

To consume or not to consume?

An exploratory study on consumption and wellbeing using the
Human Scale Development Framework

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to investigate the connection between consumption and anticipated subjective wellbeing using the framework of Human Scale Development developed by Max Neef and colleagues (1991). The work intends to contribute to a wider discussion concerning the effects of a retracting economy on subjective wellbeing. The material was gathered by using deliberative forums, a method that is due lacking within the field of policy studies, and analysed using thematic analysis. The analysis showed that a majority of the participants in the forums did not expect a lower level of subjective wellbeing would they to reduce consumption, supporting the hypothesis of adaptive preferences. The results were, however, somewhat ambiguous, as two out of ten forums were outliers and did not display adaptive preferences.

Words: 19 683

Keywords: *Wellbeing, consumption, preferences, deliberative forums, degrowth*

Sustainable Welfare for a New Generation of Social Policy

This thesis was written with material gathered by the research project *Sustainable Welfare for a New Generation of Social Policy*. The research project is funded by the Swedish Energy Agency (MESAM) and is managed by Lund University. The time frame of the project is 2020-2022.

The research project description is;

Our society is faced with the double challenge of transitioning towards more sustainable energy, economic and social systems and of reducing growing inequalities.

The goal of this project is to develop a new generation of social policy that is both socially and ecologically sustainable, by placing particular weight on the combination of expert knowledge and citizen-perspective.

We start from sustainable welfare and needs theories that stress the universal character of human needs, yet culturally and socially diverse needs satisfiers depending on contexts.

By combining citizens' forums, a survey study and expert forums, we reflect on current ways of satisfying needs and develop a new set of needs satisfiers that enable decent standards of wellbeing within planetary boundaries and with smaller energy consumption.

The project will lead to suggestions for policy changes in four areas with potential of increased energy efficiency: income/wealth distribution, nutrition, mobility and housing.

The author of this thesis was employed by the project as a research assistant during the spring and summer of 2020 and assisted with planning, executing and compiling results from the citizen forums. All the participants in the forums were informed that the results would be used as material for this thesis.

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Authors own visualization

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Authors own visualization

1 Introduction

This chapter will introduce the problem(s) that the thesis will cover and define the aim of the research. It will also present the research question to be answered.

1.1 Defining the problem

We as a world are facing multiple issues in the near future, climate change being perhaps the most notable of the lot. The extraction and processing of materials, fuels and food have more than tripled during the period 1970-2019 and currently make up about half of total global greenhouse gas emissions (International Resource Panel, 2019) indicating growing global demand for consumption goods. The drivers for this growing demand for consumption goods is, of course, the global population and economic growth fuelled by emerging economies such as China. However, per capita impacts of consumption are still highly uneven, as high-income countries have material footprints per capita as much as six times greater than those in less developed economies (Ibid).

In Tim Jackson's prominent *Prosperity without Growth* first published in 2009, he paints a picture of a world facing a multitude of issues, including growing inequalities, resource depletion and stagnating growth. This issues all negatively affect the current capitalist system's possibility to provide wellbeing and prosperity to people, and the situation looks even direr in the light of the ongoing and intensifying climate crisis.

This study aims to explore issues posed by climate change using human needs as a theory (Max Neef 1991, Gough and Doyal 1991) and deliberative forums as a method. The study will seek to understand how citizens in the context of a deliberative forum discuss and reflect upon their current and future consumption

and how it relates to their wellbeing. The study will be conducted in connection with the research project *Sustainable welfare for a new generation of social policy* (Lund university 2020-2022) using the results gathered in two deliberative forums.

The research project *Sustainable Welfare for a New Generation of Social Policy* is the first of its kind in a Swedish context, combining the method of deliberative forums with a *sustainable welfare* approach to designing social policy. The aim is to seek answers to the question of how we can maintain our critical levels wellbeing whilst staying within planetary limits and consuming less energy as a society. The broader research project will aim to apply Gough's dual strategy; combining expert knowledge with practical knowledge and experience from citizens to produce policy. This thesis' aim will not be as broad due to limitations in time and resources. It will therefore solely focus on the perspective of citizens in policy formulation, highlighted by the fact that participatory methods are due lacking within this field. The thesis will also narrow the perspective to focus on material related to consumption and explore how citizens in a highly developed country such as Sweden discuss and reflect upon society today and in prospect.

1.1.1 The environmental crisis

Modern man's and particularly western societies' levels of energy consumption have at large been disastrous for the environment. For several years, alarms have been raised due to several crises linked to the environment; climate change occurring due to increased levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere perhaps being the most notable as well as mass extinction in the most biospheres (Rodolfo et al. 2014). Some years ago, it would seem almost ridiculous to imagine somebody not acknowledging the threat that the world stands before in regards with a changing climate (Brulle et al. 2012). Still, the issue is continuously competing with other geopolitical issues for attention. Nevertheless, the environmental issue is on the top of the agenda. The World Economic Forum's (WEF) annual *Global Risk Report* highlights five global risks, which WEF define as "as an uncertain event or condition that, if it occurs, can cause significant negative impacts for several countries or industries within the next 10 years". The report is based on the *Global*

Risks Perception Survey (GRPS), a Delphi-study, directed towards the organization’s network consisting of businesses, governments, civil society representatives and opinion leaders.

