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Connecting sufficiency, materialism and the good life? Christian, Muslim and Hindu-based perspectives on EU-level

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This article analyzes Christian, Muslim, and Hindu-based discourses and practices in relation to sufficiency, materialism, and the good life in the context of the European Union. The current political and scholarly debate emphasizes the need for a sustainability transformation and, more specifically, for reductions in resource use by the global consumer class. Within this discussion, the different approaches to and interpretations of the various facets of ecology and materialism, and the links between them, have become the primary focus. Questions about what a “good life”, as opposed to a consumerist lifestyle, means and the need to focus on sufficiency rather than efficiency are being (re-)considered. Given that religions and faith-based actors (FBAs) play an essential role as interpreters of norms and values in societies, especially when societies are facing particular challenges, it is important to understand how they communicate information about relevant ideas and actions. What do FBAs say about sustainable lifestyles, sufficiency, and the role of materialism vis-à-vis those two ideas? How do they relate it all to questions of faith? Do they use faith-based or secular idioms to address the ideas? How do FBAs relate the ideas to practices? To begin answering these questions, we here present a content analysis of relevant texts and supplement the finding thereof with an analysis of expert interviews. The results come mainly from faith-based actors active on the EU level. Nevertheless, some of the actors also operate globally, which is why a clear, sharp regional separation is not entirely possible. This article identifies and explores the role of faith-based ideas and practices in maneuvering toward one of the most substantial societal challenges in this period of late capitalism and its materialist dimension. The regional focus imposes limitations on the scope of the religions in our sample, which is most evident in the case of Hinduism: here, it was only possible to include one organization in particular (Brahma Kumaris) in the empirical analysis. These practical limitations must therefore be taken into account when considering the scope of the results of this analysis.

KEYWORDS

sufficiency, good life, religion, consumption, spirituality, materialism, faith

Introduction

Recently, sustainable transformations and lifestyle changes geared toward reducing consuming behavior have become a primary focus of discussions about how we could and should live given the current climate crisis. High-consumption societies, such as those commonly (but not exclusively) found in the global North, are confronted with the question of what lifestyle choices are appropriate and fair when it comes to providing a good quality of life for every human being today and into the future. Activists and scholars have proposed the concept of sufficiency, which includes the limitation of essential consumption, as the solution. In doing so, they are opposing the materialism that emerged after industrialization.

This study analyzes the relationship between materialism, sufficiency, and the good life in the discourses of European religious actors, who are referred to herein using the more inclusive term “faith-based actors” (FBAs). Following Pollack’s (1995) definition of religiosity, we understand religion and religious behavior as a transcendental mechanism to counter the challenges of contingency (the inherent insecurity that arises because many things in life may happen but will not necessarily happen). As climate change and environmental pollution are contemporary challenges that lead to insecurities in life, religions should offer mechanisms to counter this contingency. Thus, it is interesting to consider how FBAs position themselves in relation to sufficiency. While we find criticism on excessive materialism in all major religious texts and traditions (Belk, 1985, p. 265; Sachs, 1993), it is not clear how this criticism applies to the sustainability discourse and modern concept of sufficiency. The research undertaken thus far has already demonstrated that there is a particular relationship between religion and materialism that focuses on consumption. From this perspective, both researchers and FBAs seem to question whether current consumerist lifestyles are in line with religious values. The literature also demonstrates that the understandings and definitions of sustainable consumption, sufficiency, and what constitutes a good life are diverse and blurred. To better understand this imprecise relationship, this study empirically investigates how FBAs position themselves in relation to sufficiency and the related theme of the good life. Do the FBAs have a practical approach toward a sufficient lifestyle and do they combine it with their criticism of materialism? We provide insight into the empirical findings, including internet content from and interviews with Christian, Islamic, and Hindu-based FBAs that engage with the themes of sufficiency, materialism, consumption, and the good life. These three religions are, by membership, the largest in the world. While Christianity and Islam are the two most common religions in Europe, Hinduism provides a non-Abrahamic and minority perspective on our research question. Due to the cultural heritage in Europe, the findings offer a broader perspective on Christian perspectives,

while Islam and particularly Hinduism are restricted to only a few active organizations, f.e. Brahma Kumaris.

This article presents the concepts of sufficiency and the good life identified in the literature and discusses the current research into the narratives each religion offers about these two concepts. We acknowledge that theological narratives do not necessarily lead to implementation, therefore, this article also summarizes if faith-based practices with a connection to sufficiency or the good life can be identified through our literature review. We then continue by presenting our empirical dataset and methodological framework. Our empirical findings show that FBAs in all three religions disparage consumerist and materialist lifestyles, though with different consequences for the associated responsibilities and practices. This article first presents the empirical findings for each religion individually and then second, discusses the results for each religion in relation to our theoretical findings and each other.

Sufficiency, materialism, and the good life

By way of a short and general definition, the concept of sufficiency can be explained as a perspective on how much is enough for a good life (Schneidewind and Zahmt, 2014, p. 13). The concept is about respecting the boundaries set by the planet and the needs of the global community and consequently runs counter to the current cultures of consumerism and materialism. Although the term was established in the early 1990’s by Sachs (1993), sufficiency (and the research into it) is only slowly gaining attention and still lacks a systematic global outreach. Consequently, there are not only many different understandings of the concept, there are also many different names for and translations of the idea of sufficiency. The literature on sufficiency touches on various topics including human needs vs. wants, justice and equality, and the critical assessment of current consumerist lifestyles (Kanschik, 2016, p. 556). Hence, we find a broad range of literature discussing the key features of the concept without using the term, features such as degrowth, *buen vivir*, and other postcolonial development theories that are not yet automatically associated with the sufficiency debate (Toulouse et al., 2019, p. 332). Keeping this ambiguity in the literature in mind, we approach sufficiency by discussing it from four perspectives. First, we elaborate on the relations between materialism, consumption, and sufficiency. Second, we discuss sufficiency with regard to the related concepts of efficiency and consistency. Third, we broaden the perspective on sufficiency by exploring the two sides of “enough” (Spengler, 2018, p. 132). Fourth, we follow on from this by focusing on a broader understanding of sufficiency when discussing the good life, which leads to the questioning of existing norms and values.

While the concepts of materialism and consumerism currently go hand in hand, sufficiency—as discussed above—stands against the values and habits associated with materialism and consumerism. In general, materialism refers to the “importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions” (Belk, 1984, p. 291) and there is a debate about whether it is necessarily a negative character trait (Belk, 1985). Nevertheless, in combination with the cultural phenomena of consumerism, we consider materialism to be a negative trait. Materialistic values and consumerism have become a global phenomenon (for a historical overview of consumerism culture, see Stengel, 2011) that transgresses planetary boundaries, thereby contributes to the current ecological crisis. In contrast, sufficiency is a critical assessment of this contemporary lifestyle and a guiding principle for a sustainable transformation. It refers to living (and thus also consuming) in line with natural (planetary and societal) boundaries and the limits required to ensure a good life for all current and future generations (Hayden, 2019, p. 152). This definition already reflects the interdependencies between materialism and sufficiency. While the current materialistic lifestyle exploits social and planetary boundaries, sufficiency raises awareness of the same boundaries.

The current sustainability discourse discusses three ways sustainable transformation can be achieved: efficiency, consistency, and sufficiency. All three represent a particular perspective on how to live and deal with the challenges of the climate crisis. Efficiency¹ aims to achieve technical optimization in the cost-benefit ratio (Spengler, 2018, p. 104), that is to achieve the same performance (of action, energy, etc.) while using fewer resources. Consistency proposes integrating resource consumption in natural flows to close material cycles and thus decrease harmful exploitation (Spengler, 2018, p. 112). These two strategies focus primarily on technical innovation geared toward either using less or reusing. In contrast, sufficiency aims to effect behavioral changes which prevent unsustainable actions (Stengel, 2011, p. 129–130). To illustrate with a simple example, one can think about the plastic food packaging in supermarkets. An efficient way to sustainably transform this practice would be to modify the plastic so that less petroleum is used and less CO₂ is created during its production. A consistent reform would find ways to reuse or upcycle the plastic. A sufficient method would be to stop using plastic packaging.

