Chapitre de livre   2023   Published version   Open Access

- -

Everyday Life and How It Changes: Studying 'Sustainable Wellbeing' with Students During a Pandemic

- -

Sahakian, Marlyne

<p style="text-align:center">9</p>

Everyday Life and How It Changes: Studying 'Sustainable Wellbeing' with Students During a Pandemic

Marlyne Sahakian

Introduction

Semi-confinement measures around the COVID-19 pandemic led to disruptions in everyday lives, in particular when it comes to reconfiguring habitual and routinized ways of doing things—a central theme in a social practice approach to understanding consumption (Shove, 2012; Southerton, 2013; Sahakian & Wilhite, 2014). For those who were not on the front lines delivering necessary services, the home became a space where multiple daily activities unfolded, leading to experimentations with new ways of doing that challenged established practices. How changes in social practices relate to sustainable consumption outcomes is a growing field of inquiry. The starting point for such studies is oftentimes focused on specific resources and related consumption domains, such as the energy used for thermal comfort, lighting or laundry (Wilk & Wilhite, 1985; Wilhite et al., 2000; Wilhite, 2009, 2013; Sahakian,

M. Sahakian (✉)
Department of Sociology, University of Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland
e-mail: Marlyne.Sahakian@unige.ch

2014; Hansen et al., 2016; Godin et al., 2020; Sahakian, Rau, & Wallenborn, 2020). In more recent years, there have been attempts to bring a second normative aim into consumption studies: that of sustainable wellbeing or what it means to live the good life with respect for earth system dynamics and social justice issues (Wilhite, 2015; Guillen-Royo & Wilhite, 2015; Jackson, 2017; Fuchs et al., 2021). The aim of this contribution is to answer the question, how can a practice-theory approach to the study of everyday life during a pandemic tell us something about opportunities for more 'sustainable wellbeing'?

Because the pandemic also led to disruptions in how classes were taught in the spring of 2020, 110 students in an undergraduate Sociology of Consumption class at the University of Geneva began to attend classes virtually about half-way into their semester. The data on which this study is based draws from the select journal entries of these students who spent the remaining part of the semester reflecting on how their everyday practices were changing, in relation to sustainable wellbeing. In the sections that follow, the conceptual framework of the project is presented, on how social practices satisfy human needs, and why social practice theory is relevant for uncovering everyday life dynamics. Second, the methods are introduced in relation to journal entries and the pedagogical approach. Third, an analysis of the data focuses on two main aspects: what changes took place in everyday life in relation to resource consumption, and how these changes can be related to sustainable wellbeing. Some of the main findings are discussed in the conclusion, along with reflections on how this study contributes to understanding change, in times of uncertainty and beyond.

Conceptual Framework

Sustainable consumption is an established field of research, teaching and action, that recognizes the roles of people—understood as consumers and citizens—in social change processes towards forms of consumption that are more environmentally sound and socially just. While the dominant understanding of change in the policy arena and among more behaviouralist approaches to consumption continues to be based on

information deficit models, whereby individuals need only be better informed to make the 'right' choices, a critical agenda has emerged in recent years, suggesting that the over-individualization of responsibility and forms of 'green', 'scapegoat' consumerism are insufficient towards the scale of change needed (Maniates, 2001; Akenji, 2014; Fuchs et al., 2015; Anantharaman, 2018). The appeal of individuals making better choices simply through receiving better information has been critiqued as over-simplistic and in-effective, in that it fails to recognize patterns of meanings, such as collective conventions, and existing material arrangements, such as infrastructures and technologies, that have a hold on how everyday life plays out (Shove, 2010). Further, much of the literature in sustainable consumption has started from the issue of resource constraints or environmental impacts—for example, through the identification of high environmental impact consumption domains, such as meat-based food, fossil-fuelled forms of mobility, and (over-) heated homes, in relation to energy and material resources. While this approach has generated important insights, it tends to consider consumption domains as silos, such as food, mobility, energy, albeit with much work uncovering the inter-relations between these domains.

There are two notable trends in sustainable consumption studies that act as a counter-balance to these issues. In the sociology of consumption, social practice theories have emerged as a growing field of inquiry, building on works by theorists such as Schatzki (2002) and Reckwitz (2002), and applied to consumption studies by scholars such as Shove (2003), Wilhite (2016), and Warde (2017), among others. In an attempt to overcome the structure-actor dichotomy in social sciences, this approach "moves the focus from cognitive and rationalist theories of action to embrace a theory of agency in which past experiences and the things with which the individual interacts are regarded as important to current and future actions" (Wilhite, 2016). Attention is given to the routinized and habitual nature of many consumption activities that may be 'in-conspicuous', but nonetheless significant in environmental terms (Shove & Warde, 2002). The complexities of everyday life—in relation to social norms and other meanings; material arrangements and things; and skills and competencies of 'practitioners'—are central elements in understanding how practices play out, building on Shove

and Pantzar (2005). A social practice approach seeks to describe everyday life, how it might have changed over time, but also how new practices might emerge or be revived in the future. Practices—such as shopping, preparing a meal or getting around—become the central line of inquiry, with a recognition for the natural resources on which they depend, but also their systems of provision, involving infrastructures and institutions (Fine et al., 2018). Thus, a social practice approach to consumption has emerged in an important body of research in relation to the topic of sustainable consumption.