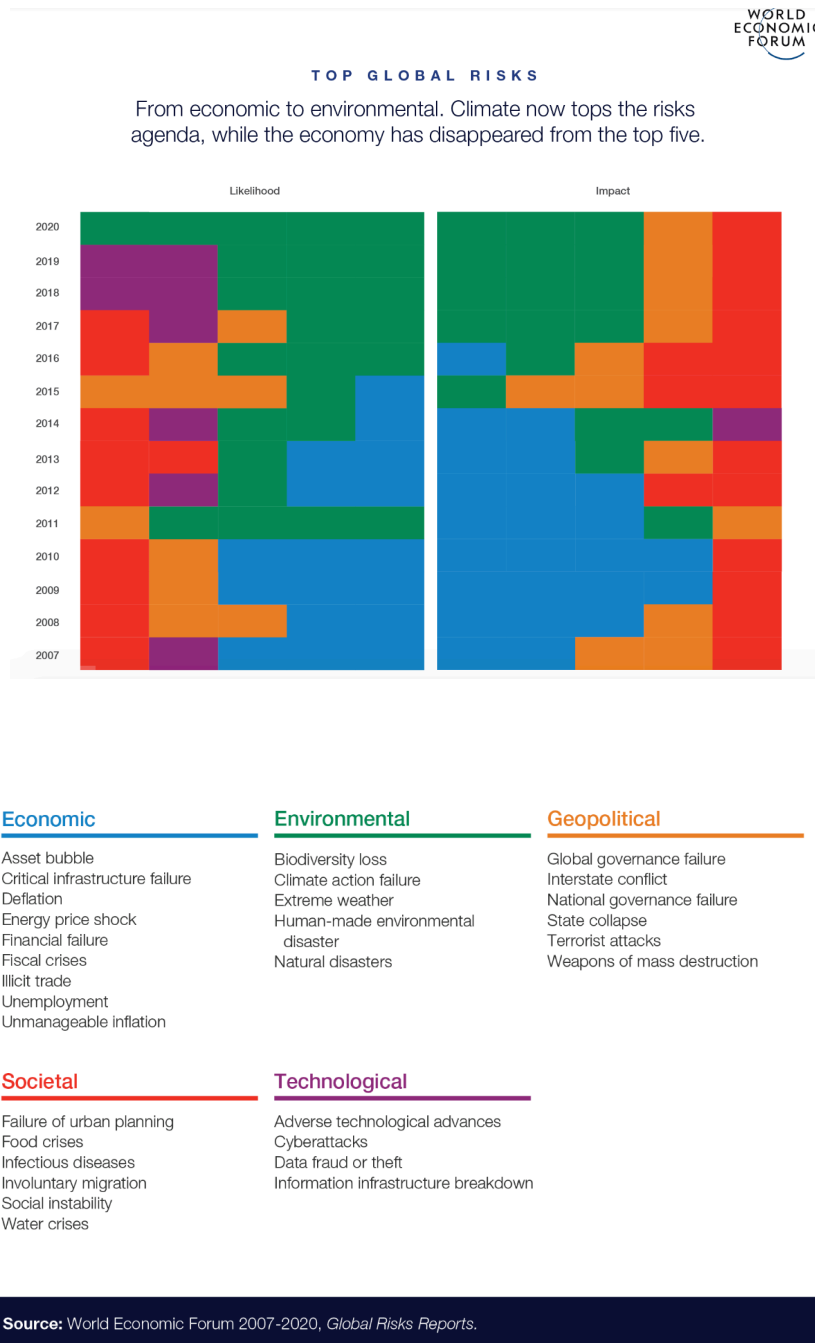


Figure 1 - WEF Global risk report 2007-2020

The 2020 edition of the report highlighted that two (*extreme heat waves and destruction of natural ecosystems*) out of the five identified primary risks for the upcoming decade

evolved around environmental issues. But more interestingly, the survey data reveals that this was the first year since 2007 that all identified risks with the highest perceived likelihood concerned environmental issues (*authors note*: the report was released prior to the outbreak of COVID-19). In *Figure 1*, one can easily identify that there is a clear trend towards perceiving climate change as a risk worthy of being at the topmost of the global agenda. Rather than reading the report as a scientific assessment of threats, one should regard the results as a barometer of which issues are considered to be important. It is no exaggeration to claim that the environment is a prioritized talking point by a majority of governments and business leaders today. There are, however, doubts concerning the level of action being undertaken to tackle the issues.