The three concepts – efficiency, sufficiency, and consistency – are closely linked to each other and are even interdependent in certain cases, with the result that it is not always easy to

¹ Some literature refers to the concept of efficiency or sufficiency with the prefix ‘eco’ (eco-efficiency/eco-sufficiency). This prefix denotes that this understanding of efficiency stresses sustainable transformation and the ecological impact of a performance, see for example Kanschik (2016, p. 565); Schneidewind and Zahrnt (2014, p. 18).

differentiate between them. Thus, continuing with our example of plastic packaging, one could ask whether the efficient change of production technology is also a sufficient usage of fewer resources. They could also ask whether the upcycling of plastic wrappers is purely a consistent usage of resources or also a sufficient change in behavior, as we are actively using upcycled plastic rather than new products. The lines between the three concepts are blurred, but the heuristic distinction is necessary if we are to understand the options we have for transforming our lifestyles. Notably, as the strategies face different levels of acceptance in the current economic system: consistency and, in particular, efficiency are solutions that integrate easily into the current economic system, even increasing its innovative potential. However, as the concept of sufficiency considers less production and consumption as inevitable, there is the possibility that it could ultimately limit economic growth and individual freedom in lifestyle choices (Toulouse et al., 2019, p. 333). For this reason, sufficiency is perceived as being critical of growth and liberty and it, therefore, has a less popular image. However, this focus on limitation is one-sided and runs the risk of misunderstanding sufficiency as a concept based on sacrifice and prohibition. Such an understanding loses sight of the fact there is also a lower limit placed on consumption (Spengler, 2018, p. 133; Toulouse et al., 2019, p. 334) that ensures that sufficiency does not aim to restrict but to ensure a good life for all (Schneidewind and Zahrnt, 2014).

Given this single-minded conception of sufficiency, it is necessary to discuss the concept from two perspectives, considering both the upper and the lower side of “enough” (Spengler, 2018, p. 132). In addition to the ‘upper limit’ of sustainable consumption, any debate about sufficiency needs to allow for a level of consumption that stays above a ‘lower limit’. This lower limit refers to the minimum every person needs to possess and consume in order to meet the needs of a good life. The development, as well as the positioning of the two sides of enough, are discussed further in the literature on “consumption corridors” (Fuchs et al., 2021). This framework further defines how a good life can be led in recognition of social and planetary limits by imagining a corridor that runs between a minimum and a maximum level of consumption. While the minimum consumption limit ensures access to the resources people need, the maximum consumption limit acts as a restriction, safeguarding the planet from ecological and societal exploitation. The frameworks of the ‘two sides of enough’ and ‘consumption corridors’ provide important perspectives on sufficiency as they open up the concept to a broader moral dimension (Toulouse et al., 2019, p. 332). The discussion moves from a simple debate about how we can make consumption ecologically sustainable to a broader debate on the values and norms of our lifestyles. Hence, it enhances the discussion about structural changes in

our behavior and the underlying needs we are attempting to fulfill through our consumption. When talking about sufficiency, one has to keep in mind this differentiation between a narrow understanding of sufficiency and a broader understanding of sufficiency that implies this moral dimension (Linz, 2002, p. 13; Spengler, 2018, p. 131; Lehtonen and Heikkurinen, 2021, p. 5). It is in the second understanding that sufficiency becomes a question of how society defines a good life for all, today and into the future, and when the discussion begins to share common ground with the discourses of faith-based actors.

As a concept, the 'good life' has a long history in philosophy, religion, and ethics [for an overview, see Di Giulio and Defila (2019) or Voget-Kleschin (2013)]. However, while philosophy and religion have pondered over the normative questions of the good life for centuries, sustainability research has now given this concept a more practical perspective. From this perspective, the good life describes the life we can lead in between these given limits, now and in the future. Hence, the good life should be considered the conceptual goal and sufficiency a method through which this goal can be achieved (Schneidewind and Zahrt, 2014). In setting the moral dimension of 'good' aside, this approach focuses on the basic material needs and possible policies that enable us to live such a life. However, there are also interdependencies between those two kinds of "good." Societies need to contemplate and deliberate about their upper and lower consumption standards as it is through such deliberative processes that societies define their values and norms and also acknowledge the global restraints and planetary boundaries. Religion can help in this deliberative process in different ways. First and foremost, it can give ethical guidance in the deliberative process and help define the essential needs of a good life. Furthermore, given their function in guiding people's behavior and practices, it can promote the idea that a sufficient lifestyle is a good lifestyle.

In conclusion, we can say that the concept of sufficiency is necessary for a sustainable transformation that presses for more than the current endeavors in efficiency and consistency. The question of "How much is enough?" raises further questions about how we want to live and where we can set these limits. The good life has, therefore, become an important goal in designing our sustainable future and even though the focus lies on basic human needs, one cannot deny the underlying dependency on values and norms. How do values and norms make us think about our basic needs? How do we set the priorities? Faith-based actors have been offering answers to these questions for centuries. Thus, it is important to be aware of what they are saying about the concept of sufficiency and how they are defining a good life. To this end, we first provide a review of the relevant literature and then proceed to present our empirical research.

Religion, sufficiency, and the good life in Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism

While research into the nexus of religion and ecology has been increasing since the 1990's (for example, see Barnhill and Gottlieb, 2001; Bergmann and Gerten, 2010; Hitzhusen and Tucker, 2013; Grim and Tucker, 2014), research focusing on the terms of sufficiency and the good life in relation to religion and faith-based actors is still less common. This can possibly be explained by the still very recent research focus on concepts such as sufficiency and the good life in relation to a sustainable transformation (Toulouse et al., 2019, p. 332). Thus, there may already be relevant research out there using alternative terms that are essentially the same as sufficiency and the good life. Consequently, we have not only explored research into sufficiency and the good life, but also related concepts such as materialism and sustainable consumption and the adjoining concepts such as degrowth and post-growth. After briefly presenting the main themes and findings of the literature review, the chapter analyzes the relationship between sufficiency and the good life within three specific religions: Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism.

As already noted at the beginning of this article, all major religions are critical of excessive materialism (Belk, 1985, p. 265), though they differ in their evaluation of what constitutes 'excessive' (Voget-Kleschin, 2013, p. 78–79). Given this connection, research on sustainable consumption has attempted to determine whether there is a causal relationship between religiosity and sustainable consumption. The attempts to understand this relationship are not only found in the field of religious and cultural studies, but also in business and marketing studies. However, each main field offers a different perspective on the issue. Religious and cultural studies focus more on the normative understandings of what the religion, as an institution or belief system, says (or can say, from an interpretative perspective) concerning sustainable consumption. These studies are often based on qualitative methods. In contrast, business and marketing studies look at the topic from an alternative perspective and attempt to understand how religious people consume. They also usually use a quantitative approach to establish causal relations between the two variables. A common premise of these studies is that religious people are more sustainable consumers because of their religious values. To date, such studies have produced varying results, suggesting that religion and religiosity sometimes have, and sometimes don't have, an effect on sustainable consumption (Minton et al., 2018, p. 656). When evaluating these results we must consider the background variables used (or not used) (Pepper et al., 2011, p. 277) and, therefore, cannot draw a firm conclusion as to whether there is a positive or negative relationship between consumption and religion.

The following paragraphs present the research on Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism and their relations to sufficiency – though this term itself is not used by the FBAs – and the good life. We first discuss the possible interpretations of the scriptures and religious traditions, then describe those practices that are linked to the concepts of sufficiency and the good life.

Christianity

The literature review on Christianity and sufficiency reveals both negative and interconnections between the values and practices of the good life and sufficiency. The influential work of Lynn White (1967) prescribes that Christian values be embedded in our current capitalist lifestyles. From this perspective, Protestant values in particular, are linked to the development of the capitalist lifestyle and are considered to be one of several factors that led to the ecological crisis we are now facing (White, 1967). Although current research is also critical of the nexus between Christianity and sustainable behavior, especially in relation to U.S. evangelicalism and forms of prosperity gospel (McCammack, 2007; Carr et al., 2012; Wilson and Steger, 2013). For instance, Wilson and Steger demonstrate the similarity between prosperity gospel and neoliberal values, such as a strong emphasis on the individual and market forces. This form of Christianity views material wealth as a blessing from God.