The second promising trend relates to reflections on wellbeing in sustainable consumption studies, or what could be termed a salutogenic approach to sustainability—or an approach that supports wellbeing and prosperity, rather than avoiding harm, beginning with Jackson's seminal work (2017, second edition), and continuing with works by Di Giulio and Fuchs (2014), Guillen-Royo and Wilhite (2015), Brand-Correa and Steinberger (2017), Sahakian, Fuchs, et al. (2021) and Fuchs et al. (2021), among others. These approaches recognize that the environmental and social dimensions of sustainability require some reflection on what is the good life for all within limits. Limits are understood as biophysical, in relation to planetary boundaries for example, but also social, such as limits to time, space or capital; limits are not set by some external force or as an objective scientific truth, but rather result from societal processes and deliberations (Brand et al., 2021; Kallis, 2019). The notion of 'the good life' draws on the vast literature on human wellbeing, ranging from Nussbaum's capability approach to Max-Neef's needs based approach, or more hedonistic approaches based on happiness and life satisfaction that underpin World Happiness Reports. In particular, theories of human needs have been applied to the question of sustainable consumption and climate change (e.g., Gough, 2017; Brand-Correa & Steinberger, 2017, and Guillen-Royo, 2010). For Doyal and Gough (1991), human health, participation and autonomy form three 'basic needs'; for Di Giulio and Defila (2020), a list of nine needs have the potential to be 'protected', in that they can be assured by collectivities; for Max-Neef (1991), nine fundamental needs range from subsistence, protection and affection, to creation, identity and freedom. While these lists vary, they each aim at

identifying needs that humans must have in order to live a good life, without any hierarchical assumption as to what need should be satisfied first.

Of relevance to achieving the normative goal of 'sustainable wellbeing' is the significance of 'satisfiers' for meeting needs, or the means necessary towards achieving the goal of the good life. If human needs—such as being healthy in body and mind, or participating in society—have the potential to be shared by all humans, the means of need satisfaction are always dependent on social and historical contexts (Max-Neef, 1991). Sahakian and Anantharaman (2020) argue that it is through understanding the social practices of everyday life that 'need satisfaction' can be achieved. More than systems of provision, the enactment of practices—with associated material arrangements, skills and competencies and social meanings—is necessary to allow for any form of need satisfaction. The implications of this distinction are that collectivities could plan for the need satisfaction for more people, while limiting resource usage—what Jackson (2005) has termed the double dividend in sustainable consumption. Some promising developments towards this aim can be seen in efforts to develop sustainable wellbeing indicators at the level of a city or region, which emerge from citizen deliberations (Ottaviani, 2018).

While establishing goals and indicators towards sustainable wellbeing is useful, uncovering how established ways of doing might need to change is also necessary, or how and in what way practices associated with moments of consumption—such as buying food, riding a bicycle or the consumption of space in visiting a park—can be oriented towards sustainable wellbeing as a normative aim. Such changes can take place in moments of disruption, as was the case during confinement measures around the COVID-19 pandemic. At such moments, emerging practices can be further promoted, established practices might fade away or older practices might need to be revived. What learnings can be drawn from the pandemic towards supporting change in other, non-crisis instances? For this contribution, we apply social practice theory to understand how everyday life during a pandemic was changing for students, and what this means for more sustainable forms of consumption and human wellbeing.
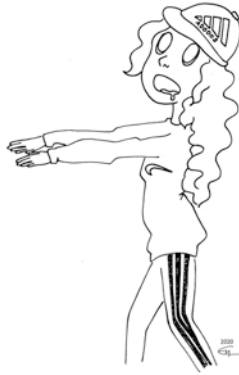
Methods

The journal entry exercise was designed as a collaborative effort between scholars at nine universities in six countries, all of whom happened to be women, as a response to the challenge of teaching remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic (see Sahakian et al., 2022 for an overview of this exercise and an analysis of results across three countries). Students at the bachelor and master levels, at different universities, were invited to participate and asked to give informed consent for the anonymized use of their data. [1] For the University of Geneva study, the course material at the start of the semester had already brought into dialogue several fictive 'personas' representing varying theoretical approaches to consumption in a sociological tradition, inspired by the work of Gravey et al. (2017). Dorothea Distinction was used to represent consumption as a form of distinction, building on works from Veblen (1994/1899) to Bourdieu (1979). Carla Critical introduced critical theories to uncover how and why consumption occurs, with an emphasis on the role of production systems, from Adorno and Horkheimer (1944/1993) to Ritzer (1993/2000), while Penelope Practices was used to represent more recent developments in the sociology of consumption as it relates to social practice theory drawing on the works of Shove (2003), Warde (2005) and Sahakian and Wilhite (2014), among others. These personas (Fig. 9.1) allowed students to engage directly with different theories of consumption, recognizing that "There is no single, composite theory that works for all types of consumption in the home" (Wilhite, 2008: 3). [2] Students were invited to see the differences between approaches, any overlaps as well as any dissonance between authors within a same personification.