The Paris Agreement of 2015 (UNFCCC 2015) signed by a majority of states commits all involved to the limit global temperature rise to 2.0 degrees Celsius counting from pre-industrial levels whilst aiming at stopping the temperature rising above 1.5 degrees. Current reports (UNEP 2019 for example) suggest that most participating countries and a large part of the business sector will fail to reach the set targets if nothing unprecedented occurs. The hope of limiting the temperature rise to 1.5 degrees is already deemed to be lost, and it would demand a reduction of emissions equalling 7,6 % annually. Thus experts (see for example Bill Hare in *The Conversation* 2019) have raised alarms that the 2.0-degree target will require a lot more effort from all parties to be met. As such, states should be perceived to be morally and legally obliged to pursue climate neutral, or at least less environmentally harmful, policies across the spectre in order to fulfil their commitment. Initiatives at the individual and local level for reducing unsustainable consumption and other such harmful behaviours exist around the globe; eco-villages, transition towns and other voluntary, simplified means of living engage a large number of people, and their numbers are increasing (Gullien-Royo 2010, Jackson 2009). However, these only constitute a fraction of all the people living in post-industrialized societies, which implies that a transition towards a less consumerist society is not as attractive as it may need to be in order to meet the challenges ahead.

The Paris Agreement and other internationally conceived climate agreements distinguish consumption as an area of human activity in need of change. The Paris

agreement (FCCC/CP/2015/L.9/Rev.1) states that the parties involved recognize “*that sustainable lifestyles and sustainable patterns of consumption and production, with developed country Parties taking the lead, play an important role in addressing climate change*”, as usual in non-specific phrasing. This suggests that developed countries are responsible for paving the way by adapting behaviours and/or policies and regulations either prohibiting harmful or encouraging non-harmful, means of consumption. Differing consumption patterns and environmental impacts by different groups in developed societies, however impose challenges in defining and deciding responsibility. The global pattern in both developed and non-developed societies is that less affluent households are generally more severely impacted by climate change and regulations combating the issue (rising costs for necessities such as heating and electricity when adopting ‘greener’ means of production for instance (Jakobsson et al. 2017)) without bearing a proportional share of responsibility for causing the same issues. The problems of disproportional shares of cause and effect will surely need to be addressed, both between as within states. This research project will not produce accurate depictions of who the ‘climate crooks’ are or provide suggestions for targeted policies towards different income groups in light of aforementioned injustices, but rather to recognize the need to adjust consumption towards sustainable practices and explore what support there is for this in developed societies.

1.2 The aim of the research

This study aims to explore the prerequisites for implementing complementary eco-social policies with less environmental impact than current policies by investigating the willingness of citizens in a highly developed country to decrease environmentally harmful consumption. The project will in its first stage explore how participants in *citizen forums* (a participatory workshop) discuss how their *fundamental needs* (according to the theory and method of HSD by Max Neef et al. 1991) are fulfilled negatively or hindered today, how they wish to fulfil them in the future and how a transition between these two states could be done whilst maintaining the perspective of staying within planetary boundaries. This thesis will

try to add to the broader research project by focusing on consumption as a theme. Consumption is a major driver for economic growth and by extension, environmental degradation, and to understand how consumption is connected to wellbeing will thus be instrumental in order to combat climate change. While the method of collecting the material and the content extracted descends from a eudemonic (objective) understanding of wellbeing, the assessment and analysis will adopt a hedonic (subjective) perspective to understand how the participants diagnose today and imagine the future relating to consumption. The logic is that if the participants express that they do not wish to lower certain or general environmentally harmful consumption as they expect or perceive it to diminish their abilities for attaining the same level wellbeing as they possess today, the support for policies related to re-directing the same type of consumption will be low. The results of this study would need to be verified on a larger scale regardless of the outcome, as the empirical material will be based on a limited number of observations and representativeness will not be taken into account. A primary function will, therefore, be to inform future research and present indicative, rather than definitive, results.

1.3 The research question

- *To what degree do participants in the citizen forums indicate that they are willing to decrease environmentally harmful consumption?*

The research question is intentionally formulated broadly as the thesis aims to explore opinions and emotions of a group consisting of roughly 70 people, thus making it challenging to present definitive answers as would be required if the thesis would adopt a narrower inquiry. This also allows us to reflect upon the diversity of the material and contribute to future studies without making excessive claims.

2 Earlier research

This chapter is divided into three parts; the first one aims to explain similar studies undertaken by other research projects while the second part will provide the reader with an overview of contemporary consumption critique. The third part will introduce the reader to a growing movement calling for reducing the scale of the economy and restructuring (modern) society.

