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The societal conditions for achieving sufficiency through voluntary work time reduction: Results of a pilot study in Western Switzerland

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Can the voluntary reduction of working hours as a sufficiency practice promote more environmentally sustainable forms of consumption along with human well-being? In this exploratory study conducted at the end of 2018 in Western Switzerland, we use the social practices and systems of provision approaches and a definition of well-being based on human need satisfaction to answer this question in the context of an affluent country where women typically work-part-time after the arrival of children due to limited family policies. In-depth interviews with people in couples, with families, where men have also voluntarily engaged in work time reduction (WTR) (n = 14), indicate that some do indeed simultaneously enjoy a high level of well-being, while limiting consumption and ecological impact. However, these are almost exclusively couples with high cultural and social capital who have adopted non-consumerist and gender egalitarian norms, despite the "culture of affluence" that dominates in Swiss society. Moreover, truly resource-sufficient lifestyles seem to be possible only for people who live in settings that offer ecological options by default, thus emphasizing the importance of systems of provision that make some forms of consumption and well-being more probable and possible than others. The article therefore argues that sufficiency as a practice must go beyond personal motivations to consider the societal conditions that support sustainable well-being.

KEYWORDS

sufficiency, sustainable consumption, well-being, Switzerland, voluntary work time reduction

Introduction

Humanity is facing a major challenge: transforming its production and consumption patterns to respect planetary boundaries and ecological limits (Rockström et al., 2019)[1], while accounting for social justice. Countries in the so-called global north contribute more than their fair share to environmental ailments including the climate crisis and

1 We recognize the "limitations" of the "planetary boundaries" approach (as discussed in Brand et al., 2021), but nonetheless use this concept as a shorthand for delineating environmental impacts at various scales and across several criteria, such as climate change and biodiversity loss.

biodiversity loss, reviving the debate on whether to ascribe more weight to population size, affluence, or technological efficiency when it comes to reducing negative impacts (see Chertow, 2001). We concur with Wiedmann et al. (2020) in seeing affluence as the main culprit in this equation: technological solutions face an uphill battle when it comes to countering the effects of the growing consumption patterns associated with affluence. If the affluence of a population can be related to income revenues, it follows that a voluntary reduction in revenues might indicate a move toward reduced consumption patterns and associated impacts. Voluntary work-time reduction (WTR) is therefore an example of what can be termed a sufficiency practice, aimed at achieving a sense of "enoughness" (Spengler, 2016). A sufficiency practice leads to consumption levels which are sustainable, meaning that they are acceptable both socially (a minima is achieved) and environmentally (a maxima is respected) (Fuchs et al., 2021). Reducing time spent in employment decreases household income and thus the resources available for consumption (Nässén and Larsson, 2015); even if the freed-up leisure time could result in greater ecological damage, changes in income also affect the way leisure time is spent (Buhl and Acosta, 2016). Studying WTR in affluent countries is therefore an interesting avenue for discussing one way in which sufficiency might be practiced.

Sufficiency, as a practice and as studied here through the example of WTR, can be linked to at least two normative aims: respecting environmental boundaries when it comes to consumption patterns, but also maintaining high levels of human well-being. The notion of "sustainable well-being" (Fuchs et al., 2021) effectively captures this dual aim. Several studies consider the links between work time reductions (WTR), reduced environmental impacts, and increased well-being, notably in the degrowth literature (Kallis et al., 2013; Buhl and Acosta, 2016; Gough, 2017; Gunderson, 2019; Gumbert et al., 2022). Starting with the aim of reducing ecological impacts, authors in the Global North have been proposing WTR as part of the solution for at least two decades (Gorz, 1999; Sanne, 2002; Kasser and Brown, 2003; Schor, 2005; UNEP, 2008; Victor, 2008). There is compelling evidence to suggest that countries with long working hours exhibit higher ecological footprints, not least due to consumption patterns (Schor, 1998). WTR may allow for a change in consumption patterns, with free time allocated to more environmentally friendly practices (Buhl and Acosta, 2016). Yet a decrease in income does not automatically lead to a better respect of planetary boundaries, as free time can be spent on consumerist practices (Kallis et al., 2013; Buhl and Acosta, 2016). Based on these studies, the ecological impacts of WTR and related consumption patterns depend on many factors, such as the level of household income and savings, how free time is organized and work-leisure time is coordinated, but also social expectations and meanings around leisure time.

Whether and how WTR achieves human well-being also merits unpacking. The scientific literature tends to emphasize the negative effects of withdrawal from paid work, with paid work seen as a key factor in the well-being and health of individuals (SSAC, 2016). Full-time employment in some contexts, such as Germany, "provides social recognition and status, whereas part-time work leads to a loss of economic and symbolic capital, i.e., a loss of income and occupational status" (Buhl and Acosta, 2016 p. 274). An important exception involves, at least for now, mothers who invest in family work: they maintain an equivalent level of well-being outside of employment as those in employment, especially in less progressive gender contexts such as Switzerland (Hagqvist et al., 2017; Notten et al., 2017; Rossier et al., 2022). In other words, a withdrawal from employment does not necessarily worsen the level of well-being and health of the individuals involved, but it must be socially valued. In the German study, caring for children and personal health were simultaneously cited as the main motivators for WTR (Buhl and Acosta, 2016). For those reducing work to increase leisure time, there can also be positive effect on well-being, so long as certain services are provided for, such as access to education, the availability of leisure activities, the possibility of having a political voice in society, and indeed, a "culture of leisure" that values time off from work (Kallis et al., 2013). However, mothers' part-time work and the gendered occupational segregation which structurally supports these choices are seen as the main factors sustaining gender inequalities in high income countries; these processes are more pronounced where family policies are weaker (Fagan and O'Reilly, 2020).