Nevertheless, it is an oversimplification to say that Protestant values led to the materialistic lifestyle that exploits planetary boundaries. Christian scripts denounce excessive materialistic values including greed and avarice. Indeed, such values are even condemned as idolatry as the believer's devotion is directed not toward God, but toward material goods (Frunzaru and Frunzaru, 2017, p. 38; Porter, 2013).

Current examples combine the Christian standpoint on materialism and the challenges of a sustainable transformation. For example, the German Protestant Church published a paper where they clearly position themselves in support of sufficiency with their concept of “ethics of enough” (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, 2018). On the Catholic side, the papal encyclical “Laudato Si” from 2015 offers several ideas similar to sufficiency, as shown by Puggioni's work on degrowth understandings (Puggioni, 2017). In the encyclical, Pope Francis expresses the same criticism of consumerism that is associated with the concepts of degrowth and sufficiency. For Pope Francis, material wealth and free time need to be shared fairly, a notion that is very similar to the good life envisioned by consumption corridors (Puggioni, 2017, p. 31). Furthermore, Pope Francis points out that the Christian tradition does not consider private property to be an inviolable right (Puggioni, 2017, p. 19), rather it is humanity's task to build up a healthy living environment that integrates all people (Puggioni, 2017, p. 23). This focus on the

integration of all people as an alternative to focusing on material goods shows similarities to sufficiency as a lifestyle that, by endorsing both lower and upper limits, aims at including all current and future generations.

In relation to practices, we again find both negative and positive interconnections between Christianity and sufficiency. On the one hand, several religious practices such as Christmas have become highly commercialized and are, thus, in opposition to a sufficient lifestyle (Porter, 2013). On the other hand, there are several denominations that – both historically and currently – cherish a simplistic lifestyle, e.g., Puritans, the Quakers, and the Amish (Voget-Kleschin, 2013, p. 80). Furthermore, the Christian virtues of a monastic life illustrate that a life of abundance, without limits, is not the way to God (Linz, 2002, p. 8). In addition to such “extreme” abstinence from materialism, there is the common practice of fasting, particularly during Lent. In the last few years, this practice has started to be integrated with a perspective on sustainable lifestyles through the introduction of the concept of *Klimafasten*² (Institut für Kirche und Gesellschaft der EKvW, 2022). This practice takes the tradition of fasting and focuses it on climate-harming practices that one should cease.

In this short overview, we see that Christianity, in several of its teaching and lifestyles, includes a perspective on sufficiency as a good way of life. The concept was only referred to a few times in the literature we found but similarities show that this modern concept is built upon long-established values that Christianity shares. Nevertheless, the question arises about how strong the commitment to sufficiency can be as long as these values are shared but not explicitly pronounced or followed (Koehrsen, 2015). On this basis, the Christian perspective on sufficiency remains blurry. Even though the values are there and have a definite influence on practices, as a call for action, it is not clear how well this translates into practice for the average believer.

Islam

The literature on Islam reviewed here demonstrates little usage of the term sufficiency. However, there are references to similar concepts and understandings and the idea of a good life that are primarily based on Muslim mysticism. This discussion is grounded in the relationship to consumption and consumerism, on which the literature is rising (Rush, 2018). Consumption is first and foremost considered an essential human need. Even enjoyment and a certain level of wealth are normal traits of human life. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that such consumption should never lead to exploitation, as a lack of moderation is related to undesirable character traits such as greed (Ghandour, 2019, p. 111; Kowanda-Yassin, 2018, p. 143). This renunciation of consumption does not mean that one needs to live an ascetic life, but that a materialistic overvaluation

² Own translation: Fasting for the climate.

of goods is seen as difficult (Rush, 2018, p. 6). In the Sufi tradition, there is even a concept (*tagarrud*) for feeling free and independent of material goods (Ghandour, 2019, p. 113).

In addition to the concepts related to sufficiency, there are also similarities between our understanding of the good life and Islamic concepts. First of all, there is the concept of a simple life called *Zuhd*, though it also refers to an ascetic life (Rush, 2018, p. 6). Second, one can make out similarities between the good life and the Islamic concepts of growth and care: The term *az-zakāʾ* not only describes growth, it also includes a more holistic approach to caring for the whole of creation by considering the long-term consequences of one's actions (Ghandour, 2019, p. 109). There is even a concept known as *waraʾ* in the Sufi tradition that describes a careful growth, which expands its semantic meaning from pure devoutness to a careful treatment of possessions by considering long-term consequences (Ghandour, 2019, p. 112–113). Both concepts relate to the good life through their acknowledgment that short-term consumption can only be maintained if it considers future costs (Al Jaafari and Zimprich, 2019).

Nevertheless, even though we find this clear conception of a sufficient lifestyle and a good life in Islamic teachings, we still need to understand how it is implemented (Khorchide, 2019, p. 39–40). The literature states a strong value-action gap, but this is also the case in many other religions. Further to this, Muslim societies often face challenges in relation to their economic security and political stability. This reality is regularly given as an explanation for why Muslim values are often not reflected in Muslim people's lives. Although we must acknowledge that other studies have demonstrated that economic stability does not lead directly to a more ecological lifestyle, less economic stability undoubtedly does not help decrease the value-action gap (Dizri, 2019, p. 63–64). However, there is also a growing awareness about materialism in Western Muslim societies that leads to a critical perspective on consumerism (Kowanda-Yassin, 2018, p. 19).

Given the often-stronger connection between religion and polity in some predominantly Muslim states, we can observe, albeit rarely, an interesting intertwining of religious values and policies that aim to generate a sufficient lifestyle. In this instance, there is a connection between the scientific evidence, Islamic law, and Muslim values, especially in relation to policies governing water consumption, a prominent challenge in the climate of many Muslim societies (Binay and Yunis Al-Zoubi, 2019, p. 214). In proclaiming water *fatwas*, for example, in Jordan and Indonesia, the Qur'an quotes and examples from the Prophet's life contribute to greater awareness of water consumption (Zbidi, 2015; Al Jaafari and Zimprich, 2019). However, there has also been a revival of the concept of the *hima*, that is "a traditional Islamic legal device for setting aside land as a reserve" (Rush, 2018, p. 6), in, for example, Kuwait and Lebanon. This practice is facilitating a more sustainable way of life by integrating cultural and religious understandings

and environmental protection (Zbidi, 2015). Both examples show that faith-based frameworks help to limit the consumption and exploitation of natural resources, leading to a life lived in between an upper and lower limit.

Hinduism

As the third-largest religion globally, Hinduism sets itself apart from Christianity and Islam by not having a single institution or holy script and by being polytheistic (Tharoor, 2020, p. 13). Its different schools, continuous reinterpretation and reevaluation of sacred texts, and sheer diversity of followers make the analysis of Hindu actors and their understandings far more complex. Nevertheless, the following chapter introduces the most common Hindu concepts discussed in the research on sustainable consumption, while keeping in mind that these are merely guiding principles for a very diverse religious practice (Narayanan, 1997, p. 298). The discourse on religion and sustainability often assumes that Hinduism, along with other Eastern religions, has a closer connection to nature and that sustainable behaviors are therefore intrinsic to their believers (Minton, 2014, p. 76), a contrast to Christianity in particular (White, 1967). The assumption that Hinduism has a strong connection with nature is based on the concept of *ātman*, the true spiritual self of all beings. Particularly in the orthodox understanding of the *Advaita Vedanta* school of non-dualism, this all-encompassing idea of *ātman* leads to a belief in the sacredness of the surrounding nature (Nelson, 2018). Nevertheless, this often-cited connection to nature is not predominant in all Hindu perspectives and some schools react differently to the idea of the sacredness of nature. On the one hand, the belief in the holiness of everything may result in greater respect for nature and animals, with the result that material things are carefully managed [a perspective that is also in line with the concept of *ahimsa*, non-violence (Jacobsen, 2018)]. In addition to this, achieving *mokṣa* (the term for becoming one with *ātman*) goes hand in hand with freeing oneself from worldly matters and consequently decreases one's interest in consumerism and an unsustainable lifestyle. On the other hand, seeking *mokṣa* can lead to a total disinterest in worldly matters. In a very blunt way, that could mean that environmental problems, climate change, and consumerism become issues that one does not need to care about because the focus should be on leaving the world behind (Narayanan, 1997, p. 298; Chapple, 2000)³. These two perspectives (and surely there are several perspectives in between) highlight that the connection between Hinduism and nature is not as clear

³ We want to note that this disengagement with worldly matters is not particular to Hinduism, it is a general challenge for an ascetic lifestyle as practiced in other religions and faiths as well.

as expected. Keeping this in mind, from here on we focus only on concepts that do promote sufficiency, a good life, and sustainable transformation.

