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Towards a good life society: when interdependencies confront atomism
Proposal

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Energy futures and the good life: needs and emotions as opportunities for discussing social and ecological interdependencies around practices of the future.

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The energy transition is increasingly understood as involving efficiency measures, renewable energies, but also sufficiency measures – or absolute reductions in energy usage (Zell-Ziegler et al., 2021). Understanding the 'good life' in relation to the energy transition is an emerging field of study, as a form of interdependency between social and environmental considerations. On the one hand, certain scholars use eudemonic approaches to what constitutes a good life, argued as most suited to consider the link between wellbeing and natural resource usage (Doyal and Gough 1984, 1991; Max-Neef 1991; Brand-Correa and Steinberger 2017, Di Giulio and Defila 2019). Eudemonic theories of wellbeing propose a finite number of human needs that are universal, satiable, non-substitutable and reachable through culturally specific satisfiers. Lists of needs vary, ranging from the basic needs necessary to reach a universal goal (Doyal and Gough 1984, 1991), fundamental human needs that represent wellbeing according to axiological and existential categories (Max-Neef 1991); or needs that must be protected by society (Di Giulio and Defila 2019). On the other hand, hedonic considerations are another important dimension of 'the good life' and sustainability (Verhofstadt et al., 2016; Dietz & Rosa, 2009; Martiskainen & Sovacool 2021). Hedonic approaches have developed in relation to emotions, such as happiness, or life satisfaction scales for example. Beyond the eudemonic and hedonic dichotomy, a consensus is emerging towards the importance of a more comprehensive picture of wellbeing in relation to environmental challenges (Gough 2017). Such an interdependent approach has already been used in the definition of sustainable wellbeing indicators (Ottaviani, 2018). For energy transitions, an eudemonic approach to wellbeing allows for the consideration of how much energy is required to fulfill everyone's basic needs (Rao et al. 2019). Yet a combined approach that also accounts for a hedonic sense of wellbeing, such as feelings of joy, might be better suited for understanding how people might engage as citizens in the transition (Martiskainen & Sovacool 2021). Research has demonstrated that emotions can play a role in motivating people to change their energy-intensive practices (Sahakian and Bertho 2018).

In this contribution, we draw on data gathered from a study on how Swiss citizens engage with an energy transition, and more specifically, how they discuss tradeoffs between reduced energy usage and collective wellbeing. We start from narratives of the future that were designed in a transdisciplinary manner, and represent what it might look like to live in Geneva in 2035. We engage in participatory and qualitative methods with citizens and local

associations to debate in what way such futures are understood as being representations of the good life. We draw on both focus group discussions and semi-structured in-depth interviews, which are analyzed through a combined eudemonic and hedonic understanding of wellbeing. More precisely, we address whether sustainable energy futures can be seen as meeting human needs, but also how people engage emotively with such visions of the futures in relation to the present. Three interdependencies are discussed: that between social and environmental dimensions of the good life; between how people understand the good life as either a collective or individual aim; and between present and futures. Unpacking these interdependencies is crucial towards understanding what role people living in Switzerland today might take in supporting ambitious measures towards net zero emissions by 2050.

Keywords: sustainable wellbeing, needs, emotions, energy sufficiency, social change, future studies