The brief review above reveals the ambiguity around voluntary WTR, as a proxy for sufficiency practices, in achieving the aim of "sustainable wellbeing." What is clear, however, is that this dual aim is not achievable at the individual level alone. The ability of individuals to exercise autonomy over their work time and consumption choices is one thing, but such motivations are directly linked to cultural and gendered expectations around employment, family care, leisure time, as well as the services, infrastructures and opportunities that are available. The over-individualization of environmental responsibility has been a central critique in sustainable consumption studies for some time, and obscures the more structural and systemic, and thus political, changes that are needed to achieve such an aim (Cairns, 1998; Maniates, 2001; Anantharaman, 2018; Balsiger et al., 2019). These critiques suggest moving beyond the unit of the individual consumer, to consider how people carry out social practices that are embedded in material arrangements and social meanings, but also how systems of provision make certain practices more probable and possible than others. We will further discuss this approach, as well as our definition of well-being, in the conceptual framework below.

It would follow that there are some settings that are more conducive to sustainable well-being. In what Dubuisson-Quellier (2022) calls a moral economy of affluence, societies

are currently organized to support a value regime around abundance, full-time employment and affluent consumption, through policy measures, public discourses, corporate strategies, and the like. For parents with small children, the "breadwinner model" has been applied to maintain high levels of consumption, with men strengthening their involvement in the job market, allowing women to work part-time or retreat from the job market and care for the family (Gibb et al., 2014). The resulting "lock in" to unsustainable levels of consumption and gendered inequalities in these households is not only due to work-spend patterns, the availability of credit, or savvy marketing tactics (Schor, 1998; Sanne, 2002), but also a normative frame around what it means to live the good life (Fuchs et al., 2021). This is further reinforced by what has been termed "social lock in" (Sahakian, 2018), or how such expectations around the good life are tied to social groups, particularly elites, and the reproduction of their acquired status in societies. Switzerland is a highly relevant context in which to study affluence, as the moral economy of affluence is pervasive there: it is shared by Swiss residents. But this culture is also that of the urban elites in the global south. On a planet where local consumption leads to global impacts, not least the climate crisis, how to achieve sufficiency through WTR practices in settings that are more or less affluent, in terms of infrastructures and social policies for example, but nonetheless committed to a moral economy of affluence, is a question we will return to in the conclusion.

The main aim of this paper is to uncover what societal conditions could support WTR among men *and* women as a form of "sufficiency" in Switzerland today, understood as a practice that aims toward sustainable well-being. In the section Conceptual framework that follows, we describe how we understand sufficiency as a social practice facilitated by systems of provision, and cultural and social capital. We also provide our definition of well-being in the eudemonic tradition, as meeting human needs. We then present our methodology, which involved in-depth interviews with 14 people in Switzerland in couples where men as well as women have purposefully reduced their work time. After presenting our results, we discuss the societal conditions that are necessary to support men and women's WTR as a sufficiency practice. In the conclusion, we reflect on the question of scale and social justice, or what the Swiss study implies for other settings.

Conceptual framework

Social practice theory is a combination of affiliated theoretical approaches that build on earlier attempts in the social sciences to address the dichotomy between structure and agents, starting with authors such as Giddens, Bourdieu and Foucault. These authors attempted to answer the fundamental question of whether the site of the social lies in structural elements, such as culture, or rather in the agency of people. More recently, theorists such as Schatzki (1996) and Reckwitz (2002), have proposed a contemporary conceptualization of social practices, which has been widely used in sustainability and consumption studies, and is beginning to be used in family studies (Morgan, 2017; Wilson and Tonner, 2020), among other fields. A key aspect of this understanding of social practice is that the focus shifts from individuals or structures to practices as the object of study: it is the doings and sayings of everyday life that become the site of social inquiry. Building on these ideas, and while acknowledging the heterogeneity of existing definitions, Welch and Warde (2015, p. 85) have suggested a minimal definition of social practice as "...an organized, and recognizable, socially shared bundle of activities that involves the integration of a complex array of components: material, embodied, ideational and affective. Practices are sets of "doings and sayings"; they involve both "practical activity and its representations'."

In the context of our study, examples of social practices are from an "employment and gender" point of view: working part time and dividing paid and unpaid work between spouses; and from a "consumption" point of view: getting around, buying clothes, or heating and living in homes. Social practices, then, are collective patterns of activity that are recognizable and reproduced over time and space, but which are constantly changing because practitioners are always enacting the practices in different ways. Social practices are held together by various elements, such as meanings, materials, and skills (Shove et al., 2012), or in another interpretation by understandings, procedures, and forms of engagements (Warde, 2005), or for yet another, bodily elements – including cognitive processes, emotions, and physical dispositions; as well as material elements – including technology and infrastructure; and social elements – including frameworks, norms, values, and institutions (Sahakian and Wilhite, 2014).

To summarize, how people engage as practitioners in a given activity might relate to the skills and competencies they have acquired, as well as the institutional and material conditions in which they are performing a given practice. Practices always imply certain societal conditions. Empirically, studying practices also implies uncovering the meanings of a given practice, which are culturally specific. In this respect, the notion of "teleoaffectivites" (Schatzki, 1996) is useful, in that it suggests that practices have aims and objectives, to which affects are assigned. As Welch (2017) suggests, these can be studied empirically as "motivations" held by different practitioners. Social practice theory becomes relevant in recognizing that motivations are not individually held, but rather tied up with ways of doing that are collectively understood as shared meanings. Motivations are thus cultural expectations interpreted differently by social groups, such as the value given to leisure time.

In the Bourdieusian tradition, social groups not only share meanings of the good life but also have different resources at their disposal that allow them to effectively live up to cultural

expectations. This might imply access to economic resources (economic capital), a certain education (cultural capital) or family and friend support systems (social capital). Economic capital is made of income, fortune and access to state subsidies. Cultural capital can be acquired through institutions, such as academic degrees, but also through the acquisition of cultural goods, such as works of art. Social capital refers to relations and acquaintances, and all forms of capital help to stabilize social reproduction of a group over time.