2.1 Related previous studies

2.1.1 Postgrowth and imagined futures

Garcia and Martinez-Iglesias (2017) conducted a series of focus groups within the POSTCARBON-project (CSO2011-24275) to study imaginable futures from a postgrowth perspective. The eleven focus groups were held in Spain, and the groups were composed homogeneously by defined profiles (age, gender, academic and occupational background). As the study took place in 2013, Spain was still recovering from the latest economic crisis that began in 2007, and these circumstances heavily influenced both the discussions and the framing. The *laïsssez-faire* (meaning seemingly very little intervention from the moderator) discussions centred around the future as the participants were asked to imagine 20-30 years ahead and discuss and compare the imagined futures with today's situation. The researchers noted that the ecological crises were to a considerable extent absent in the discussions in all focus groups and when asked to address the topic, the groups failed to make it a focal point of the discussions and swiftly reverted to other issues. The authors use the ideas of 'anticipatory learning' and 'learning by shock' to make the argument that during times of economic crisis and thus faced with immediate financial difficulties, the collective consciousness fails to consider the ecological crises and that consumerist/productivist consensus is reinforced (2017 p64). Alas, if the economic hardship prevails in the long term, society will likely to be taken by

surprise, and ‘shock’ by the coming ecological crisis as other challenges has dominated and occupied the wider debate. These conclusions relating to crisis and agenda-competing crises are interesting to bear in mind as the citizens' forums for this thesis were conducted during the global pandemic outbreak of 2020, which certainly dominated the agenda during this period. There are, however, some differences that may make the comparison irrelevant; the recession Spain was recovering from had lasted several years and the repercussions from which had already been debated and reflected upon for some time. This would make that crisis likely to have shaped and entrenched itself in the collective consciousness to a greater extent than the 2020-crises would have done to the same as the forums took place during the initial phase.

The authors also noted that when discussing post-carbon futures, the participants heavily referenced technological advancements as the solution to future crises which was in accordance with survey data for the Spanish population. Another conclusion the authors present is the difficulties of imagining a future without referencing day-to-day concerns (2017 p68). The authors go as far as to say “*The problem outlined above (authors note: problem previously discussed in the text was technological optimism) goes much deeper than the fact that people are not thinking about a post-carbon society: in fact, there is no imaginable future at all, nothing beyond people’s day-to-day concerns*”. The authors go on to describe that the notion of lessening consumption according to the ecologist slogan “less is more” do not appear within their material though some well-educated young people touch upon the subject. It leads them to carefully consider whether well-educated young people might be more prone to imagine alternative futures since they have less connection to inherited categories and notions of how to live a good life.

2.2 Consumption and consumerism

2.2.1 A brief overview

Consumerism is the idea (or ideology when put in practice) that happiness, as well as wellbeing, is dependent on private consumption of material goods (EO Wright

2010). Wright (2010) describe the consumer society as “... one in which people devoted a great deal of time, energy, resources and thought to “consuming. The general view of life in a consumerist society is consumption is good, and more consumption is even better”. Consumerism thus depends on constant growth of both production and consumption of goods to sustain and increase happiness and wellbeing. Not needed to be said, this takes a massive toll on nature as the input of resources demanded to maintain such production is huge. Consumerism is thus embedded in the capitalist economy as profit and growth are intrinsically the ultimate goals. What drives the desire for excessive consumption (the consumption after ones has fulfilled their needs) by individuals is debated, some point to a biological tendency towards acquisition and growth while others regard consumerism as a product of institutions promoting specific values (Olin 2010, Soper 2017).

2.2.2 Kate Soper’s Alternative Hedonism

Consumerism as a part of the capitalist economy is therefore dominant in Western post-industrialized states. It characterizes society in such a manner that it permeates dreams and desires of the many. The growth of the fashion industry in the latest century exemplifies this suitably (Soper 2017). There is however, a growing disenchantment with consumerism and excessive consumption according to philosopher Kate Soper. In affluent societies, although still displaying growing output and growth, there is an increasing strand of people rejecting the consumer culture. These are in part driven by altruistic and environmental concerns but, Soper explains, also by self-interest motives (2007, 2017 and Jackson 2009). Soper has dubbed this reaction to consumerism as “alternative hedonism”, meaning that (some) people enjoy intrinsic pleasures of consuming differently and sustainably, pleasures that material goods or acts within consumerism cannot provide. Soper gives the example of the cyclist enjoying pleasures that the car-driver cannot attain and that no material good could mimic. Soper does not deny the happiness and wellbeing induced by consumerism but highlights the unsustainable effects of living beyond planetary boundaries and sees tendencies in modern society (notably within the environmental movement) of alternative hedonist-behaviour that

challenges the paradigm of consumerism. Soper likens this growing consciousness about consumption to the emergence of feminism in previous decades, referring to a gradual transformation of norms and behaviour.

Changes towards more sustainable behaviour have already occurred according to Soper. While far from enough, there has been increased consumption of “fair-trade” foods, increased taxation of polluting production and carbon-emissions, regulation of advertisement and some competing alternatives to GDP (but still nowhere close to being the norm). Soper proposes measures, both political action and individual choices, in the fashion of alternative hedonism; to limit traffic (both car-bound and aviation), local tourism as opposed to long haul flights, reducing the working week/hours for workers, reducing consumption (altogether or via making use of sharing economy services or self-creation) and universal basic income. These proposals would, according to Soper, limit consumption and growth in order to reduce resource use and combat climate change. There is also some empirical evidence (see Jackson 2009 p159), suggesting a growing part of the population in developed countries that desires a simpler life with less consumption, furthermore suggesting that people that leap this downscaling enjoy a higher level of subjective wellbeing. However, empirical contributions like these are limited, and thus studies like this one are direly needed.