Considering the established relationship to nature, what relationship is there between Hinduism, sufficiency, and the good life? First of all, as described above, one needs to acknowledge the sustainable perspective of *mokṣa*. In addition, there is the concept of *tapas*, mostly translated as asceticism and austerity (Carpenter, 2018). This supports the existence of a positive relationship based on the idea that a 'simple' life is thought to be the way to salvation. In conclusion, a sufficient lifestyle, in the sense that one only consumes as much as needed, is part of Hinduism even though its goal is salvation rather than a sustainable transformation. Nevertheless, the question remains whether the concept of a good life (opposed to the un-worldly *mokṣa*) also features in Hinduism. The ethical perspective that comes closest to the concept of a good life is the *Puruṣa-arthas*, which includes *artha* (wealth), *kama* (pleasure), and *dharma*, which roughly translates to the right path (or life) (Doniger, 2010, p. 199–211; Strauch, 2018). All three aspects of the *Puruṣa-arthas* coexist interdependently, but it is *dharma* that most research currently refers to when describing Hinduism's concept of a good life in relation to a sustainable transformation (Narayanan, 1997, 2010; Jain, 2011).

In addition to this more philosophical perspective on how Hinduism relates to sufficiency, it remains to be asked how these beliefs are translated into practice. We can find analysis of the concept of *dharma* and environmental practices, but this research is restricted to very particular Indian communities like the Swadhyaya or the Bishnoi (Jain, 2011). In a global perspective, there has been research on the increasingly consumerist religious practices such as Diwali (Porter, 2013) and some literature has questioned the sustainable activism in Hindu communities in Europe (Das et al., 2014). This European activism focuses on sustainable lifestyles, such as vegetarianism, to some extent but it does not focus exclusively on sufficient lifestyles and, most importantly, still seems to be reliant on a small number of activists.

All in all, one can say that Hinduism's connection to sustainability might not be as self-evident as is sometimes thought, but it still incorporates several concepts that relate to sufficiency and the good life. As was the case in Christianity and Islam, these concepts must be seen as possible frameworks that could support a sustainable transformation despite the consistent challenge of the value-action gap.

The following analysis aims to broaden the understanding of how faith-based actors use these frames in political discourses. As our review of the literature has revealed, there are only few specific concepts that relate to sufficiency and the good life in relation to a sustainable transformation in the three religions. Nevertheless, materialism, consumption, and the aim of living a good life are paramount ideas in each religion.

We, therefore, expect that faith-based actors connect these with the concepts of sufficiency and a good life during their environmental engagement work.

Materials and methods

To examine how FBAs articulate their ideas about sufficiency and the good life, we conducted a computer-assisted qualitative content analysis based on the rule-bound procedure from Mayring (2014). For our research, we used the corpus of texts generated for the project "Religion as a Resource in European Climate Politics"⁴ and expert interviews with representatives from faith-based organizations.

The corpus consists of internet content published on the websites of FBAs active in EU climate politics (e.g., newsletter or blog articles, descriptions of the FBA's work and motivations, reports from events, and prayers)⁵. Hence, the empirical focus of this paper is on conceptions of sufficiency and the good life in connection with environmental issues and is limited to only those FBAs who are active on the EU level. We filtered the corpus to include only Christian, Muslim, and Hindu texts in our investigation. At this point, our corpus consisted of 55 Islamic texts, 150 Hindu texts, and 2,764 Christian texts. It is important to note that for the specific context of the corpus (EU climate policy, organized and registered actors in the EU Transparency Register, thematic texts on environmental issues on the actors' website), we could only identify Brahma Kumaris as the only FBA that can be counted to the Hindu tradition. Our research focuses on the European context, where Christianity is the primary religion, and this partially explains the high imbalance in the number of religious texts available. As the corpus was still too large, we applied further filtering by extracting a list of keywords related to sufficiency and the good life from our theory and the literature (for the lists of keywords, see Table 1 in the appendix). As we were specifically interested in investigating whether the FBAs use specific terms and theoretical concepts, this procedure proved to be most effective. During preprocessing, we removed stop words from the texts (ubiquitous words that do not convey meaning like

4 <https://www.uni-muenster.de/Religion-und-Politik/en/forschung/projekte/B3-31.shtml>

5 The corpus is the result of a web scraping procedure undertaken by the project "Religion as a Resource in European Climate Politics". In that project, we selected actors with a faith-based affiliation in their organizational name or who reported having an interest in the topic "climate action" in the European transparency register. We applied a keyword list driven web crawler to identify which of the FBAs' specific internet content covered climate related topics. After the automated extraction of that content, we inspected the results manually and eliminated the irrelevant texts (i.e., any texts that did not focus on climate related topics).

“and,” “or,” and “the”). We then classified the texts by calculating the relative frequency of keywords in the remaining content. We identified the 16 texts containing the highest number of keywords from each religion. Thus, we used the rate of keywords that appeared in the texts to measure the extent to which each text deals with the topics of sufficiency and the good life. We do acknowledge that our approach favored the concepts of sufficiency and the good life that are consistent with our theoretical findings and, therefore, other readings of those concepts could be disadvantaged in the sampling of the texts. However, checking how well this keyword method worked for one religion, Islam, confirmed that the unselected texts only rarely, if at all, dealt with sufficiency as a topic.

For further validation, we complemented our data set with expert interviews. This is an excellent method for investigating the special knowledge of the people involved (Gläser and Laudel, 2006). We conducted nine interviews with representatives from faith-based organizations using open questions to extract the particular understanding of sufficiency found within their religious tradition and practice (for the collection of questions of the interviews, see Table 2 in the appendix). The nine interviewees consisted of three Hindu-related, four Christian, and two Islamic representatives. We contacted representatives of FBAs that are active in the context of EU climate policy. Most of the responses came from Germany⁶. As we anonymized the interviews in the case of the online survey, it is not always possible to assign the interviewees to specific organizations (except for voluntary statements). In the case of the analysis of Hinduism, the validation of the textual findings through the interviews benefits from the broader contextualization of Hindu traditions other than Brahma Kumaris. Given the restrictions associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, we decided to use an online survey format. After building up our sample and conducting the interviews, we did a close reading of the texts and developed a coding scheme for our specific purposes (see Table 4 in the appendix). We deductively determined the starting categories based on our theoretical analysis and subsequently derived specific subcodes inductively from the material. We carried out the coding process in three rounds with four coders and implemented a qualitative validation process through repeated discussion and adaptation.

Findings

Overall, the analysis of the material confirmed our initial assumption: we found understandings of sufficiency and the good life in the texts of all three religions, even though the specific terms are not or only rarely used. The FBAs

⁶ For more context information about the used material, we append a list of the organizations' and interviewees' local background (see Table 3 in the appendix).

most often discuss aspects of the theoretical concepts of sufficiency and the good life in conjunction with a critique of over-consumption and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles. Furthermore, they partially connect those ideas with aspects of spirituality and divine commandments, thus contributing their specific articulation of the theoretical approaches. In the interviews that we conducted to validate our findings, all the representatives from the faith-based organizations evaluated current consumption patterns very negatively and called for appropriate lifestyle changes. For them, faith and spirituality can provide important guidance toward a qualitatively better life that draws fulfillment not from consumption but from faith itself and from an appreciation of related values such as charity, solidarity, responsibility, and balance.