How people engage in practices, such as working part time, depending on their gender also reveals broader systems of provision. Compatible with Dubuisson-Quellier's (2022) call to consider the governance techniques that privilege affluent consumption over sufficiency practices, the "systems of provision" or SoP approach "… is based upon understanding the structures, relations and agencies that underpin the chain of activities linking production to consumption" (Fine and Bayliss, 2022). An analysis of the SoP reveals what is needed to be in place, collectively, before any individual act of consumption can occur. It draws from what has been termed "a political economy of excess" (Bayliss and Fine, 2020) in uncovering how affluence and excess have been made possible and even probable in contemporary consumer cultures. Both private and public provisioning determines who gets to consume what and how, in relation to specific socio-cultural settings. A link can be made quite effectively to social practices, as the practice of "engaging in work time reduction" (WTR) is made possible because of certain institutional arrangements, but also underlying cultural expectations: for example, whether women or men are seen as primary caregivers, how this is reinforced through corporate pay structures that privilege men, or the availability of public childcare. Systems of provision reveal societal conditions for sufficiency vs. affluence, some being highly visible – like public transport systems, or shared vegetable gardens; and some less visible but all the more pertinent – such as public or corporate policies, or gendered cultural expectations around childcare and paid work.

Now that we have shared our approach to understanding WTR as a social practice facilitated (or undermined) by (gendered) systems of provision, we now define the two normative aims put forward in this paper: how WTR as a sufficiency practice might achieve environmental sustainability and human well-being. We build on a growing body of literature that explores this notion of "sustainable well-being" (Jackson, 2005; Guillen-Royo and Wilhite, 2015; Gough, 2017; Sahakian and Anantharaman, 2020; Fuchs et al., 2021). In terms of environmental sustainability, we considered in this study certain consumption domains that are acknowledged in the literature as having high environmental impacts in Europe: these involve food, transport/mobility, and energy usage in the home, particularly for heating (Tukker et al., 2005), but also housing surface area (Jack and Ivanova, 2021) and clothing and accessories (Iran and Schrader, 2017). More sustainable consumption patterns imply consumption across these priority categories. How to study well-being is not self-evident, as there are multiple interpretations of this term. For our study, we chose a eudemonic approach based on reducing harm through the satisfaction of human needs. Different lists of needs exist, and each are relevant – such as the Deci and Ryan (2008) approach, which distinguishes three basic psychological needs: autonomy, affiliation and competence. For this study, we use the "protected needs" approach of Di Giulio and Defila (2020), which identifies the human needs of a particular society, those that it can foresee and protect – implying an ethical obligation to provide for and meet these needs (culturally, socially, politically, economically, etc.). Because of our interest in the collective conditions that are necessary to perform sufficiency in Switzerland, their list of nine protected needs (Appendix 1), which was validated through a representative quantitative survey in Switzerland, seemed the more relevant.

The human needs-based approach is compatible with both a social practice and systems of provision approach: if the Di Giulio and Defila (2020) list of Protected Needs are seen as ends in themselves, un-substitutable and satiable (as is the case with other lists), how these needs are satisfied is always context dependent. It is through social practices, which are socially embedded, that human needs are satisfied (Sahakian and Anantharaman, 2020), practices which rely on systems of provision. Meeting needs, in a situation of global constraints and limits, allows for a broader reading of sustainability in relation to social justice: while societies can organize at a local or national level to support sufficiency practices toward the aim of "sustainable well-being," it is important to reflect on how this effects people living now, in different countries, or in the future, for forthcoming generations (Fuchs et al., 2021).

The conceptual framework is summarized in Figure 1. Voluntary work time reduction is apprehended as a potential sufficiency practice, if it achieves the aim of "sustainable well-being," understood as meeting human needs, while reducing environmental impacts, with a consideration for social justice. To study WTR, we consider how such a practice plays out – in relation to people's competencies and motivations, but also societal conditions that involve systems of provision and gendered cultural expectations. Because people are also embedded in social groups, exerting, and indeed reproducing social and cultural capital, it is important to study WTR in relation to different forms of capital, which are unequally distributed within societies. Finally, systems of provision, including infrastructures and policies, are also unequally distributed across societies, when comparing Switzerland to certain regions in the global south, for example. To reflect on how sufficiency practices might be further supported in Switzerland leads us to better

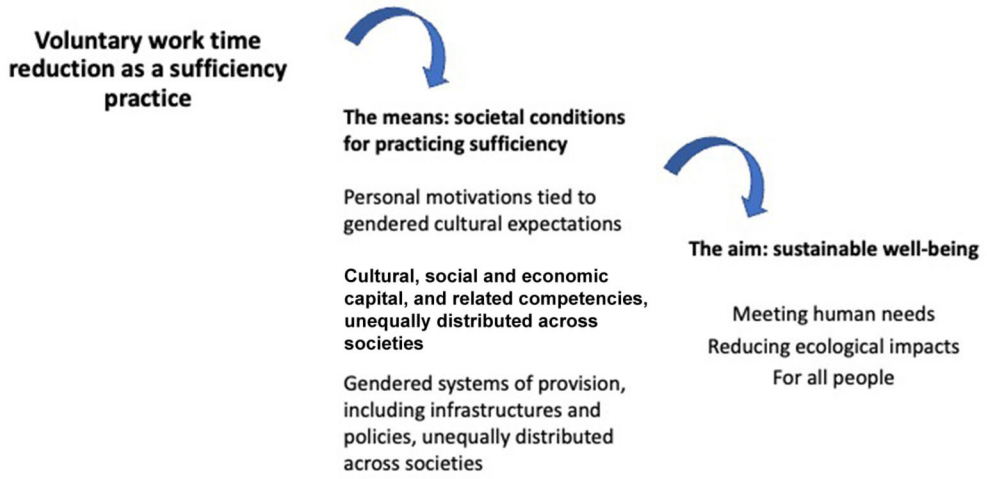

FIGURE 1
Conceptualization of how voluntary work time reduction might lead to sustainable well-being.

understand what might hinder or support WTR as a sufficiency practice elsewhere.