2.3 Degrowth – shrinking the economy and restructuring society

A sustainable welfare state for the future that the broader project aims at exploring, would by all means, presuppose a leaner, greener, smaller or wholly differently set up economy, depending on which “green” theoretical framework or ideological approach one assumes. The following section aims to introduce the reader to degrowth, which is one school of thought on how to pave the way forward.

The de-growth movement’s academic roots start in in the 1970s in the francophone world with the coinage of the word *décroissance* (roughly translated into de-

growth). The question of potential limits to growth had first been asked in the now iconic *'The Limits to Growth'* (Meadows et al. 1972) which centred around future resource scarcity in light of the oil crisis and questioned capitalism's survival in the case of zero-growth. As the oil-crisis had faded, and the world had begun to adapt to a neoliberal paradigm, the questioning of growth remained in the periphery for several years only to resurface in the 1990s, once again in the francophone world. Since then, interest from the academic community has steadily grown to the point where it is part of several universities' curriculum, and well-attended conferences are held annually. It has also gained political and media attention, although marginally (D'Alisa et al. 2015). Activist movements drawing inspiration from the de-growth movement, perhaps unknowingly, has flourished in recent years as the environmental crisis has gained public attention.

Degrowth revolves around the idea that growth is finite and critiques the 'growth paradigm' that presupposes that growth in itself is an objective and solution to the world's issues (Büchs and Koch 2017 p9). It seeks to decolonize the mind from 'economism' (viewing the world from a strictly economic perspective) and assumptions that such things as GDP or disposable income can measure human wellbeing or welfare. De-growth seeks to redirect society into using less and fewer natural resources and reduce material and energy throughput by downscaling production and consumption. Büchs and Koch present the core idea of degrowth as "*voluntary, democratically negotiated, equitable downscaling of societies' physical throughput until it reaches a sustainable steady-state*" (2019 p155). Degrowth could also be defined as, in the words of Garcia and Martinez-Iglesias (2017), simultaneously being the *process* towards a smaller scale system as well as the *result* of this process. Contemporary de-growth ideas are thus not only focused on policies for reducing human ecologic footprint or improving social conditions but puts forward proposals on how to restructure society in order to break the economic growth-paradigm. The authors of a (or perhaps *the*) degrowth manifest formulate the movement's goal as "*The objective is not to make the elephant leaner, but to turn the elephant into a snail*" (D'Alisa et al. 2015 p4).

The degrowth movement is generally highly sceptical to the highly influential idea of 'sustainable development' which influence stems from the Brundtland

Commission Report of 1987. The postulates of sustainable development in this report and the later development of the concept is twofold. First comes the notion that we as humans, are morally obliged to sustain the possibility for the current generation to meet their needs without comprising future generations to do the same. Secondly, it legitimizes economic growth in order to maintain continuous and (what is regarded as) inevitable population growth and urbanization. The second idea within the concept of sustainable development presupposes rising material demand both in terms of absolute population growth and increasing relative demand of goods and services due to industrialization in the southern hemisphere.

The degrowth movement surely agrees with the first postulate, to guarantee wellbeing for current and future generation, but generally refutes the idea that global economic growth is a path to sustainability. The de-growth movement would instead present the solution that the industrialized world has to lower its expectations and demand of consumption to give space for the less or not-industrialized part of the world to *partly* catch up in terms of material living standards. The de-growth movement's perspective concerning human wellbeing is simply that increased growth beyond a certain point does not improve happiness or objective wellbeing. An often-used reference is 'the Easterlin Paradox' named after economist Richard Easterlin in 1974. Classical economics theory bases much of its argumentation on the direct relationship between growing material prosperity and increasing happiness (see Bentham's utilitarianism for example), but Richard Easterlin (D'Alisa et al. 2015) showed with his studies that after a given point in time, capitalist democracies (mainly proven with the example of the US) did not increase in happiness in correlation with its growth in GDP.