In the first virtual classroom after the semi-confinement measures were announced in Geneva, one student asked if it would be possible to work on how consumption was changing during the pandemic. We responded to this request and immediately reformulated the course programme around a journal entry exercise that would extend over the rest of the semester, and coordinated between several teachers in different countries. For the first phase, students reflected on how their everyday practices were changing during the semi-confinement measures. For the second

Dorothée Distinction   Carla Critique   Pénélope Pratiques

Fig. 9.1 Different fictive personas representing conceptual approaches to understanding consumption (in French). *Note: drawings by Eva Leona Luvisotto, bachelor student, 2020*

phase, students were asked to engage with a list of human needs, selecting from among two: Max-Neef's matrix with nine needs and satisfiers (1991) (see Annex) and Di Giulio and Defila's (2020) list of nine Protected Needs. They were also introduced theories of needs. Students in Geneva went on to submit journals in two phases: first, they submitted three weekly journals on changing practices, and a second, three weekly journals on need satisfaction. Students were then given the option of exchanging with other students, based on the international network that was created for this teaching offer. The exercise culminated in group work between students at the University of Geneva, as a third assignment; students read each other's journals to identify commonalities and differences in their experiences, reflecting on the different socio-material settings they were based in.

Journal entries as a method allow for spontaneous expression and render changes over time more tangible, and are used notably to study the everyday (Gershuny, 2002; Kenten, 2010). They can express personal testimonies, everyday events, chronological details, contextual details, introspection (Hyers, 2018). Unlike daily journals, these solicited weekly journals included a series of questions that acted as prompts for student

reflections. For example, students were asked to describe how their consumption-related practices were changing in relation to specific domains (e.g., food, mobility, clothing and fashion), and to relate this to different dimensions of sustainability (e.g., environmental impacts and social justice). In a second phase, new questions were introduced on individual and collective wellbeing, with 'wellbeing' defined in relation to human needs theories. This exercise was thus a form of co-construction of knowledge between researchers, teachers and students, which aimed at encouraging reflexivity (Elliott, 2017; Kenten, 2010).

Two biases must be accounted for: first, the students were aware that their journals would be shared, with the course instructor and assistant, but also with fellow students, which could have hindered what they were willing to share in written form. That being said, we found that the journals revealed quite poignant testimonies and that students might have used them as a form of release during a difficult period. The group work was also graded, which may have influenced their participation. Students were informed that they could withdraw their consent to share anonymized and de-identified journals after grades were submitted. In all, 110 students participated, and 95 gave their consent to be included in the study. Most of the students were based in Switzerland, but some were living in neighbouring France during the quarantine period, a country that experienced more restrictive confinement measures. Some students were living in co-housing situations, others with their parents. In terms of gender, about two-thirds of the students self-identify as women, with most students in their 20s. The focus on a student population must be considered in the interpretation of the data, as many students do not have financial autonomy, may not have reached the life stage of car acquisition and are mostly not living alone nor with small children. Because the journals were structured around a series of questions, analysing the data across entries was facilitated; in addition to analysing the journals, an analysis of the group work was also useful towards assessing similarities and differences between everyday life dynamics among students.

Results: Changes in Everyday Life in Relation to 'Sustainable Wellbeing'

First, changes to everyday life in relation to sustainability is discussed, followed with an analysis of the second set of journal entries, on wellbeing and sustainability. To set the stage, Switzerland announced semi-confinement measures in early March 2020, which involved a recommendation to 'stay at home' as much as possible, as well as a limit of five people for any meetings, indoors or outdoors, and the closing down of primary schools and physical classrooms at universities. Unlike the confinement experienced in neighbouring France, staying home was an individual responsibility more than a mandate and people living in Geneva could go out for walks and for transit, without any need for justification. Shops identified as offering 'basic necessities' also remained open, such as supermarkets and pharmacies.

Changes to Everyday Life in Relation to 'Sustainability'

Journal entries during semi-confinement measures served to make visible the routine practices that were rarely questioned in the everyday lives of students. Three main trends were identified in relation to 'sustainability', which students understood mainly in terms of resource usage and related environmental impacts. First, much attention was paid to thrift and frugality, both in relation to managing financial resources, but also natural resources such as energy and water. Second, the journals revealed the ways in which students contested established norms, or how the confinement period led to new meanings, with different implications in terms of sustainability. Finally (and unsurprisingly, due to physical distancing measures in place), the journals stressed the importance of social relations in everyday life, which can be linked to the notion of wellbeing. These three main findings are detailed below.

Thrift is a common theme in the sociology of consumption, recognizing how shoppers value spending and saving in different moments of purchase (Miller, 1998). Yet, thriftiness can also be applied to other moments, in relation to the production of food waste, for example, or repair activities (Evans, 2011; Holmes, 2019). In their journal entries, students

expressed concern about thrift when it came to their financial expenditures, and took stock of their spending habits through the journals. For some students, an increase in consumption in some areas (such as more food) was offset by a decrease in spending in others (fewer leisure-oriented outings, or no transportation costs). A small number of students indicated the difficult financial situation they were facing, due to the loss of student jobs, and with insufficient support from their families. This led some students to closely monitor their food expenses. Food consumption was a central theme, as it was considered to be an unavoidable activity that took up more resources than usual in the context of confinement—in terms of time and money. Homemade food was prepared more regularly, whether living alone, with parents or with flat mates. Students who usually benefited from 'grocery shopping tourism' in neighbouring France were no longer able to benefit from the cheaper prices across the border.

Notions of thriftiness and frugality extended beyond financial concerns, to energy and water usage in particular. This was also due to questions in the journal exercise that prompted students to reflect on the 'sustainability' impacts of changing practices. Students recognized that consumption practices typically conducted outside of the home now generated more usage of water and electricity, and more food waste, inside of the home. Several students began to count how many trash bags they would generate in a given week, particularly in shared flats. Consuming in the home rendered resources and related waste more visible and more immediate. There were also insights on the links between public and private consumption, and how these change in different spaces, from school to home: some students realized that they used to charge their phones or refill water bottles, or discard food waste, on campus, and were now exclusively using home-based resources and generating much more non-food waste (packaging, mostly). Students also recognized changes in their own use of resources in the home: for some, showers and washing clothes became less frequent; for others, doing daily physical exercises at home meant more washing.