Methodological approach

Using purposive sampling, we recruited 14 people in Western Switzerland of working age and in couples with family responsibilities where the male spouse voluntarily reduced his work time, as well as women in almost all couples. The sampling bias toward male WTR reflects the specific context of Switzerland, where limited institutional arrangements are more favorable to women reducing their work time rather than men, creating strong gender inequalities with the arrival of the first child (Le Goff and Levy, 2016). The small sample size reflects the exploratory nature of the study, whose goal was to develop an integrated conceptual framework grasping at once issues of gender inequalities, well-being and sustainability as applied to voluntary work-reduction.

The study was not intended to be representative but rather diverse in the qualitative tradition, with the aim of seeing typologies emerge from the data. Nine of these respondents are men; both men and women were asked about their own and their spouse's work practices. Most have children aged 12 or younger at the time of the interview, and are in their 30 s or 40 s. One couple in their 50 s has an adult child but is caring for an aging parent who lives in the same neighborhood. Among the respondents, a mother and her ex-partner share the custody of a child, and are considered here to be a "parental" couple. In 13 cases, neither partner works full-time. Despite efforts to diversify the sample, all of the respondents have middle-level jobs (e.g., sports coach, administrator, musician-teacher) or upper-middle-level jobs (e.g., tertiary teacher, interior designer, manager in a non-governmental organization), except for one person in a manual labor job. The table in Appendix 2 details the working hours of the partners, their type of contract, and their cultural, social and economic capital and household composition.

Most of the respondents live in the Lake Leman (Geneva) region. The interviews were conducted mostly in French in the fall of 2018, with two in English; they were recorded, transcribed, and anonymized using fictitious first names. Informed consent was obtained in writing. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, in a few cases by videoconference, and generally lasted 1 h. The interview grid addressed the following topics: the history of the reduction in work time and that of the spouse, their motivations, and the current situation, particularly the issue of work-family balance and consumption. For consumption, individuals were asked about their consumption in high impact categories (mobility, food, housing, clothing). Whether or not their practices achieve well-being was ascertained in two complementary ways: first, respondents were asked to respond to the list of nine human needs proposed at the end of the interview (Di Giulio and Defila, 2020; Appendix 1). Second, the researcher analyzed in what way well-being was being discussed and addressed spontaneously in the interviews.

For the analysis, we started with the themes that structured the interview guide. In addition, we used the different elements drawn from the theory of social practices: meanings and motivations, competencies and cultural/social capital, and material arrangements. An inductive analysis then allowed us to identify additional themes, that also fed into our analysis. For example, while we focused on social practices during the interviews, it became evident in the analysis that certain systems of provision had to be in place to allow for sufficiency practices

to play out, as we presented in the conceptual framework and will further discuss in the findings.

Results

In the following section Results, we will start with a description of male work reduction practices through the motivations people expressed, and the gendered cultural expectations that underly them. We then discuss how WTR relates first to sustainable consumption and second to well-being, understood as the satisfaction of human needs. In the final sub-section, we detail the systems of provision that make "sufficiency" practices more possible and probable than "non-sufficiency" practices.

The reduction of paid working hours: A variety of motivations tied to gendered cultural expectations

All 14 respondents present their and their spouse's reduction in working hours as a choice. Three main reasons are given for moving to part-time work, with respondents most often citing several reasons at once: improved personal well-being by pursuing leisure or community activities ($N = 11$), having more time to care for children (N=10), being more aligned with ecological values ($N = 7$).

The respondents spoke about the non-work activities they have been able to develop and the promotion of their personal well-being. Thus, Jonas is involved in associations and the local church; Luc is involved in the development of a housing cooperative; Iris has founded her own association in the field of ecology; Matthieu plays sports intensively and is part of a political party. Several of the respondents work in their garden, and others are musicians or active in cultural activities in their community. For some people, however, this decrease in work time seems to be linked to setbacks in the professional sphere. For example, Luc, who had a full-time job as an engineer, explains that he had a burn-out a few years ago following problems with a supervisor. He stopped working for 3 months, came back to work at 50%, and then finally returned to work at 80%, having in the meantime become involved in associations and wishing to continue these activities. Other participants have similarly experienced an episode of ill health that seems to have opened a window of opportunity to engage in more meaningful initiatives for them. Iris lost her job at the beginning of her pregnancy; for a while she was a stay-at-home mother, and after her divorce she wanted to return to work, but without success. She is pleased with the associative activities she was able to develop during this time of unemployment. Other respondents did not experience negative health episodes, but explained that a full-time job would be detrimental to their health. Mathieu was working full-time but concluded that 100% was not sustainable because of the fatigue, stress and lack of attention; he changed his field of work to be able to be engaged at 60%. Two other respondents did not mention any such problems, but experienced time off for other reasons, which allowed them to appreciate the benefits. For example, Jonas, who was once offered a 60% position, explains that he felt like he was on permanent vacation, and cannot imagine being full-time after that experience.

The second main motivation that relates to well-being revolves around childcare, and was cited by all the women interviewed. This unanimous female discourse reflects the social norms that instill mothers as the primary care providers and unpaid domestic workers in the Swiss context (Le Goff and Levy, 2016). Sandrine explains that when she worked full-time in another city (with long commute times), she was completely stressed and often found herself raising her voice at home. She took a 60% job close to home, even though it is less intellectually stimulating. Her spouse is working at 80% and is committed to working from home to help with the children. However, several men in the sample also mention this reason: for them, taking care of the children is important to create a more equitable distribution of tasks within their couple. For example, Cyril, whose daughter was born 7 months before the interview, reduced his workload to avoid creating an imbalance in his relationship. Jonas thinks that the long working hours favored by most fathers are a "meager" approach to gender equality, as he puts it. Matthew wanted to be there for his children because his father was absent during his own childhood.