For a more detailed analysis, we present our findings for each religion individually in order to identify the various frames used for a sufficient approach to sustainable transformation and the good life. It is also interesting to highlight the slightly different target groups of each religion. Finally, we identify the common ground shared by each religion as well as differences in the FBAs' positions and provide a critical evaluation of the results.

Elements of sufficiency and the good life in Christian texts

In the analysis of the Christian texts and interviews, the themes of sufficiency, consumption, and other related topics are particularly salient and discussed in relation to individual behavior and the structural and systemic level. Consumption and production patterns are critically examined in relation to individuals, society, and politics. This systemic view of the interplay between consumption and production is especially interesting as we do not find this aspect discussed in the texts and interviews of the other two religions in such a decisive manner. The Christian texts and interviews display a negative assessment of individual consumption, as is reflected in statements such as “Consumer behavior still predominantly means “a lot” at a “low price” (Interview ID 22). Thus, the representatives have perceived that a change of mindset is required if we are to overcome our negative consumption habits. However, the Christian FBAs also criticize the current economic system with its “linear economic model, which is based on extracting materials, using them, and then discarding them” (QCEA – Quaker Council for European Affairs)⁷. The external costs are often not recognizable or are actively suppressed (Interview ID 22). To challenge this model, they call for a shift toward more sustainable alternatives and demand a “paradigm shift that replaces the current model of a growth- and consumption-oriented prosperity that needs a continuous supply of fossil fuels

⁷ <http://www.qcea.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/CE-basics.pdf>

and CO₂ emissions” (CIDSE – International Alliance of Catholic development agencies)⁸.

Several Christian FBAs frame their call for change in production and consumption in relation to the values of fairness, solidarity, and the divine mandate to care for nature and people. It is suggested that current consumption styles reflect a lack of integrity and responsibility for God’s creation and future generations. Moreover, the Christian FBAs regard human rights as of fundamental importance in production and consumption patterns. They question the significance of affluence, instead highlighting rights, justice, and sustainability as more important aspects of life (CIDSE)⁹. In this matter, the Catholic FBAs often refer to the encyclic appeal written by Pope Francis in 2015 to respond to the “cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (Laudato Si 49). At the same time, other Christian FBAs have connected their calls for change and moral frameworks to the planet’s limitations, thereby highlighting an aspect that is central to the theoretical concepts of sufficiency and the good life:

As Quakers we believe that “we do not own the world, and its riches are not ours to dispose of at will.” (BYM Advices & Queries 42) We are called instead to show a loving consideration for all life, and to act as its careful stewards, particularly as many resources are finite, and dwindling (QCEA)¹⁰.

Interestingly, we also find that Christian FBAs question what defines a good life, or in their words, a better quality of life, wellbeing, and good living. Some texts analyzed here reference a conception of the good life that is similar to that identified in the theory, namely an understanding of a good life that incorporates other humans as well as nature:

How can we design an economy that provides a better quality of life for all within the ecological limits of the planet? [...] The controversial debate [...] is not only a controversy about the best methods to promote human wellbeing and environmental sustainability. It raises profound questions with regards to what we regard as “wellbeing” and “good living,” what it means to be human and how we relate to those around us and to nature (WCC - World Council of Churches)¹¹.

To achieve a good life, the WCC recommends the Latin American concept of “buen vivir,” which underlines the interconnected aspects of a global human community and harmonious coexistence with nature. The CIDSE also defines

the good life in a similar way, connecting it to happiness and wellbeing:

Happiness can be seen as a form of prosperity that meets the most urgent needs and does not cost others anything. It is a form of prosperity that accepts planetary boundaries and gives us freedom to live within those borders. We do not want to tell others how to live, however, there are and must be limits to excess that ensure the survival and wellbeing of others (CIDSE)¹².

Thus, their concept of “happiness” relates to the theoretical concept of the two sides of enough (Spengler, 2018, p. 132). It describes a consumption that fulfills basic needs but does not harm other people’s ability to have a good life. As suggested by both FBAs cited (WCC and CIDSE), limitations in consumption should enable a good life for all.

The interviews confirm this reading of the good life as connected to the understanding of the good life with an “ethic of enough” (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, 2018), which means that the poor have enough to live a decent life and the rich set limits in their lifestyle choices (Interview ID 20). Yet above all, there is a stronger emphasis on the role of faith in this nexus between consumption and the good life in the interviews: the good life is seen as the core message of Christianity and the faith itself as a source of the strength needed to realize self-limitation, given that material consumption should not play a central role in life (Interview ID 18 and 20). The good life is defined as “[...] life of fullness and in the fullness of the Christian faith is a life that rests in faith in God the Savior and does not ‘restlessly’ strive for the satisfaction of the next need in consumption, whose fullness is thus the opposite of material fullness” (Interview ID 22). The respondents emphasized the importance of Christian (and other religious) values in motivating a cultural change in consumption (Interview ID 20 and 22). At the same time, however, they also acknowledged that the values have not yet led to sufficient corresponding action (Interview ID 18). It is this missing link to practice that will be the focus of the next sub-chapter.

Sufficiency in practice

In the texts of the Christian FBAs selected, we discovered a questioning of current economic paradigms in relation to a good life for all that led to a discussion of the three approaches of sufficiency, consistency, and efficiency in practice. The FBAs contemplate, among other things, how food production could reduce hunger around the world and how energy production and supply can be made compatible with a sustainable lifestyle. To respond to all such requirements, the Christian FBAs demand actions on several levels, including sufficiency,

8 <https://www.cidse.org/2014/06/10/headlines-from-the-future/>

9 <https://www.cidse.org/2014/06/10/headlines-from-the-future/>

10 <http://www.qcea.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/CE-basics.pdf>

11 <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/seven-weeks-for-water-2012-week-6-buen-vivir-good-living>

12 <https://www.cidse.org/2014/06/10/headlines-from-the-future/>

consistency, and efficiency. In regard to sufficiency, the Catholic FBAs of our text sample in particular call for a change in individual lifestyle:

At the core of the event, a call on Catholics and all people of goodwill to carry out a lifestyle conversion to answer to “the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (COMECE Secretariat - Commission of the Bishops of the European Union)¹³.

Here, conversion – the Christian term for a change of life toward Christian confession – explicitly includes ecological and social sustainability. The Christian FBAs state that there is a rising awareness of the impact of individual consumption habits on others and nature. This awareness is leading more and more people to make a commitment to changing those habits. Possible practices suggested by our text sample and interviews relate to the reduction of natural resource use, energy, and meat consumption, as well as sharing instead of individual ownership. In more detail, these practices include using renewable energy, buying sustainably-produced local food, riding a bike instead of a car, reusing, repairing, redistributing, and upgrading to ensure products and materials last for as long as possible (QCEA)¹⁴. All these practices combine sufficiency and consistency. However, they also recommend measures that are in line with the concept of efficiency, particularly in relation to energy consumption (e.g., using energy-saving bulbs) (CIDSE)¹⁵.

Furthermore, the interviews reinforce the community aspect of implementing more sustainable lifestyles. A lifestyle change that increases sufficiency needs role models, mutual encouragement, and remembrance. Thus, the churches see themselves as having a role in establishing group services such as repair cafés (Interview ID 18 and 22).

Our sample demonstrated that the churches’ role as an engaging actor is ambiguous. On the one hand, the churches are described as actors that organize and implement various campaigns, such as an anti-fast-fashion campaign, meat-free food, climate pilgrimages, and climate fasts (Interview ID 14, 18 and 22). From this perspective, the churches have a positive role model function. On the other hand, we found critical voices that assess the churches’ commitment to sufficiency as not strong enough.