The meanings tied up with practices also changed for some students, particularly in relation to the occasions for which you dress, in adhering to what might be apprehended as 'fashionable'. Students commented on how they dress differently, whether they are in a real or virtual classroom,

or whether they are alone or with others. Many students reported staying in the same comfortable clothes for the duration of the semi-confinement period, noting that they no longer needed to 'dress up' to go to work or university. The separation of work-space from home-space, in the past, seemed to justify changes in clothing and thus 'working from home' for some allowed them to reconsider this habit, and perhaps break with a more consumerist approach to everyday life (i.e., different outfits for varying activities and social settings). On the other hand, several journal entries mention dressing 'as usual' as a way of staying motivated and focused on their course work. Dressing up at home gave them a sense of purpose and normality, a sense of routine. Given the lack of material separation between private and work-space, and the more frequent disturbances to their work rhythm at home, a change of clothing allowed them to recreate a symbolic and embodied separation between leisure and work time: they would wear their 'street' clothes at home for work during the day, then change into 'home' clothes to mark the start of leisure time. This led to reflections for some on the sustainability of fashion-related practices: how they only needed a few essential items in their wardrobe, for example, or could make do without buying new clothes, but repairing what they had. Many students sorted through their clothes and reflected on what items were necessary and what were superfluous.

With more time on their hands and through this process of sorting, students also picked up new hobbies, or revived old habits. Here also, the quest for new and novel experiences—tied up with a more consumerist approach—is set aside, in favour of reviving old consumption habits and appreciating things that one already has (rather than purchasing anew). As in the example of this student, who explains [3]:

> In sorting through my stuff this week, I found old video games which, in normal times, might have ended up in the trash. But finally, when I turned them on again, I discovered the same pleasure I had when I was playing with as a kid, and playing these games has become a good pass time right now.

Food took on a new meaning as a hobby for many, in terms of enjoying more time to experiment with new recipes, but also eating food as a

pleasant moment in the day. For a minority of students, food was also a source of anxiety at times, as there could be long lines for accessing supermarkets, and preparing food more regularly in the home was seen as a chore. In a previous study in Switzerland, a clear distinction can be made between preparing food for special occasions, which can be seen as enjoyable, as opposed to the chore of preparing one or several daily meals (Godin & Sahakian, 2018). Some students presented photographs of the meals they had prepared in their journals, mentioning the new recipes they had mastered during the confinement period. Whether this led to more meat consumption or resulted in more food waste is not ascertained; based on the qualitative data, students were generally careful about what they spent on food, and on how they managed leftovers—claiming that in some instances, they had reduced food waste to a minimum.

The significance of social relations was a dominant theme, or how to maintain such relations from a distance and through virtual means. For many students, this was a source of anxiety and frustration, experienced as social deprivation. Several mentioned chatting with friends through windows giving onto the street, or visiting grandparents to share signs of affection from a distance, while avoiding physical contact and the trespassing of physical boundaries. As can be expected, students were highly connected through information and communication technologies (ICTs), although they also expressed a waning interest in social media channels, and frustrations around managing the multiplication of platforms for supporting social relations, from virtual classrooms, to online course materials, to social media tools, for communicating with teachers, peers or family members. The environmental consequences of increased ICT usage, for maintaining social relations but also for schooling and entertainment, meant a shift in burden from public spaces, such as classrooms and cinemas, to private spaces.

The degree of physical distancing depended very much on where students were based: for those who were in confinement in more isolated Swiss villages and after a period of quarantine, there were opportunities to see friends who lived nearby (the self-imposed quarantine period was seen as an opportunity to limit risks of contagion). Others, especially in the city, avoided seeing people in person for longer periods of time, which

was even more the case on the French side of the border, where stricter confinement measures were experienced. While for others still, the mandate to 'stay at home' was digressed with detailed explanations of why and in what way they justified physical proximity, for example, visiting family members, but staying at a distance and keeping windows open. All of the examples above point to the significance of social interactions in practices, as discussed by Halkier (2020), involving what is socially do-able in relation to others and how this was re-negotiated when restrictions were imposed by others.

In relation to sustainability, students were able to discuss reductions in consumption—of flights and fashion clothing, to cite the most common examples—as favourable to the environment. They were heartened by images in the media of nature taking over cities, but were also deeply touched by questions related to social injustice, another dimension of sustainability. An oft cited example was that of a free food-distribution service provided by a charity in Geneva, which made the headlines in international newspapers. It was surprising and even shocking for some students to recognize that people living in the prosperous city of Geneva would stand in a queue for hours, to access a free food basket valued at approximately 15 euros (minimum wage in Geneva is approximately 20 euros per hour, in a city which also boasts one of the highest costs of living in the world).

Relating Changing Practices to Sustainable Wellbeing

A first finding is that all students were able to engage with a list of human needs, and relate this list to their everyday lives; this is heartening, as bachelor students were only given one class on human needs theories, but then asked to reflect on one of two lists of needs (see Annexe A for the Max-Neef example). Three main insights can be gathered from an analysis of the data: first, students were able to detail what different activities lead to need satisfaction; second, they were able to distinguish between needs as something different from desires; and third, their insights led to reflections on individual and collective need satisfaction. I now present these insights in relation to the notion of 'sustainable wellbeing'.