The third motivation refers to the ambition to live in a more ecological way. Some of the respondents explain that they have reduced their working hours because they do not wish to contribute to the society of overconsumption, and mention the positive effects for the environment of the reduction of productivity and consumption cycles. For example, Sandrine, who changed her job to devote herself to her family, states:

> It's very important not to fall into a system where we work a lot and are mainly dedicated to work, which reflects our consumer society. [...] I wanted to change my job to give more space to the human being. [...] With less we consume less, which is also something I think is right.

The ecological argument thus often supports the two other reasons for working part-time. But beyond such general positioning in favor of a less consumerist lifestyle, some respondents also emphasize that time away from work allows them to implement more sustainable lifestyles. For example, Simon is happy to contribute concretely through his gardening and other exchanges of products to "feed as little as possible that which can be capitalist." We will return to this point below.

While half of the respondents mentioned all three motivations, others mentioned only two or one. The mode of recruitment (which targeted people in a couple with family responsibilities, with a part-time male spouse and a diversity of

TABLE 1 Patterns of sustainable consumption in couples with reduced working hours.

Group 1: Low sustainable consumption	Group 2: Moderate sustainable consumption	Group 3: Strong sustainable consumption
No significant reduction in consumption	Reduced consumption in some areas	Reduced consumption in all areas
($N = 6$)	($N = 3$)	($N = 5$)
Matthieu, Juliette, Cyril, Sandrine, Luc, Robert	Pierre, Laurence, Simon	Iris, Nicolas, Marc, Jonas, Beatrice
Low to high economic capital	Low economic capital	Low to medium economic capital
Medium to high cultural capital	Medium to high cultural capital	High cultural capital
Low to high social capital	High social capital	High social capital

consumption practices) no doubt explains in part why the values of family time, gender equality, and ecology are strongly and simultaneously present in the sample. In a more critical stance, one might say that reduced work time may not be as voluntary as the respondents made it out to be – and that these different motivations are used to justify their sense of agency over their present condition. What is "voluntary" is indeed subjective. Reducing working time as a form of sufficiency may have been imposed on people as a new practice, but by becoming adept practitioners, respondents were able to justify their motivation in hindsight as a choice.

However, these three motivations came across quite clearly in all interviews and seem to reflect a form of counter-culture to the dominant paradigm: that of an affluent moral economy based on full-time employment for men, economic gain and the quest for productivity as the main driver of life choices. The findings thus suggest that cultural expectations in Switzerland may be changing, toward privileging gender equality, leisure time and ecological lifestyles, in addition to personal health and fulfillment, a trend which emerged as well in other studies (e.g., Buhl and Acosta, 2016). It is essential, however, to understand these motivations in relation to economic, social and cultural capital, which we discuss below.

WTR and sustainable consumption in relation to economic, cultural and social capital

Although ecological principles are fairly frequently emphasized in the motivations for switching to part-time work, study participants show varying degrees of commitment to implementing sustainable consumption. We asked respondents if they have a reduced or had different than average consumption in high impact categories (mobility, food, housing, clothing) (Table 1). Five participants appear to be strongly committed to more sustainable consumption (Group 3): time spent away from work is invested in gardening, baking bread, or making their own cleaning products. Saving energy is a prime concern: these people travel by foot, public transport, or train, and avoid flying. They buy almost all their food at the market and prefer local and organic products, sold without packaging and in bulk. They also exchange homemade products and services, and look for second-hand products or clothing.

A second group of participants reflects a more moderate commitment to sustainable consumption: they buy organic, local, and bulk produce and have vegetable gardens; they engage in low-impact leisure activities such as hiking or playing board games; but they continue certain resource-intensive practices, such as air travel or using the family car. Finally, Group 1 adheres to the easiest and most accessible sustainability practices: they try to prioritize organic food at the supermarket and public transport but have not changed their consumption patterns and everyday practices further toward more sustainable consumption.

All the people involved in an advanced sustainable consumption approach (Group 3) are endowed with strong cultural capital. This capital can take the form of university degrees, which are among the highest in our sample (Jonas, Iris, Nicolas, Beatrice) and/or a profession in the art world (Marc, Beatrice). Note that in the group of people with relatively moderate sustainable consumption practices (Group 2), two out of three are also engaged in artistic activities (Pierre, Simon). Incomes are low in Group 3 (and 2) due to fewer working hours, while respondents in Group 1 (normal consumption category) have rather "average" incomes (higher working hours). Financial resources also matter more particularly in some consumption domains: good quality shoes and long-lasting clothing, sourced locally, are perceived as too expensive by some of these respondents. They can afford to spend relatively more money on locally sourced and organic food, rather than supermarket food even with a modest income, but the entry cost of sustainable fashion remains beyond their reach. The availability of second-hand fashion markets thus seems critical, assuming cultural expectations around second-hand clothing also evolve to favor such clothing as socially desirable.

In terms of social capital, understood as the number and type of personal relations and resources exchanged with them, respondents in Group 2 and 3 clearly enjoy many quality ties and collective activities, which bring to them a number of resources (Iris being an exception). Respondent engaging in unchanged

TABLE 2 Level of well-being, in couples with reduced working hours.

	Fragile well-being	Satisfactory well-being	Pronounced well-being
	($N = 3$)	($N = 5$)	($N = 6$)
	Matthieu, Iris, Pierre	Juliette, Cyril, Simon, Marc, Nicolas	Sandrine, Luc, Laurence, Jonas, Beatrice, Robert
Social capital	less present	Present or very present	very present
Cultural and economic capital	Less present or present	less present or present	present or very present
Psychosocial skills	Less present	Present	Present

consumption patterns present a variety of social constellations, from rather limited relations with a few relatives and colleagues (Matthieu) to large networks of friends and family, topped with several community or artistic activities (Juliette).