One further and very interesting observation is that Christian FBAs not only focus on sufficient or sustainable lifestyles but also on the power structures that enable those lifestyles implementing consumption restrictions can be difficult in everyday life (COMECE Secretariat)¹⁶. They connect lifestyles

13 <http://www.comece.eu/second-european-laudato-si-reflection-day-towards-a-life-style-conversion>

14 <http://www.qcea.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/CE-basics.pdf>

15 <https://www.cidse.org/2015/08/03/lifestyle-challenges-campaign-change-for-the-planet-care-for-the-people/>

to political action in order to enable their vision of what can be defined under the label of “a good life for all.” External changes can help make those lifestyle transitions easier. Therefore, it is, on the one hand, necessary to show political commitment (“the private becomes political”) and demand that governments create conditions that enable a sufficiency lifestyle (Interview ID 22). We also find this point in the Christian online texts from our sample:

The changes that we envision toward a just and sustainable world, the kind of transition for society that history usually attributes to politicians or leaders, cannot happen without the personal commitment of the many. There are ways we can all engage in creating the kind of world we want to see, and our actions can be the seeds of a new way of life and the driver for policy makers to move from words to actions. By practicing and promoting sustainable consumption and production patterns, we send a message to our decision makers that we want sustainable alternatives to be made the norm with policies that make them more accessible for all, safer and more affordable (CIDSE)¹⁷.

On the other hand, other respondents say that it is the role of religion to tackle the challenge individual responsibility presents. They suggest that Christian values have greater potential to motivate people to focus on spirituality and personal change rather than being too politically demanding (Interview ID 18).

Elements of sufficiency and the good life in Islam

We find similar aspects of sufficiency and the good life in the Islamic texts and interviews. They also discuss consumption patterns and promote sufficient lifestyles. Nevertheless, we detect differences in their line of reasoning and recommendations. For example, we find little regarding production patterns and calls for systemic change and political action¹⁸. Indeed, there is only one text, the *Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change*, that also involves political discussion. Instead, the Islamic FBAs focus on individual or group action and religious considerations, which in turn may spill over to the societal level. Here, the Islamic FBAs emphasize the interplay between the ecological and social dimensions.

16 <http://www.comece.eu/second-european-laudato-si-reflection-day-towards-a-life-style-conversionandInterview22>

17 https://www.cidse.org/areas-of-work/sustainable-lifestyles?sf_paged=8

18 However, we know from our other research that some Islamic FBAs do also include the systemic level in their actions and demands.

In comparison to both other religions in our analysis, it is striking that the Islamic texts contain the most religious references. There are a lot of Qur'an quotes and links to a way of life that follows the example of the Prophet Mohammed cited in relation to a sustainable or even sufficient lifestyle. Our sampling might have partially affected this finding, which predominantly features one specific Islamic FBA [The Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Science (IFEES)]. Nevertheless, we did also identify relevant Qur'an quotes in the few other texts from Islamic FBAs that were in our sample. Furthermore, we identified a similar observation in our literature reviews (Binay and Yunis Al-Zoubi, 2019). Similarly, we also found a call to follow the example of Muhammad among the Islamic respondents:

From the teachings and way of life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings upon him) comes an always mindful and particularly frugal use of resources, whether in food or water consumption (including for ritual cleansing). This mindful way of life is for all Muslims to take as an example (Interview ID 17).

The content of the religious references and instructions resembles, in part, the religious frameworks we detect in the Christian texts. The value of justice in relation to consumption seems to be the most significant identified in the Islamic texts and responses. These texts refer to aspects of justice toward God's creation and mankind's responsibility as the stewards of it:

The Qur'an asks us to be just to our natural surroundings, "We did not create the heavens and earth and everything between them, except with truth" ([Qur'an] 15:85). Thus, a Muslim's behavior toward the environment is based on the imperatives laid down in the Qur'an (IFEES)¹⁹.

Thus, one's consumption should do as much good as possible and cause as little harm as possible. Furthermore, as in the Christian texts, the Islamic texts also disapprove of materialism with reference to planetary boundaries:

[...] We take our wealth for granted and use up resources as if they will go on forever. But they are finite and our extravagance in using them is causing pollution and damage to the lives of other people and creatures, and even to ourselves (IFEES)²⁰.

In addition, the Islamic texts add further frameworks to the field. They trace unsustainable and insufficient lifestyles to aspects of the human soul and its development during modern progress. In a text from the Representative Office of the

Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina (IZBIH), they say that progress, like education, wealth, communication etc., has not led to wisdom and ethical acting but to ruthlessness in human behavior.

The pollution of the human soul with lies and immorality is no less harmful than the pollution of nature with poisonous gases and garbage. Moreover, it is not possible to cleanse nature as long as human soul remains polluted with wickedness and irresponsibility toward life on earth (IZBIH)²¹.

Similarly, IFEES discusses mankind's attitudes and modernity observing that "the construct of what we have now come to describe as modernity is deeply hostile to the natural world" (IFEES)²². While we also find negative evaluations of the current levels of consumption in the Christian texts, this connection between mankind's attitudes and modernity is not made in the Christian texts. The explicit statement that negative human character traits cause environmental destruction and damage to other people's lives, is something we only detected in the Islamic and Hindu texts in statements such as: "What sort of actions corrupt the earth? Look into the Qur'an: Arrogance, wastefulness, greed, hoarding wealth, miserliness" (IFEES)²³. This finding again supports the trend we identified in the literature (Ghandour, 2019).

Like the Christian FBAs, the Islamic FBAs also refer to concepts similar to the good life. In the *Islamic Declaration on Climate Change*, they promote a new "model of wellbeing, based on an alternative to the current financial model, which depletes resources, degrades the environment, and deepens inequality" (IFEES)²⁴. Indeed, in another text, they state that living within limits contributes to a good life for all (for oneself, the environment, and other people): "We understand that caring for the environment is an important part of our vision for a better, fairer world for all" (Muslim Hands)²⁵. However, overall, in our sample at least, the relationship between the good life and sufficiency seems to be even less of a thematic focus in the Islamic texts and interviews than in the Christian and Hindu texts and interviews.

21 <https://english.islamkazajednica.ba/news/248-spiritual-revolution-the-challenge-for-the-21st-century>

22 <https://www.ifees.org.uk/about/charter/>

23 <https://www.ifees.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/khutbah-notes-1-sustainable-living.pdf>

24 https://www.ifees.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/climate_declarationmmwb.pdf

25 <https://muslimhands.org.uk/latest/2015/12/our-policy-on-paper>

19 <https://www.ifees.org.uk/about/charter/>

20 <https://www.ifees.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/khutbah-notes-1-sustainable-living.pdf>

Sufficiency in practice

The conclusion the Islamic FBAs draw is the same that we find in the Christian texts and interviews: there needs to be a change in our lifestyles. Again, we see a mixture of sufficiency, consistency, and efficiency in the recommended approaches. They suggest using green electricity and biodegradable tools. Initially, they begin promoting these ideas by implementing them in their own organization, for example by developing a recycling policy for themselves (Muslim Hands)²⁶.

It is also notable that, in the Islamic texts in our sample, a sufficient lifestyle best meets many of the commands made in the Qur'an, for example, "Eat and drink but DO NOT BE WASTEFUL: God does not like wasteful people (Qur'an 7:31)" (IFEES)²⁷. Thus, IFEES calls for a moderate lifestyle that limits consumption to the essential:

If you had to grow your own food, would you eat as much as you do? If you had to raise and slaughter your own animals, would you eat as much meat? The Prophet's wife Aishah (RA) said, 'A complete month would pass by during which we would not make a fire (for cooking), and our food used to be only dates and water unless we were given a present of some meat.' (Hadith: Muslim). If we all lived as simply as this, the earth would be better able to sustain us. We would eat only what we grew, not waste energy and food transporting it around the world. (Ibid.)

The Islamic FBAs also link a sufficient lifestyle to specific religious practices, for example, when they promote *Iftar* (breaking fast). Fasting helps people become aware of their own consumption behavior and consciously do without. Nevertheless, it is important to maintain mindful, responsible behavior outside of fasting times as well, by eating healthy, regional, seasonal, and often meat-free food (Interview ID 17). Furthermore, the Islamic FBAs in our sample condemn the waste of food and plastic during Ramadan and advise Muslims to reduce their reliance on single-use plastics (IFEES)²⁸.