Changes in practices across consumption categories—such as mobility, fashion or food—lead to need satisfaction in different ways; as one student put it, while their needs may not have changed, the means of satisfying needs certainly did. Students created new routines, such as going for walks in nature or preparing elaborate meals, as well as new moments of relaxation, through music, drawing or cooking. The physical distancing measures in Switzerland were experienced as a loss of mobility for some, who had to find alternatives for exercising, either at home or in their surrounding neighbourhoods. The borders between Switzerland and France, usually so fluid and open, had suddenly become visibly closed to protect people from some invisible enemy (Fall, 2020). One student who lives in a shared apartment with other students explained how a new routine was established, as a way to 'perform activities that were valuable to them' (protected need number 6, Di Giulio and Defila list) or a sense of 'participation' and 'freedom' from the Max-Neef list:

> We started doing sports downstairs from our building, in the basement and in front of a communal space, with my flat mates. One of my flat mates decided to be our fitness and cross fit coach, it really did us good to move around a bit.

Having some sense of routine seemed to contribute to wellbeing. Thus, getting dressed, even if this meant staying home, was still important for many students—who lost the motivation to keep up their school work if they stayed in their pyjamas all day, as discussed above. Shopping for clothes was a habit certain people had prior to the confinement, and was a habit that could continue through online shopping for some. As another student put it, *"I noticed that my mother and some of my friends now buy clothes from the Internet to fill the void of shopping they feel because all the clothing stores are closed"*. A Swiss report on Swiss commerce in 2021 noted that the overall value of merchandise ordered online and at a distance increased by 25.8% in 2020, representing a three-fold increase compared to previous years (Wölfle & Leimstoll, 2021). But given the financial constraints, 'shopping' was performed somewhat differently: one student reported the thrill of shopping online and adding different items to a virtual basket, only to then skip the last stage of payment and

acquisition. Shopping, for some, certainly provides positive emotions, such as feelings of excitement or happiness, and can satisfy human needs, such as creativity, a sense of belonging, or living the life as you see fit. And yet some students also noted that shopping was not meeting essential needs, but rather more fleeting desires. This underscores an essential distinction that some students were able to make, between needs as something satiable and finite, and desires as something that seems insatiable and endless.

Contact with nature was important to many as a form of need satisfaction—as also uncovered in a recent study on wellbeing in green public spaces in Asian cities (Sahakian, Anantharaman, et al., 2020)—which involved visiting parks or taking walks in the countryside around Geneva. Some students also spent their confinement in more rural areas, such as their parents' secondary homes in the mountains, and were grateful to be out of the city and closer to nature. Many students noted the importance of public spaces and some form of connection with natural environments. While some felt that they were privileged to be in a secure and stable environment (in their words, based on their representation of what it means to live in Switzerland), and felt grateful to able to continue with their studies, others found it very destabilizing to conform to new forms of discipline and security measures. As discussed above, some lost their student jobs and means of livelihood, which was a further source of stress. The need for affection and close physical relations was lacking for many. While social ties were maintained through new rituals, such as video calls with family members or group sports activities, many students developed a love-hate relationship with the technologies that facilitated their social relations but remained a poor proxy for physical proximity. Students craved for physical contact with nature, and with others.

In the literature on human needs theories in relation to sustainability, the distinction between needs and satisfiers is critical. Students were able to make this distinction in their journal entries; they could clearly identify the need for personal freedom and contact with others, noting how ICTs were one way of satisfying those needs. A good internet connection was essential for many students, but also access to computers and electrical power. ICTs, or more generally the socio-technical systems, that underpin connected devices, sports activities and cooking were noted as

'synergic' satisfiers for some students, in that they can satisfy multiple needs. They recognized their dependence on technological objects, however, and noted how reducing their usage of ICTs could also increase their wellbeing. Thus, as discussed in other studies (Guillen-Royo, 2020), ICT is ambivalent when it comes to need satisfaction and wellbeing: such devices can satisfy needs in some cases, but can also lead to harm in other cases, when used excessively. The students also mentioned the competences needed to not only manage new socio-technical interfaces, such as online classes, but also skills for managing their workload autonomously.

The analysis on the difference between needs and satisfiers also shed light on how the students understood collective and individual wellbeing. For many students, staying at home was more than just a change in routine: it created a sense of stress and anxiety, in the moment of writing journals and in how they represented the future in their entries. At the same time, many had reflections on how their situation compared to that of others, with sentiments of strong solidarity—both in terms of how the national government was handling the pandemic [4] and in relation to small gestures of solidarity that they either read about in the media or experienced at the level of their buildings and communities. Many students put their situation in perspective with what they deemed to be other, less favourable situations, pointing out their access to a garden or other natural environment as an advantage, as well as spacious accommodation, access to a computer and connectivity or family support, depending on the case. Even for students living in small apartments in the city, there was a sense of gratitude at not being on the front lines working in 'essential services' (although one student did continue working in a supermarket during this period, and another student had care responsibilities towards another family and their two small children). Perhaps this somewhat rosy picture also relates to the timing of the journals, which took place at the very start of the first confinement; students may have felt resilient in the face of change and the consequences of sustained confinement and virtual classrooms on student health had yet to be made evident. [5]