Altogether, more sustainable lifestyles require, at the individual level, time – an inescapable resource – irrespectively of economic, cultural or social capital. Gardening or producing eggs takes time, as does making your own cleaning products, or finding second-hand products, or reducing waste by buying in bulk, or taking a train rather than flying. The reduction of paid work by both members of the couples also frees time used to that end. However, the issue of material and energy resources consumed during leisure activities in the home, such as downloading movies or music, was not addressed at all by respondents. Indirect energy related to different forms of consumption remains invisible to most of them.

WTR and well-being: Need satisfaction in relation to cultural capital and skills

By analyzing responses to the list of human needs discussed during the interview, we classified respondents into three groups: fragile ($n = 3$), satisfactory ($n = 5$), and pronounced ($n = 6$) well-being (Table 2). In the optimal case of pronounced well-being, participants are all fully active in their lives and thrive in multiple social affiliations: they engage in paid and unpaid activities that they have chosen and value, and that are socially valued; they maintain many social relationships through these activities; they advance their skills through these activities. They declare to satisfy most or all of the protected needs presented in Appendix 1. These people all have high levels of education and well-paid jobs, although household income is modest when the percentage of time worked is low.

Respondents with a satisfactory level of well-being have more constraints and fewer opportunities to exercise autonomy. Some of these respondents also have a less favorable socioeconomic situation. In particular, Simon, the only manual worker in the sample, whose partner does not work and who pays child support to his ex-wife, does not have a salary level that allows him to meet all of his needs. For example, he puts off dental work and other major purchases due to lack of funds. His paid work (80%) is repetitive: he would reduce his working hours further without hesitation if it were financially possible. Moreover, his level of training does not allow him to consider another professional project. However, the various artistic, manual and collective activities that he pursues in his free time allow him to enjoy a satisfactory level of well-being. This suggests that WTR, when paid work is not contributing to personal development, can allow for leisure or collective activities that do.

Others in this satisfactory well-being category are either experiencing temporary challenges related to a particular life event or more chronic work constraints. Cyril is in transition: after the birth of his first child, the couple is living in a new rented apartment, geographically cut off from his friends; the weeks are long, between a job in another city and an infant to manage at home. Nicolas is in the midst of a professional transition: dissatisfied with his previous job, he has just started a new training program; a full-time homemaker with two small children, he would like to work part-time (so as to gain a certain percentage of paid employment) but is currently faced with a lack of options on the job market. The social capital of this group is (temporarily?) more centered on the nuclear family for those with toddlers (Cyril, Nicolas), but is high for Juliette, Marc and Simon, who engage in many collective artistic and community activities.

Only a minority of respondents are characterized by a fragile level of well-being. Their social relationships are more limited. The professional activities they engage in only partially value their existing skill set and leaves them little autonomy (Iris) or tend to overload them when working hours are too high (Matthieu, Pierre). These people do not have a particularly poor cultural capital (they have medium to high diplomas) but have experienced negative health or difficult events in the past and seem to struggle with slightly worse psychosocial skills (being quickly overwhelmed by situations, anger, self-discipline). In all three cases, the ecological credo allows them to value their withdrawal from the world of employment, and provides them with avenues to recreate social participation in other ways, for example through exchanges on the Internet, membership in a political party or associations dealing with the theme of sustainability.

The systems of provision that support (or not) WTR in Switzerland

As detailed in the conceptual framework, we understand WTR as a sufficiency practice that could potentially allow people to reduce the environmental impact of their consumption patterns while achieving well-being. In our case, sufficiency is attained by a part of the sample through the practice of male work time reduction, which is linked to personal motivations and cultural expectations, and has direct implications in terms of sustainable consumption and favorable well-being, as in the examples of Béatrice and Marc.

What remains is to detail the Systems of Provision (SOP) that make some forms of consumption more sustainable and some forms of living more satisfactory in terms of meeting human needs. One of the most significant challenges when it comes to the environmental sustainability of consumption in our sample seems to be related to where people live. The size of a home is not something that our respondents questioned, despite the energy intensity of heating, among other high-impact domains in the home. People in our sample were not motivated to move to more energy-efficient housing or to smaller spaces, because housing is a synergistic satisfier – one that meets several needs at once. Housing satisfies many essential needs: social relations in the neighborhood, for example, or proximity to family members, or to employment. In addition, in a more political economy reading, the housing situation in Geneva does not facilitate such moves: people are primarily renters, and the housing market is notoriously difficult to access. Without state support – for example, through a service that would assist people in making a move – it is difficult for people to transfer to smaller homes, even if they want to engage in a more sufficient lifestyle. The centrality of employment to well-being, and the unavoidable time constraints it implies, also explains why people prefer to live in areas close to their jobs.

While cooperative housing has developed in Western Switzerland in recent years, a form of housing that offers both social and ecological advantages, such housing is still relatively rare. In the sample, Simon, for example, lives in a yurt on land shared with several families, a lifestyle that is extremely compatible with sufficiency goals but also with his associative and artistic investments. People living outside of the city, such as Simon and Beatrice, may benefit from village gardens or their own vegetable patches. But in both instances, while they prefer public transport, they are nonetheless more dependent on private cars. Respondents all recognize that the public transportation system is excellent in Switzerland and, when possible, would choose their housing and employment accordingly. Luc, who for the moment does not have a particularly ecological lifestyle, will soon move into a cooperative: he will then share his car with others, will have a food cooperative nearby, and a shared vegetable garden on the roof, all that in the heart of the city. The sustainability of his lifestyle, after he moves, will be much less dependent on his active individual choices and time, and will be greatly facilitated by the opportunities present in his building and area. Luc will then be in a favorable default position, where the choice to live in a green home "locks in" the most sustainable consumption options. Sustainable modes of transportation or food become the easiest solutions.

