many countries, achieving *social participation* and *autonomy* (two core human needs, cf. Doyal & Gough) exceed the maximum level of consumption. Energy-intensity is built into the social-material fabric (practice architectures) of societies.
- *Long-term* thorough changes are unimaginable without active involvement of citizens through (collective) learning processes
- In the *short term*, we need to develop new everyday practices within existing socio-technical structures – this requires the involvement of the embodied-practical knowledge of citizens to come up with workable solutions

"Learning should not be understood narrowly as the acquisition of knowledge … but rather as 'coming to practice differently' through the reproduction of practices with variations" (Kemmis, 2021)

We will need the creativity and 'innovation' of people who are *virtuosi performers* of their everyday practices and who therefore can engage in learning processes aiming at better choosing 'what to do in a practice' (to reach sufficiency) and contesting the 'normativity that governs the practices she carries on' (quotes from Schatzki 2017)

Learning theories

- Learning needed in order to have a just and democratic transition, that could last in the long–term and start at the level of individuals' daily lives.
- Learning can actively engage people in changing the performance of certain practices.
- We approach learning as it occurs through the participation in practices, as a combination of "cognitive and bodily processes" (Lave and Wenger 1991).



Learning process



Situated, social and collective: Learning is imagined to happen collectively in the social situations where individuals are embedded, being “located in the processes of coparticipation, not the heads of individuals” (Lave and Wenger 1991: 13).



Transformative: Process “happening in the reproduction (with variation) and transformation of practices, and the production of new practices” (Kemmis 2021: 280). Learning as causing transformation of practices AND people – “ontological transformation of people” (Schatzki 2017: 24) .



Flexible: It should enable individuals and communities to continually adapt to external changing circumstances (Hager 2012: 30).



Hybrid: Kemmis (2022: 10) refers to “the perfect” as being “the enemy of the good”: learning should also be a “process of hybridization”, where the “emergence of new practices” happens “alongside more established practices” (Kemmis 2022: 10).

How to learn to perform more sufficient everyday practices

4 stages characterizing learning (Schatzki 2017)	How these 4 stages can be achieved "in practice"
1) It consists in achieving excellence in the performance of a chosen practice – so in its sayings, doings, etc.	Learning and incorporating a new "sufficient" practice – e.g., using the "right amount" of water when cooking.
2) Ability of the practitioner to relate the skills gained by performing the new practice to other settings where other practices are carried out.	Practitioners, by being more confident in the new practice performance, get engaged in other ways of saving water – and not just in the context of the cooking practice.
3) "People better choose what to do in a practice. This can involve reasoning better or making choices that are better informed by the state of the world" (Schatzki 2017: 32).	Engagement with the community, confrontation of the newly adopted practice with the world (this could happen also at the level of the neighborhood, through dinners, meetings, etc.) (cf. flexibility of learning process)
4) "Normative structure of a practice" (Schatzki 2017: 32), and performers' ability, through learning, to adapt and challenge the normativities and rules "set in stone", according to the changing external circumstances.	Following this confrontation (step 3), the "sociological and creative" process can happen, where also new narratives are commonly built and new practices established (challenge of practice architectures).

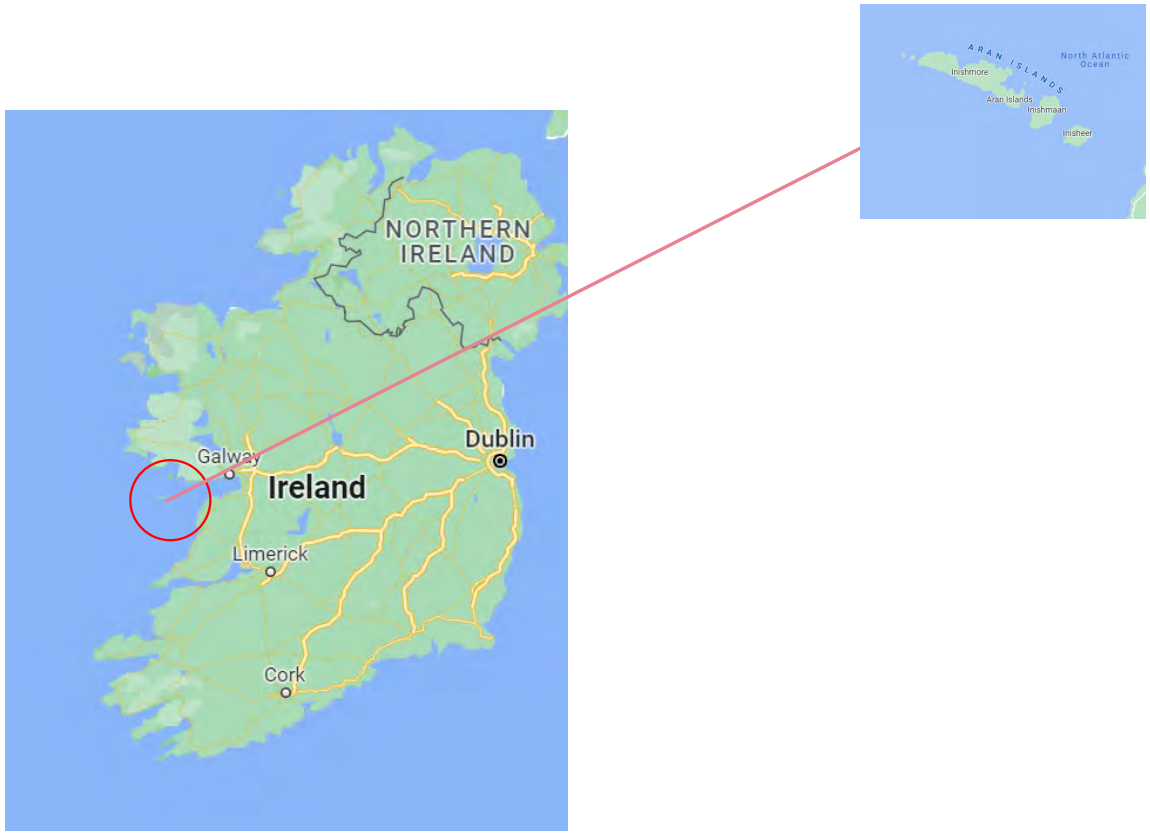
Thinking in terms of practice architectures?

Practices (as performances)	Practice architectures
Sayings Making energy a ”wonder” to be cherised and cared for	*Cultural-discursive arrangements* The climate emergency is a call for action; we are living with the sun and wind
Doings Syncing daily habits with rhythms of sun and wind	*Material-economic arrangements* Micro-generation – making energy local; new tax structures on resources
Relatings New ways of relating socially not (too) dependent on automobility; new ways of sociality (familial/extra familial) not dependent on extensive consumption (e.g. holidays)	*Social-political arrangements* Rescaling communities and social networks; new forms of communities

Conclusions

- Sufficiency is needed for “living well in a world worth living in” (Kemmis, 2014).
- To reach sufficiency, thorough changes in practices and practice architectures are needed.
- Learning is needed to achieve these changes, by fully and actively involving people as part of a just and democratic transition.

Next steps...


NORTHERN IRELAND
Galway
Ireland
Dublin
Limerick
Cork
ARAN ISLANDS
North Atlantic Ocean
Inishmore
Aran Islands
Inishmaan
Inisheer


ARAN ISLANDS
North Atlantic Ocean
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Aran Islands
Inishmaan
Inisheer

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Thank you ☺

- Chiara Tellarini – ctellarini@build.aau.dk
- Toke Haunstrup Christensen – thc@build.aau.dk