Some students did nonetheless testify to difficulties they experienced in terms of material arrangements and technology (e.g., spotty internet connectivity), but also mental, emotive capacities. For some, being alone

during confinement or being away from family members based in distant countries increased a sense of fear and anxiety. Some students noted a sense of anxiety over university exams, and increased course work during this period. The need for safety and security was both experienced and imagined, in that students reflected on how secure they felt, but also how they expected the future to unfold. This suggests a clear relation between individual and collective wellbeing, as expressed by one student: *"Our need for protection is altered and the reopening of the world increases our feelings of insecurity. Therefore, in order to maintain collective well-being, it seems necessary that individuals feel well cared for and safe."*

Discussion and Conclusion

Being alone together, this is perhaps one way of summarizing how students documented their changing social practices—being confined, but sharing in this practice with many others. The confinement measures lead to an increased sensitivity towards bodies in public spaces, as distinct from a sense of safety experienced in private spaces. How students recall navigating these two realms led to reflections on how resources were used in different spaces, towards frugality and thrift, and also feelings of solidarity, towards friends and relatives, but also imagined communities—protected yet separated by physical distancing measures. Meanings around getting dressed or preparing a meal changed, in practice, but students also reflected on what they wanted to maintain as 'normal' in their future projects or what they would like to experience as a return to normality. For the latter, students discussed how confinement led to more ethical consumption practices, seen as a means towards wellbeing for some, or a deeper consideration for ecological and political commitments, perhaps due to more time for reflexivity. Mostly, students felt that their individual actions were part of a collective effort, to reduce the pressures on the health care system; some then carried this same reflection over to environmental issues, wondering why a similar collective effort could not be possible, towards reducing carbon emissions or adapting to climate change. Students reflected on whether or not they would keep

their new habits after the end of the confinement measures, for example spending and shopping less, cooking more and walking and cycling more.

The first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Switzerland led to a unique form of social change, based on government measures that required most people to suspend their routinized and habitual ways of doing, in a specific time and space configuration of a semi-confinement period and at home. A growing body of literature is emerging to document these changes in practice.[6] There is no evidence that any 'good practices' might have continued once the measures were relaxed. This may be because the semi-confinement measures were imposed, rather than emerging through autonomous reflections and self-limitations, in the sense given to the terms by Gorz (1989). When the semi-confinement measures were lifted before the summer, the local press was quick to report on the endless lines of people waiting to eat out at newly opened fast-food restaurants, or shop in fast-fashion stores. There is also evidence to suggest that—for some people, with more financial resources than the students presented in this study—consumer habits did not die: people continued to shop from their couches, through online purchases, as attested through a sharp increase in online sales.

What does remain from the study, as a promising way forward, are the conceptual and methodological implications: it is possible to engage people in reflecting on the normative goal of need satisfaction in relation to everyday life, and for people to distinguish between needs and desires, but also between needs and their means of satisfaction. While the pandemic was a unique occasion for this particular exercise, such reflections can be achieved without it—as the work of Guillen-Royo (2016) demonstrates. Beyond the context of the pandemic, ongoing research has demonstrated that practices can be oriented towards more 'sustainable' outcomes when people willingly and voluntarily engage in some form of a change initiative. This was the case in a recent Living Lab project that engaged over 300 households in Europe to reduce indoor temperatures and wash cycles over a seven-week period, leading to reductions in energy usage, but also changes in routines that were sustained over time (Sahakian, Rau, et al., 2021).

In this notion of being alone together, there is also a reflection around how individual and collective wellbeing are to be understood and planned

for, in the future. For some, it was possible to have fewer needs satisfied, or to satisfy them differently, towards a broader sense of wellbeing at a societal level. For others, individual wellbeing must imperatively be maintained, along with collective wellbeing. For all, it was difficult to have restrictions imposed from above. Limits to consumption may indeed be good for us, and may give us the space and time needed to experiment with different ways of doing, but such limits would most likely need to be established through a participatory and deliberative process—as suggested in the 'consumption corridors' concept of upper and lower limits (Fuchs et al., 2021), while recognizing that all such processes are not devoid of power dynamics.

This study on changes in everyday life during a pandemic demonstrates that certain practices contribute more to sustainable wellbeing than others, at a collective level. How to plan for sustainable wellbeing requires grappling with the political economy of consumption, which leads to 'bad habits' associated with capitalist regimes, including a profit imperative (rather than a sustainable wellbeing dividend), and tied up with powerful forces that render more sustainable practices difficult to propose, let alone maintain over time (Wilhite, 2016). Following Guillen-Royo and Wilhite (2015), *"New thinking is urgently needed on the conceptual links and courageous policy makers are needed who are willing to experiment with a new genre of policy that puts sustainability and increased wellbeing ahead of conventional ideas of economic progress"* (p. 313). This is what a salutogenic approach to social change and more sustainable consumption implies, where everyday life includes reflections on the differences between needs and their satisfaction, between available resources and possible satisfiers, towards new meanings around what it means to live the good life in practice.

Annex: Max-Neef's Fundamental Human Needs

	Being	Having	Doing	Interacting
Subsistence				
Protection				
Affection				
Understanding				
Participation				
Idleness				
Creation				
Identity				
Freedom				

Based on: Max-Neef, M. A. (1991). Human Scale Development Conception Application and Further Reflections. Zed Books Ltd

Notes

1. Ethical clearance was obtained through the Canadian partner, the University of British Columbia, file number H20–01222.
2. A full description of this approach can be found at: https://www.unige.ch/innovations-pedagogiques/innovations/theatre-theorique-posters (in French).
3. All direct citations have been translated from French to English by the author.
4. This support for government interventions will wane over time, with clear signs of resistance across the population during the second wave of semi-confinement measures some months later.