For Luc also, the building itself represents a more sustainable consumption option by default. The provisioning of housing and energy sources is highly relevant when it comes to the energy and carbon intensity of heating and living in homes. For most residents in our sample, the energy system remains dependent on gas or fuel. Tenants have very little choice in this respect, unless they chose to move to a cooperative housing unit where renewable energy systems are installed. Cooperative buildings tend to be more energy efficient (for heating and lighting), and are designed for reduced living space and more shared, collective areas (such as shared guest rooms or working spaces). Even for certain apartment owners, such as Beatrice, there was no mention of how her heating system might be changed to more renewable sources of energy – despite her attention to various climate related issues. The energy efficiency of buildings and renewable energy provisioning for electricity and heat will be a central issue in Switzerland in the years to come, not only in relation to climate change targets but also in relation to energy security, given that Switzerland is currently dependent on Russian gas for 40% of its needs.[2]

Respondents rarely mentioned their longer-term well-being, i.e., the need to build up savings to meet future needs or counter negative life events, either for their own future or for that of their children. The two-pillar (mandatory and optional) federal pension system in Switzerland is tied to employment and universal old age insurance is minimalist, providing 19 000 EURO equivalent per year for a person living alone (minimum wage is approximately 15,000 EURO, not enough to live in Geneva, whose living costs is among the highest in the world). The future economic security of some of our respondents is thus not guaranteed. Indeed, it is well known that women's underemployment during periods of family care is a major reason for their poverty and poorer health at older ages, because although women often return to employment when children have grown up, the lost contribution years are not made up for (Carmichael and Ercolani, 2016; Comolli et al., 2021). Moreover, their part-time work trajectories often confine them to lower-skilled, lower-paying jobs; they can also lose access to their husband's pension in the event of a divorce (Widmer and Spini, 2017). The long-term economic implications for couples who have both chosen low work percentages remain to be studied. Yet, in the sample, only Peter briefly stated that he will pay for his current lifestyle "in a different way, in retirement."

2 Based on 2019 data, see: https://gazenergie.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/e-paper/GE-GasInZahlen/GiZ_20_fr.pdf.

It is true that in the Swiss context, many human needs seem guaranteed when focusing only on the immediate situation: quality public education, protection of tenants, and (minimal) economic security are available to all inhabitants with a permit of residence. This lack of reflection on the future could therefore reflect a justified lack of concern for people engaged in WTR. However, these socially provided minima may appeal only to some selected groups. The vast majority of people probably have higher expectations, especially to maintain their housing conditions and lifestyle at retirement; they may also aspire to realize some upwards social mobility or want to invest in their children. In the vast majority of respondents with family responsibilities in Switzerland, the man works full time, probably so as not to diminish their capacity to build up economic reserves that are deemed sufficient. In fact, one respondent (Robert) explains that he only reduced his paid work time (his wife remaining full-time) after he had amassed personal wealth that allowed him to take an early retirement.

Another aspect that is rarely mentioned is the use of social services: when posed the question as to whether they benefit from any such services, many respondents answered negatively. With further prompting, they all recognize that the 300 CHF (approximately 300 EURO) received per child and per month is indeed a social service (a universal child allocation, with the amount slightly varying by canton). Perhaps the term "social services" is more associated with "those in need," rather than an amount that people feel they have a right to, as parents. A few respondents rely heavily on need-based public subsidies. Juliette and her companion used to receive state support for their health care insurance, and also state that they receive a small amount of support for their rent. Iris receives unemployment benefits, and is in on a "back to work" program. There are, other – non individualized and non-monetary – ways in which systems of provision meet human needs in Geneva, in addition to public transport, mentioned by many. For example, respondents use the public library or benefit from highly-subsidized sportive or cultural services; they also participate actively in associations, which benefit from state support, and enjoy an easy access to natural surroundings, such as the countryside, lake shore, or public parcs, which they often mention in relation to well-being.

But why then is male WTR not more widespread? On top of a culture of affluence and the need to put savings aside to dealing with events later in life already mentioned, the gender regime in Switzerland, in its economic (labor market), institutional (work-family policy) and cultural dimensions (gendered roles regarding childcare), remains relatively conservative with respect to the division of paid work (Rossier et al., 2022). Childcare costs are high, due to high wages in Switzerland, including those of childcare staff. As a result, it is often less costly for a parent to reduce their working hours, most often mothers who may have anticipated this decision by choosing a less demanding career path (Gianettoni et al., 2015). Men in our sample, who have stepped up to the plate when it comes to household chores including childcare, also have this sense of not being appreciated in this role in broader society. Jonas mentions a gap with the rest of society, being often the only man present at activities where he accompanies his little boy (he is among the rare respondent to be employed at only 50%).

Discussion

In this study, we use the social practices and systems of provision approaches, complemented by a theory of human needs, as heuristic tools to apprehend what remains a novel practice in Switzerland: male WTR and how this might achieve the aim of more sustainable well-being. Our results show that it is possible, today in Switzerland, to simultaneously achieve a high level of well-being and a lower environmental impact through consumption in couples where the male partner has reduced his paid work time. We define this form of living "sufficiency," or a practice where needs are satisfied without impeding the ability of others to do the same; or living well within planetary limits.

However, couples who voluntarily reduce their male work time, and are living well and sustainably in environmental terms, correspond to a very specific subpopulation, that of people with high cultural and social capital. Our results also show that a certain degree of work engagement remains an essential foundation of well-being for these individuals, in that it provides not only financial resources but also social status, social roles, and relational and cultural resources, in so far as work is meaningful. A favorable social position (high cultural, social capital, well-paying jobs) and all the benefits it provides remains a key factor in well-being, regardless of income. It is thus clear that high levels of well-being can be achieved with substantially reducing paid work, but that the arrangements made by couples must correspond to social expectations and relate to sufficient levels of resources for meeting needs.

To achieve *sustainable* well-being, which is far from systematic in our sample, resources need not solely be financial: achieving a sustainable lifestyle implies a considerable personal investment in various sustainable consumption activities, such as gardening. Such resources – not least, available time – also allow people to engage in community or associative work, through their skills and competencies. Such individuals tend to pursue extra-occupational activities (such as music) that provide synergistic satisfiers, i.e., that simultaneously satisfy the needs for affiliation, autonomy and competence. We found that these non-consumerist motivations are underpinned by cultural expectations and meanings that value non-material accomplishments. The long-term implications of this "sufficiency" lifestyle are far from clear, however. Decisions to substantially reduce work time today (both members of the couple) do have implications on social security in the future.