The Islamic FBAs promote another practice, *Zakah* and *Sadaqah* (donation), which also fits well within a sufficiency-oriented lifestyle.

For those of us who have more than we need, Allah showed us the way to use up our surpluses. They ask you what they should give: say, 'Give what you can spare.' In this way, God makes His messages clear to you, so that you may reflect on this world and the next ([Qur'an] 2:219-20). Instead of wasting our money on buying food and

other goods we don't need, or even on indulging in haram activities, we could be giving it as *Zakah* and *Sadaqah*, just as some of us send money back home to our families (IFEES)²⁹.

Donating, as a pillar of Islam, means giving away a portion of one's possessions, which cannot then be spent on excessive consumption. Thus, although it is not explicitly labeled as such, this approach corresponds with the concept of the two sides of sufficiency. Poorer people should be allowed to consume enough to live while avoiding unnecessary consumption themselves. A lifestyle based on the Prophet's model should move between these boundaries and be responsible, mindful, and moderate (Interview ID 17). We also found passages where the Islamic FBAs linked a reasonable lifestyle with divine rewards: "The simpler our lifestyle, the more we can spare, and the more rewards we store up for the next life" (IFEES)³⁰.

Elements of sufficiency and the good life in Hinduism (particularly Brahma Kumaris)

Our data selection for Hinduism ultimately contained texts predominantly from one FBA, Brahma Kumaris. This FBA defines itself as a spiritual organization rather than one directly linked to Hinduism. Nevertheless, several of their rituals and beliefs are drawn from Hinduism's beliefs (e.g., the belief in reincarnation and karma) (Arweck, 2018). Focusing on these similarities, our sample primarily demonstrates what this specific school of Hinduism says about sufficiency and the good life. However, we could compare these results with two other Hindu-based environmental activists in our interviews. Other schools may well have different perspectives, though this is an inherent challenge in studying Hinduism and not only an issue for this particular study.

As in the Christian and Islamic texts, we also find aspects of sufficiency and the good life discussed in our sample texts and interviews from Hindu FBAs and Brahma Kumaris. They also paint the current lifestyles and materialism in an unfavorable light, but their line of reasoning differs from the other two religions. In contrast to the other faiths in our investigation, the moral frames of the Hindu FBAs and Brahma Kumaris are only rarely directly connected to religious authority or holy scriptures. For example, only one respondent cites the *Bhagavad Gita* (Interview ID 13). As in the other texts and interviews, consumerism, especially in the global North, is seen very negatively. The Hindu texts and interviews justify this

26 <https://muslimhands.org.uk/latest/2015/12/our-policy-on-paper>

27 <https://www.ifees.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/khutbah-notes-2-recycling.pdf>

28 <https://www.ifees.org.uk/projects/plastic-free-iftar/>

29 <https://www.ifees.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/khutbah-notes-5-food.pdf>

30 <https://www.ifees.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/khutbah-notes-2-recycling.pdf>

in a way that is comparable to the Islamic rationale, as they attribute consumption primarily to undesirable human qualities and describe it, for example, as an addiction:

Although it seems to offer satisfaction it must never do so. It only works if – whilst believing that the next purchase will satisfy our need, and having made the purchase – we remain dis-satisfied and once more in need. Despite the promise of satisfaction, we must always feel we need more (Brahma Kumaris)³¹.

Thus, a consumerist lifestyle is considered a negative but influential role model for less developed countries (see Brahma Kumaris)³². In this context, greed is described as a great vice. The widespread desire for external consumer goods and the focus on physical comforts stand in the way of a truly fulfilled life. Instead, the focus should be on peaceful thoughts, spiritual aspirations, awareness of mindfulness, inner contentment, and joy in life (Interview ID 13 and 24). Frugality is considered an ethical cornerstone of Hinduism that is necessary to allow all living beings on this planet their due space (Interview ID 13).

While Brahma Kumaris frames the topic of consumption in relation to the moral goal to take care of the planet, they link problems such as poverty and climate change to concepts of peace, harmony, contentment, and empathy toward other people. The current consumerism is seen as the obstacle to a good life as it hinders the rekindling of the connection to our inner self. This inner self is never referred to specifically as *ātman*, nevertheless, their concept of the inner self (with which people are trying to reconnect) closely aligns with the idea of *ātman*:

We are living in a technological age which is increasingly out of step with the natural world and its cycles. In the busy-ness of daily life, it is easy to get disconnected from ourselves with consequences for our wellbeing & health on all levels (Brahma Kumaris)³³.

Hence, and in accordance with the goal of *mokṣa*, Brahma Kumaris view the good life as achieved through a reconnection to our inner self:

To get this [happiness] you have to go inside, this is very different from what the world is asking you to do. The world would tell you that you want more, more, and more and this is exactly how we have found ourselves in

the situation we are now – we are already consuming one and a half times the resources we have. When I eat more, drink more, consume more – do I become happy? No. It is time to challenge the messages we are receiving from the advertisers – money cannot buy happiness, money cannot buy love! (Brahma Kumaris)³⁴.

As we predicted in our theorizing, from the Hindu perspective the good life equates to a simple life: as little consumption as possible, as much consumption as necessary (Interview ID 13). Hence, there is a strong affiliation with a less materialistic lifestyle. Moreover, Brahma Kumaris asks how much is enough with regards to our needs. With this thought, they acknowledge that everybody has different needs that must be fulfilled if they are to have a good and satisfying life:

How much is enough? [...] How many pairs of shoes are enough? How many clothes do we need in our wardrobe to dress us? How much food in our pantry is enough to feed us? How do we gauge this balance between need and greed? In fact, everything can be enough when the heart is big and generous and when it's not, then nothing is enough. Waste is a relative term. What is waste to one may be a necessity to another! [...] Therefore, it is important not to judge another for what their 'needs' maybe (Brahma Kumaris)³⁵.

Thus, although it is not specifically named as a concept again, sufficiency is often indirectly referred to by the Brahma Kumaris when they express the desire for lifestyle changes and greater awareness of how much is enough.

Interestingly, Brahma Kumaris does broach the issue of a connection between a good life and religion or religious people directly. It concludes that while religion is one possible source of values, it is not the only one and that atheists can also facilitate a good life:

Would this require a religious revival perhaps? Well religion alone does not necessarily lead to greater empathy and being concerned about the wellbeing of others not connected to us. We can see that some individuals and communities feel driven by their religious dogma to act out violence and hatred to their ideological 'enemies'. And religion does not have a monopoly on caring and empathy - there are many atheists who live extremely humanitarian and ethical lives (Brahma Kumaris)³⁶.

31 http://www.brahmakumaris.org/es/descubrir/articulos-blog/articulos?view=article&option=com_alfresco&~articleId=b63aae49-87fb-4d2f-b305-60ecf163bb6d

32 <https://eco.brahmakumaris.org/empathy-and-the-environmental-crises/>

33 <https://eco.brahmakumaris.org/healing-the-self-restoring-the-earth/>

34 <https://eco.brahmakumaris.org/6th-and-7th-day-climate-change-conference-saturday-and-sunday-4th-and-5th-december/>

35 <https://eco.brahmakumaris.org/enough/>

36 <https://eco.brahmakumaris.org/empathy-and-the-environmental-crises/>

Sufficiency in practice

As already indicated, our Hindu-related sample suggests that sufficiency relates to inner contentment and the reestablishment of a connection to our inner self or soul. If one succeeds in this endeavor, their wastefulness and abuse of resources will decrease automatically:

Suffice it to say, one needs to look within, at themselves, and check where they are wasting their time, money and other resources. What is the excess in my life that I can trim or put to a better use? (Ibid).

Brahma Kumaris proposes meditation and a vegetarian lifestyle. A vegetarian diet is linked to a healthy life and our survival on Earth as it incorporates the protection of the planet and a way to stop climate change. However, meditation is considered the preferred way to awaken empathy with nature and our fellow humans, leading to a good life for all. This lifestyle could be supported by living in a community (Interview ID 24).