5. Early on in the pandemic, The University of Geneva made available a mental health hotline for students and staff, put in place by the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences (FPSE).
6. A special issue on Disruption in Everyday Life: Changing Social Practices and Dynamics in Consumption is currently in press with the journal *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy*. See: https://staging.www.tandfonline.com/journals/tsus20/collections/Disruptions-in-Everyday-Life

References

Adorno, T., & Horkheimer, M. (1944/1993). The culture industry: Enlightenment as mass deception (1944). In J. Continuum (ed) *Dialectic of enlightenment*. Continuum

Akenji, L. (2014). Consumer scapegoatism and limits to green consumerism. *Journal of Cleaner Production, 63*, 13–23.

Anantharaman, M. (2018). Critical sustainable consumption: A research agenda. *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences, 8*(4), 553–561.

Bourdieu, P. (1979). *La distinction critique sociale du jugement*. Les Editions de Minuit.

Brand, U., Muraca, B., Pineault, E., et al. (2021). From planetary to societal boundaries: An argument for collectively defined self-limitation. *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy, 17*(1), 265–292. https://doi.org/10.1080/15487733.2021.1940754

Brand-Correa, L. I., & Steinberger, J. K. (2017). A framework for decoupling human need satisfaction from energy use. *Ecological Economics, 141*, 43–52.

Di Giulio, A., & Defila, R. (2020). The 'good Life' and protected needs. In A. Kalfagianni, D. Fuchs, & A. Hayden (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of global sustainability governance*. Routledge.

Di Giulio, A., & Fuchs, D. (2014). Sustainable consumption corridors: Concept, objections, and responses. *Gaia, 23*(S1), 184–192.

Doyal, L., & Gough, I. (1991). *A theory of human need*. Macmillan.

Elliott, H. (2017). The use of diaries in sociological research on health experience. *Sociological Research Online, 2*(2), 38–48.

Evans, D. (2011). Thrifty, green or frugal: Reflections on sustainable consumption in a changing economic climate. *Geoforum, 42*, 550–557.

Fall, J. (2020). Fenced in. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space, 38*(5), 771–794.

Fine, B., Bayliss, K., & Robertson, M. (2018). The systems of provision approach to understanding consumption. In O. Kravets, P. Maclaran, S. Miles, et al. (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of consumer culture*. SAGE.

Fuchs, D., Giulio, A. D., Glaab, K., et al. (2015). Power: The missing element in sustainable consumption and absolute reductions research and action. *Journal of Cleaner Production, 132*, 298–307.

Fuchs, D., Sahakian, M., Gumbert, T., et al. (2021). *Consumption corridors: Living well within sustainable limits*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367748746

Gershuny, J. (2002). Social leisure and home IT: A panel time-diary approach. *IT & Society, 1*(1), 54–72.

Godin, L., Laakso, S., & Sahakian, M. (2020). Doing laundry in consumption corridors: Wellbeing and everyday life. *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy, 16*(1), 99–113.

Godin, L., & Sahakian, M. (2018). Cutting through conflicting prescriptions: How guidelines inform "healthy and sustainable" diets in Switzerland. *Appetite, 130*, 123–133.

Gorz, A. (1989). *Critique of economic reason*. Verso.

Gough, I. (2017). *Heat, greed and human need: Climate change, capitalism and sustainable wellbeing*. Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.

Gravey, V., Lorenzoni, I., Seyfang, G., et al. (2017). Theoretical theatre: Harnessing the power of comedy to teach social science theory. *Journal of Contemporary European Research, 13*(3), 1319–1336.

Guillen-Royo, M. (2010). Realising the 'wellbeing dividend': An exploratory study using the human scale development approach. *Ecological Economics, 70*(2), 384–393.

Guillen-Royo, M. (2016). *Sustainability and wellbeing: Human-scale development in practice*. Routledge.

Guillen-Royo, M. (2020). Applying the fundamental human needs approach to sustainable consumption corridors: Participatory workshops involving information and communication technologies. *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy, 16*(1), 114–127.

Guillen-Royo, M., & Wilhite, H. (2015). Wellbeing and sustainable consumption. In W. Glatzer et al. (Eds.), *Global handbook of quality of life, international handbooks of quality-of-life*. Springer Science+Business.

Halkier, B. (2020). Social interaction as key to understanding the intertwining of routinized and culturally contested consumption. *Cultural Sociology, 10*(1177/1749975520922454), 1749975520922454.

Hansen, A., Nielsen, K. B., & Wilhite, H. (2016). Staying cool, looking good, moving around: Consumption, sustainability and the 'rise of the south'. *Forum for Development Studies, 43*(1), 5–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/08039410.2015.1134640

Holmes, H. (2019). Unpicking contemporary thrift: Getting on and getting by in everyday life. *The Sociological Review, 67*(1), 126–142.

Hyers, L. L. (2018). *Diary methods: Understanding qualitative research*. Oxford University Press.

Jackson, T. (2005). Live better by consuming less? Is there a 'double dividend' in sustainable consumption? *Journal of Industrial Ecology, 9*(1–2), 19–36.

Jackson, T. (2017). *Prosperity without growth: Foundations for the economy of Tomorrow*. Routledge.