This argument is based on the idea that beyond a certain disposable income people spend their wealth not only to satisfy their basic needs (goods such as food and shelter) but on positional goods (D'Alisa 2015 p6 exemplifies with "*house bigger than the neighbours*"). As wealth gives access to positional goods, and growth (at least in theory) provides wealth to the masses, the result of growth would be that nobody gets happier as people are competing in a zero-sum game (D'Alisa 2015 p7). This line of thought does, however, meet some objections. One might, or

perhaps should, object to the definitive dismissal of growth and positional goods as enablers of happiness (subjective wellbeing) as the evidence is inconclusive. But the very idea to measure happiness and relate it to measures of growth is somewhat peculiar. As Büchs and Koch (2017) point out, subjective wellbeing or happiness is measured in a finite bounded scale, usually ranging from 1-10 drawing the results from self-assessment surveys. In contrast, economic growth is theoretically infinite as there is no supposed upper-limit. To correlate these two variables, where happiness, in theory, could 'hit the ceiling' due to saturation, is counterintuitive. Furthermore, even in utopias, it is difficult to imagine a society where all humans, regardless of prosperity, ranks themselves at the maximum level of happiness. There is also evidence that supports the opposite of the paradox, that growing prosperity correlates with increasing happiness (Halliwell et al. 2018 and Deaton 2008 referenced in Büchs and Koch 2019). This entails that the Easterlin paradox conclusions be regarded with some caution and perhaps limited to particular contexts of post-industrialized capitalist societies. Authors such as Büchs and Koch within the de-growth movement, therefore, make objections to argumentation based on subjective wellbeing such as the Easterlin paradox and instead propose using objective wellbeing, such as human needs theory, to further legitimize the degrowth idea.

To presuppose that the economy of the industrialized world would have to shrink would align with the degrowth-literature. This would, by extension, suggest that citizens in these societies would have to adapt to a lower material standard compared to today or at the very least a material standard that would not increase from current levels. The movement refutes ideas such as the Environmental Kuznets Curve which is a model that supposes that after a given point rising economic growth will no longer lead to increasing environmental degradation but instead decouple the two factors. Authors suggesting this often point to the transition of post-industrialized societies from mainly producing goods to instead producing services. This is disputed as a drop of absolute emissions are unlikely to occur even though relative emissions might significantly drop. As the environmental degradation per unit might decrease, the total output of goods in the economy is still increasing, and consumption of services often are overlooked in terms of their environmental impact (Büchs and Koch 2015 p45, D'Alisa et al.

2015). It also suggests that developed economies, instead of producing emission-intensive goods domestically, import these goods from less developed economies and thus the global output would not have changed but rather redistributed pollution from the rich to the poor (Van Alstine and Neumayer 2010).

How post-industrialized capitalistic democratic societies would react to reduced material standards that transitions towards degrowth would entail is a debate within the movement that merits further attention. Büchs and Koch (2017, 2019) highlight the fact that since there has been no macro-level *planned* and *voluntary* reduction of material throughput (production and consumption) in society, no evidence exists for how subjective wellbeing would be affected. There have of course been involuntary phases in modern times of diminishing growth and reduction in consumption, both in specific cases and globally, due to crises but this cannot be equated with a voluntary transition due to the several apparent reasons (time for people to mentally and practically to prepare perhaps the more notable).

The degrowth movement is home to a variety of hypotheses on the consequences of retracting economies. Sekulova (2015) argues for *adaptive preferences*, which in its essence, means that people tend to adjust their preferences given their situation. This would entail that a reduction in material goods would not negatively affect subjective wellbeing as people will merely adapt to a new reality and seek to take advantage of the possibilities presented. A future based on a degrowth paradigm would decrease working hours in the economy and redistribute work, reduce income inequalities and lower material demand by decolonizing the mind from consumption activities. Sekulova argues that this would mean increasing spare time and more emphasis on pursuing meaningful activities which would rather increase happiness than lower it.

However, since we lack empirical evidence of transitions towards de-growth, Büchs and Koch argue that the best available option is to look at involuntary phases of inverted or diminishing growth. The evidence coming from these involuntary phases is also not definitive but tends to support a counterargument to Sekulova; following the 2008 crisis several countries reported a significant loss in subjective wellbeing (studies references in Büch and Koch 2017 p74). This leads to Büchs and

Koch to propose a competing hypothesis on the effect on wellbeing following a contraction of the economy, *loss aversion*. This concept derives from the idea that people respond more strongly to losses than towards gains. Proponents of adaptive preferences often reference a study showing that lottery winners were not reporting increased happiness compared to a control group. In contrast, Büchs and Koch point to another study (Brickman et al. 1978, referenced in Büch and Koch 2017 p74) that reveals that people who had become paralyzed following an accident reported significantly lower subjective wellbeing compared to a control group. These two studies may be comparing apples to oranges but bear some intuitive reasoning and will serve as points of references for formulating hypotheses.

The de-growth movement is not always in accordance with one another, as shown above. However, the leading scholars share the view that action is required to enact a paradigmatic shift from a capitalist growth society towards something else. What that utopian ‘something else’ entails is still an open question for the movement, although several authors have described and put forward proposals for an alternative future.

A competing view of growth and the environment is something dubbed *green growth*. The idea there is to through; scientific breakthroughs, engineering sophistication and managerial innovation mend the damage done by the capitalist industrial society and guide the world into a new era of green consumption whilst staying within the current growth paradigm. The idea of this process would be not to stray too far from the current institutional and normative reality. The core argument is that this will achieve *absolute* decoupling of economic growth with anthropogenic disturbances to the environment, i.e. that the economic growth *is* possible without rising absolute levels of pollution. Dale et al. (2016) writes about green growth from a critical perspective and describes the idea of green growth as utopian and idealistic, but in a fundamentally different manner than the idealism of degrowth. If not yet clearly differentiated for the reader, one might regard the relationship between the two as a dichotomy, degrowth being revolutionary in its desire to change the very foundations of society and ‘green growth’ as the reformist counterpart.