One main finding is that personal motivations are reinforced by cultural expectations around what it means to live the good life. By uncovering meanings, which are central to social

practices, we also uncover the social context that allows for some forms or provisioning to be possible over others. In the case of reduced work time, meanings around "sustainable living" are emerging and become repertoires that both women and men can draw from to make sense of their lives. They are in turn reinforced by institutional conditions, such as climate action plans, which might favor investments in more energy efficient homes, for example. Meanings around childcare also need to change, related to how men and women are understood as taking on parental roles in society. Thus, people's motivations truly are collectively held beliefs and conventions, that are reinforced by how people practice certain activities, including sufficiency. This relates to "invisible" policies which either promote or hinder more sustainable forms of consumption (Greene and Fahy, 2020). People may not be aware of state funding for culture, education etc. They may also not see direct links between energy policies and their daily lives. How to reflect on all the social policies that are relevant for a more sustainable good life is central.

A second main finding is that the provisioning of ways of living is central, for example in the types of buildings that are provided for, or options for more sustainable food or transport in a given area. It is relevant here to look at the level of a building – its energy efficiency, or its renewable energy provisioning – but also at the scale of a neighborhood, or how where we live relates to where we work and what public services are available (i.e., public transport, museums, healthcare and childcare, etc.). Where people live will reveal amenities and opportunities (i.e., access to parks, urban gardens, libraries, etc.), which are more available to some than to others. Here, collective decisions to provide at the local level for human need satisfaction through sustainable forms of production, distribution and consumption will make "sustainable well-being" more possible and probable, for a greater amount of people, than any individual effort to do the same.

Conclusion

Based on an exploratory qualitative study in Switzerland, we uncover what societal conditions could support WTR as a form of "sufficiency" in Switzerland today, understood as a practice that allows for sustainable well-being. How WTR as a sufficiency practice might achieve environmental sustainability and human well-being depends on individual motivations and related cultural and gendered expectations; cultural, social and economic capital, which is unequally distributed in societies; but also, gendered systems of provision, including infrastructures and policies, which are unequally distributed across societies. These favorable collective conditions would allow living well within limits, as a form of sufficiency, to be accessible to more people, in a just transition. And yet today in Switzerland, as is the case in many other parts of the world, neighborhoods exhibit different degrees of social distinction and oftentimes reflect varying socio-economic groups. This is most noticeable in relation to those who can afford to live in city centers as opposed to more peri-urban areas, which might not be as well provisioned for in terms of public services. Because those with existing resources tend to benefit most from collective resources than others, any transition to sufficiency is a question of social justice, both in terms of distribution – who has access to resources – but also in terms of representation and participation, in recognizing that some needs are more accounted for than others, and some voices are more prominent than others in defining the good life, for whom. While sufficiency can be attained by some people living in Switzerland today, it will be critical for sufficiency to be planned for and designed at the collective level, to ensure that systems of provision can make sufficiency a default position for all people, and not a privileged few. The high social and cultural capital of those in our sample achieving sustainable well-being suggests that, more than financial capital, education levels and social relations are important in supporting WTR. At the same time, most respondents have high paying jobs, which precisely allows them to reduce their paid working time and to still maintain modest but sufficient income.

We now turn to reflections on how the Swiss case generates learnings for other contexts as well as opportunities for further research. In her critique of a moral economy based on affluence, which is very much the setting in which we conducted our empirical study, Dubuisson-Quellier claims that: "… sufficiency cannot arise without the development of a new consumption governance regime able to place sufficiency rather than affluence at the core of the process of social and economic value creation." (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2022, p. 45). And yet a culture of affluence and abundance exists in cities around the world, irrespective of their economic ranking: what it means to be a global citizen today is very much tied up with consumerist expectations and economic growth beliefs (Wilhite, 2016). Our approach suggests that, along with cultural and social capital, systems of provision are critical for delivering sustainable well-being, and that WTR can be a sufficiency strategy that allows people to meet their human needs with less environmental impacts. But to achieve such an aim, creating the societal conditions for reduced work time would need to be considered along with the provision of public services, such as access to renewable energy in more energy efficient homes, and adequate public transport services, but also the provision of childcare and elderly care. The concept of basic universal services covers this ambition of meeting human needs through the collective (Coote, 2021). We cannot prove that high levels of consumption do not also yield high levels of well-being: this is where social justice becomes a central issue, as an excessively affluent lifestyle by the few prevents many people from living a good life (Fuchs et al., 2021). More research is needed to uncover what is supportive of or dissuasive when it comes to achieving sustainable well-being when working less. One option might be to create conditions that are un-favorable to

high levels of consumption. Taxing resource-intensive products and services may make them even more desirable to the most affluent, as they seek to further distinguish themselves and communicate pecuniary strength. It is the cultural expectations around consumerism that need to change, and more research is needed on how such expectations come to be shaped and challenged, such as the gendered role of caregiving, but also meanings around leisure time or commitments to civil society. For people without care responsibilities, taking time off from work to engage in personal or collective activities would need to be valued. Here, the media has a crucial role to play, in shaping such expectations. In addition to new policies and governance measures, new imaginaries on what it means to live the good life are sorely needed.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article can be made available upon request.

Ethics statement

Ethical review and approval was not required for the study on human participants in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

Both authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

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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.2022.956055/full#supplementary-material

APPENDIX 1
List of the nine Protected Needs, based on Di Giulio and Defila (2020). Legend: Group 1 (PN 1–3) focuses upon tangibles, material things, group 2 (PN 4–6) focuses upon the person, and group 3 (PN 7–9) focuses upon community. Building on Di Giulio and Defila (2020).

APPENDIX 2
Respondent profile.

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