Kallis, G. (2019). *Limits: Why Malthus was wrong and why environmentalists should care*. Stanford University Press.

Kenten, C. (2010). Narrating oneself: Reflections on the use of solicited diaries with diary interviews. *Qualitative Social Research, 11*(2), 16.

Maniates, M. (2001). Individualization: Plant a tree, buy a bike, save the world? *Global Environmental Politics, 1*(3), 31–52.

Max-Neef, M. A. (1991). *Human scale development: Conception, application and further reflections*. Zed Books.

Miller, D. (1998). *A theory of shopping*. Cornell University Press.

Ottaviani, F. (2018). Time in the development of indicators on sustainable well-being: A local experiment in developing alternative indicators. *Social Indicators Research, 135*, 53–73.

Reckwitz, A. (2002). Toward a theory of social practices: A development in Culturalist theorizing. *European Journal of Social Theory, 5*(2), 243–263.

Ritzer, G. (1993/2000). *The McDonaldization of society.* Pine Forge Press.

Sahakian, M. (2014). *Keeping cool in Southeast Asia: Energy use and urban air-conditioning*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Sahakian, M., & Anantharaman, M. (2020). What space for public parks in sustainable consumption corridors? Conceptual reflections on need satisfaction through social practices. *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy, 16*(1), 128–142.

Sahakian, M., Anantharaman, M., Giulio, A. D., et al. (2020). Green public spaces in the cities of south and Southeast Asia: Protecting needs towards sustainable wellbeing. *Journal of Public Space, 5*(2), 89–110.

Sahakian, M., Fuchs, D., Lorek, S., & Giulio, A. D. (2021). Advancing the concept of consumption corridors and exploring its implications. *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy, 17*(1), 163–173. https://doi.org/10.1080/15487733.2021.1919437

Sahakian, M., Rau, H., Grealis, E., et al. (2021). Challenging social norms to recraft practices: A living lab approach to reducing household energy use in eight European countries. *Energy Research & Social Science, 72*, 101881.

Sahakian, M., Rau, H., & Wallenborn, G. (2020). Making 'sustainable consumption' matter: The indoor microclimate as contested cultural artifact. *Cultural Sociology, 14*(4), 417–437.

Sahakian, M., Stroude, A., Godin, L., Courtin, I., Fahy, F., Fuchs, D., & Langlois, J. (2022). Reflexivity through practice-informed student journals: How "sustainable wellbeing" relates to teleoaffectivities. *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy, 18*(1), 247–262. https://doi.org/10.1080/15487733.2022.2043078

Sahakian, M., & Wilhite, H. (2014). Making practice theory practicable: Towards more sustainable forms of consumption. *Journal of Consumer Culture, 14*(1), 25–44.

Schatzki, T. R. (2002). *The site of the social: A philosophical account of the constitution of social life and change*. Penn State University Press.

Shove, E. (2003). *Comfort, cleanliness and convenience: The social Organization of Normality*. Berg.

Shove, E. (2010). Beyond the ABC: Climate change policy and theories of social change. *Environment and Planning A, 42*, 1273–1285.

Shove, E. (2012). Habits and their creatures. In A. Warde & D. Southerton (Eds.), *The habits of consumption* (pp. 100–112). Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies.

Shove, E., & Pantzar, M. (2005). Consumers, producers and practices: Understanding the invention and reinvention of Nordic walking. *Journal of Consumer Culture, 5*(1), 43–64.

Shove, E., & Warde, A. (2002). Inconspicuous consumption: The sociology of consumption, lifestyles and environment. In R. E. Dunlap, F. H. Buttel, P. Dickens, et al. (Eds.), *Sociological theory and the environment*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Southerton, D. (2013). Habits, routines and temporalities of consumption: From individual behaviours to the reproduction of everyday practices. *Time and Society, 22*(3), 335–355.

Veblen, T. (1994/1899). *The theory of the leisure class.* Penguin Group.

Warde, A. (2005). Consumption and theories of practice. *Journal of Consumer Culture, 5*(2), 131–153.

Warde, A. (2017). *Consumption: A sociological analysis*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Wilhite, H. (2008). *Consumption and the transformation of everyday life: A view from South India*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Wilhite, H. (2009). The conditioning of comfort. *Building Research & Information, 37*(1), 84–88.

Wilhite, H. (2013). Energy consumption as cultural practice: Implications for the theory and policy of sustainable energy use. In S. Strauss, S. Rupp, & T. Love (Eds.), *Cultures of energy* (pp. 60–72). Left Coast Press.

Wilhite, H. (2015). The problem of habits for a sustainable transformation. In K. L. Syse & M. L. Mueller (Eds.), *Sustainable consumption and the good life*. Routledge.

Wilhite, H. (2016). *The political economy of low carbon transformation: Breaking the habits of capitalism*. Routledge Studies in Low Carbon Development.

Wilhite, H., Shove, E., Lutzenhiser, L., et al. (2000). The legacy of twenty years of energy demand management: We know more about individual behavior but next to nothing about demand. In E. Jochem et al. (Eds.), *Society, behavior and climate change mitigation* (pp. 109–126). Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Wilk, R., & Wilhite, H. (1985). Why don't people weatherstrip their homes? An ethnographic solution. *Energy, 10*(5), 621–631.

Wölfle, R., & Leimstoll, U. (2021). *Evaluation de la situation du commerce suisse*. Datatrans SA.