3 Theory

This chapter will provide the overall setting of the thesis by first explaining the concept of wellbeing and which position this thesis will assume. It goes on to describe the HSD-proposal, which is the overall framework of the thesis and how it will be utilized. The chapter ends with defining postulates and proposing two theoretically derived hypotheses.

3.1 Objective and subjective wellbeing

To better understand the prerequisites for sustainable welfare and eco-social policies, we turn to the concept of wellbeing, which might be understood differently depending on the context. The literature on wellbeing and growth, for example, Büchs and Koch (2017), differentiates wellbeing into two dimensions, *subjective* and *objective* and make the division between the *theory of wellbeing* and the *method of measuring wellbeing*.

		Content	
		Subjective	Objective
Assessment	Subjective	Subjective hedonic wellbeing Self-assessment of subjective states/ feelings, e.g. happiness, anxiety etc.	Evaluative wellbeing/subjective eudemonic wellbeing Satisfaction with objective wellbeing dimension (general life satisfaction or satisfaction of specific dimensions, such as health, finances)
	Objective	Objective hedonic wellbeing Physical measures of emotions (brainwaves, heartbeat, sweat, etc.).	Human needs approaches; capabilities; objective eudemonic wellbeing Measures of health, education, community engagement, political participation, freedom, social capital etc.

Figure 2. Positions of wellbeing. Reproduced from Büchs and Koch 2017 p59

The figure above outlines the different positions regarding and assessing wellbeing, according to Büchs and Koch. Hedonic wellbeing (subjective on the content-

dimension) refers to the emotions and feelings of individuals and is either measured by self-assessment or measuring physical reactions in the human body. Subjective hedonic wellbeing implicitly comes with a set of theoretical claims; by using self-assessment as the only determinant, one more or less claim that individuals are best suited for understanding and articulating their desires and reject that people share universal satisfiers (Lamb and Steinberger 2017 p2). Eudemonic wellbeing (objective on the content-dimension) refers to wellbeing in broader terms, either people's general satisfaction with their lives or specific aspects of their lives or by defining what a 'good life' constitutes and operationalizing variables. Eudemonic wellbeing claims universal and collectively shared values, norms and needs but contextually ways of satisfying these needs. The main proponents (elaborated further in the following section) share a view of wellbeing as politically grounded, meaning that the fulfilling of the 'good life' should be formulated by means of discussion and deliberation for the given context (Lamb and Steinberger 2017 p4). There have been raised objections to the presented distinction as the eudemonic wellbeing also partly could be interpreted as subjective because the very idea of the notion of a 'good life' by all means is subjective. One could explain the 'objectiveness' of a concept such as the 'good life' by that it is the observer and not the subject that determines what lies within the concept. The distinction between objective and subjective however is widely used in several academic fields (see for example Gasper 2005 as an example of the use economics and Alartartseva and Barysheva 2015 as an example of the use in psychology). Henceforth the paper will adopt Büchs and Koch definition and distinction of wellbeing.

The literature of wellbeing within political science and philosophy is vast, and its history traces as far back as to ancient Greece with Aristotle (Bache and Scott 2017 p4). Bache and Scott identify two waves of resurging interest for wellbeing within policy studies during the post-war period; the first one in the 1960's due to the critique of GDP, paving the way for extensive social surveys across Europe and the US. This first wave made little to no real effect on policymaking, and the perspective was unable to migrate into politics due to the global recession the following decade and changes in the dominant political paradigm (ibid). The second wave, which perhaps should be regarded as on-going, began in the 1990s stemming partly from the environmental movement's critique of globalization and hyper-

consumerism. The second wave of interest for wellbeing theory was fuelled by the financial crisis of 2008 and its consequences that lead to massive protest movements in liberal democracies and malcontent with the capitalist liberal economy-paradigm and resulted in calls for the need of complementing (or perhaps substituting) GDP for measuring societal progress (Ibid). A wide array of disciplines has critiqued GDP as an indicator, each from their perspective; for example, Layard that highlighted happiness and mental wellbeing, Wilkinson and Pickett that focused on inequality perspectives as well as Jackson critiquing from an environmental position. Bache sums it up as “...*the idea of wellbeing is mobilised in different ways, by different groups, to support different purposes*” (2017 p15). The position utilized in the research project *Sustainable Welfare for a New Generation of Social Policy*, the human needs approach, comes from the developmental field. Still, as Guillen Royo has demonstrated (2017, ch. 5) the application of the framework does not need to be limited to cases of conventional developmental studies aimed at eradicating poverty but may also be utilized for cases within with participants enjoy relatively high material standards. Guillen Royo furthermore shows that the framework is also suitable to use to seek pathways for sustainable development from a bottom-up perspective (ibid), given that the process is highly likely to result in sustainable solutions in itself but also since the format is easily adaptable to incorporate postulates.