It is noteworthy that in comparison to the other two religions, efficiency is considered a less salient way to achieve a sustainable transformation. Although modern technologies such as solar energy are positively evaluated, there is also a clear criticism of strictly refraining from anything else than efficient lifestyles. According to Brahma Kumaris, efficiency is not enough to fight climate change, rather, it is a worthy addition to a less materialistic lifestyle:

The link between this form of economy and resource depletion, global warming and climate change might seem self-evident, but there are still those who suggest that we can “decouple” them; that by ingenuity and technical innovation we can continue to grow our economies and raise global levels of consumption without having an adverse impact upon our environment. I doubt that this is true (Brahma Kumaris)³⁷.

We also find critical comments in the interviews regarding the implementation of sufficient lifestyles in practice. In addition to attitudes (or the lack of connection to the inner self), both air travel and the desire for ever-better technology stand out as obstacles to sustainable living. In particular, interviewees critically questioned regular air travel (for example to India) (Interview ID 01, 13 and 24).

Given this the strong focus on individual mindsets, the statements made by Brahma Kumaris only address people as individuals. Political actors, institutions, and society en masse are not directly addressed. Furthermore, legislation and political

institutions are depicted as less important because people need to find more compassion and empathy in their inner self:

It is not so easy to get governments to change, there are so many factors involved, but we don't have to wait for governments to make the policies we can to something today! (Brahma Kumaris)³⁸.

Discussion

As previously discussed, we identified references to the concept of sufficiency and the good life in relation to living sustainably in between limits in the material of all three religions. As the concept of sufficiency is still relatively new (Toulouse et al., 2019, p. 334), it is interesting to observe how compatible it is with the understandings and frameworks of climate activism used within these three religions. Furthermore, the values detected related to an understanding of a good life, which implies a sustainable future as the ultimate goal of a better life and, in some cases, even means a life lived between limits as recommended in theoretical concepts such as the consumption corridors. It is notable that, in our sample, the sufficiency approaches were not limited to elitist asceticism either. Rather, the faith-based actors addressed every (religious) individual and linked them to their respective communities. Hence, we found references to the positive effect communities have when implementing sufficient lifestyles in the sample texts for each of the three religions. Thus, encouraging each other could have an important function in the establishment of sustainable lifestyles. In particular, the common reinforcement of religious values and practices could strengthen the community and its sustainable lifestyle.

Nevertheless, there are still differences between the frameworks that became visible in the description of our results. Although each religion evaluated our current consumer culture negatively, they offered different strategies for changing the situation, each based on their individual religious tradition. In our corpus, we found that the Hindu-based school of Brahma Kumaris advocates for changing our consumption through meditation and a vegetarian diet, while Muslims offer advice on how to conduct a sustainable Iftar. Christians discuss the possibilities more broadly by more openly including the political sphere in the discussion of the topic. However, our sample contained less advice on how to conduct Christian traditions more sustainably. For example, there is no mention of Christmas, currently one of the most commercial and consumption-driven holidays. Also, the other two religions only focus on certain elements of sustainable lifestyles, leaving other, maybe harder to implement, aspects of lifestyle changes unsaid.

37 http://www.brahmakumaris.org/es/descubrir/articulos-blog/articulos?view=article&option=com_alfresco&~articleId=b63aae49-87fb-4d2f-b305-60ecf163bb6d

38 <https://eco.brahmakumaris.org/6th-and-7th-day-climate-change-conference-saturday-and-sunday-4th-and-5th-december/>

While a vegetarian diet and meditation are relatively simple lifestyle actions for Hindus, restricting one's long-distance journeys (mainly between the place of residence and India), for example, would be a much harder limitation to one's lifestyle. This critical assessment of flights was expressed during the interviews but was not mentioned in any of the texts from the Hindu sample. Furthermore, although theory discussed, if also only rarely, the growing consumerism during Hindu festivals like *Diwali* (Porter, 2013), this theme was not identified in our sample texts. As the Hindu sample did not include discussion on the systemic and political level, we can assume that the recourse to *moksha* can restrain the action only to meditation, leaving otherworldly matters and possible actions out of sight. However, it should again be noted that our empirical sample is primarily limited to a specific Hindu orientation and does not reflect the full diversity of Hindu schools. Even though the interviews include other orientations, we cannot make generalized statements here about Hinduism as a whole. In regard to Islam, a sustainable *Iftar* is undoubtedly a good advancement, but it only promotes living a sustainable life for 1 month a year. As the lines of production and systemic difficulties of changing a consumption system are rarely discussed in the Islam and Hindu documents in our sample, it seems like all of the responsibility lies in the hands of the faithful consumers – even though it is evident from our other research that some Islamic FBAs do also include the systemic level in their actions and demands³⁹. Nevertheless, this engagement with the climate policy of the EU does not seem to be as pronounced in the Muslim context as it does in the Christian one. Of course, this imbalance between Christianity, the majority religion, and the Islamic and Hindu minority religions may well lie in the different level to which they are embedded in European culture and their position in the political system. Furthermore, the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence: our small sample cannot generalize to the sustainability activism of all religions. However, it is noteworthy and important to highlight that the frameworks discovered here can nurture a broader awareness and activism among consumers. This could lead to a broader acceptance of sufficiency as a concept that demands a critical reassessment of how we lead our lives and how much of our consumption is really necessary for all aspects of our lives.

Conclusion

This article analyzed how FBAs from three religions, Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism, engage with the concepts of sufficiency and the good life. These two concepts are becoming more and more important in the face of advancing

climate change as they are possible guiding principles for a sustainable future. Although all three are interdependent, sufficiency, as opposed to efficiency or consistency, is the key to a sustainable transformation as it takes into account the question of how much is enough. Furthermore, it considers what is enough in relation to both a lower and upper threshold and, therefore, provides the foundation for what researchers consider the good life in relation to sustainability. This corridor facilitates a good life that can be enjoyed by everyone, now and in the future. We have demonstrated that this good life focuses on a needs-based perspective by leaving the moral definition of the good within the consumption corridor open to individual interpretation and desire. It is in this determination that religious institutions, as generators of values and norms, could be an important asset when promoting such a shift in lifestyle. Moral reasoning through faith-based values could also benefit the promotion of sufficiency as a policy by broadening the acceptance of such values and policies.

Our analysis of web-based documents and online interviews from FBAs engaging with climate action at the level of the EU has shown that religious moral reasoning is already occurring, though the FBAs are not using the specific terms sufficiency or good life. All three religions evaluate our current consumerist lifestyles negatively, citing it as one of the reasons for the current climate crisis. Therefore, the FBAs are united in their effort to raise awareness on a more simplistic life, reducing one's consumption and, as a result, leading a better life. Nevertheless, our research has also shown that Muslim and Hindu FBAs address the structural level less than the individual faithful consumer. Christian FBAs, in contrast, criticize the systemic unfairness but lack detailed concepts of change. All three religions lack a broad and comprehensive assessment of their own traditions and lifestyles in relation to sustainability, however, we did find critical evaluations of certain aspects within our sample. Furthermore, the engagement with climate policy of Islamic and Hindu actors on the social and political level could be much stronger in the locations where the majority of their followers live. For example, the literature review has already given us a glimpse of other faith-based sufficiency frameworks that are possible in Muslim countries, but which were not found in this European sample. Future research could investigate this further. Nonetheless, this analysis has provided the first assessment of sufficiency in the work of FBAs and showed that they are engaging with similar concepts and emphasizing the importance of living within limits in our sustainable future.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

³⁹ <https://www.uni-muenster.de/Religion-und-Politik/en/forschung/projekte/B3-31.shtml>

Ethics statement

Ethics review and approval/written informed consent was not required as per local legislation and institutional requirements.

Author contributions

HK and AR contributed to conception and design of the study and wrote sections of the manuscript. AR organized the literature review. HK organized the empirical material. All authors contributed to manuscript revision, read, and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Supplementary material

The Supplementary Material for this article can be found online at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/frsus.2022.952819/full#supplementary-material>

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