The human needs approach, as opposed to a hedonic approach, provides us with a framework that ensures that we maintain a holistic approach to the requisites that is human life and ensuring that climate change mitigation and intra-generational justice (ensuring that future generations are not hindered from satisfying their needs by today’s generation) is taken into account. But as will soon be presented, the application of human needs theory and methodology does not define or reveal how or with what people wish to fulfil their needs. To approach those questions within this project, this thesis will complement with a perspective of subjective wellbeing to analyse how discussions within the citizen forums indicate support for or against lessening consumption of goods and services that are generally considered to be environmentally harmful within the context of a highly economic developed country. By utilizing the framework of needs, the thesis will assess statements

within a defined set of categories to understand what the participants desire for the future and how they experience their own and society's situation today.

3.2 Human wellbeing and needs

Wellbeing theory (see discussion in Büchs and Koch 2017 about distinguishing capabilities and needs) and more specifically *human needs theory* as made famous by authors such as Gough and Doyal (1991) and Max-Neef (1991) centres around the idea that human wellbeing should be the purpose and centre of all economic activity pursued by human society. The theory stems from viewing wellbeing from a eudemonic perspective and relates closely to other eudemonic theories such as *buen vivir* (referenced in Guillen Royo 2017, see also Gudynas 2011). Human needs are defined as the essentials that every human being requires both to survive and to thrive and prosper in society. It differs from the stairs or pyramid made famous by psychologist Abraham Maslow in 1954 that portrays human needs as a hierarchy in how the individual psychologically functions whereas in human needs theory the defined needs are universal, non-hierarchical, non- substitutable and interlinked. The theory distinguishes between *universal needs* and *needs satisfiers*, the latter type manifesting differently depending on the context. The research project and this thesis will primarily use Max Neef's theoretical framework.

Max Neef along with collaborators first published the publication (or perhaps more suiting, *manifest*) of Human Scale Development (from now on HSD or the HSD-proposal) in 1986 in Spanish. It was translated into English and published in collaboration with Dag Hammarskjöld's Foundation in 1991 with the title *Human Scale Development – Conception, Application and Further Reflections*. Their work was aimed at highlighting the failures of major international development agencies efforts as well as the enforced neo-liberal monetary policies in Latin America. Critique of a neo-liberal capitalist growth paradigm, which brings uneven and fractured economic growth, is at the centre of the manifest. The authors also viewed the efforts of major international actors pursuing development policies in the region as solely focusing on economic growth whilst disregarding political and social

realities (Gullien-Royo 2017). The HSD presents an alternative proposition from a more humane understanding of societal development, again in the context of Latin America. Their approach drew inspiration from contemporary thoughts on participatory methods such as Fals Borda (1987 in Gullien-Royo 2017) and human development such as Sen's capabilities approach (1985) (Ibid). These perspectives combined to form a proposal to human centred-policy development approach focused on mobilizing grassroots movements from the bottom-up opposed to the typical top-down approach to designing and implementing policy. Therefore, one of the main characteristics of the HSD-proposal was the significance of popular participation from people without significant power in society as they were identified as being largely underrepresented in formulating what issues said society needed to address (Ibid).

Another postulate of the theory is that current societal issues are unquestionably inter-linked and reciprocal. The authors argue that each fundamental need not being adequately addressed will generate a single or several pathologies. These pathologies are by society being treated as single issues or together in smaller groups rather than as being a systemic failure. Addressing these issues, which have become collective pathologies, the role of the researcher must be to cooperate and interact with other researchers and with people as well as to incorporate perspectives from other disciplines as to maintain a wholesome image of the issue at hand. From this perspective, the authors regard transdisciplinary approaches to societal issues as the only sensible way to conduct research broadly and particularly with the aim they pursue.

The HSD-proposal identified nine *fundamental human needs*;

- *Subsistence*
- *Protection*
- *Affection*
- *Understanding*
- *Participation*
- *Idleness*
- *Creation*

- *Identity*
- *Freedom*

As well as four *existential human needs*;

- *Being*
- *Having*
- *Doing*
- *Interacting*

The logic of the HSD-proposal of human needs is that these two different types of needs, the *fundamental* and *existential*, combine in such a way that the existential needs are the manner of how we fulfil the fundamental needs. For example, to satisfy the need for subsistence, we need a certain way of being and doing, but we also need to have and to interact. The fundamental human needs will, in the later presented matrix, be plotted along the vertical axis, whereas the existential human needs will be plotted along the horizontal axis, resulting in 36 empty cells. The empty cells are to be filled with what Max Neef named *needs satisfiers*, which represent the manners with which we as humans fulfil our needs. These are according to Guillen Royo (2015) defined as “*social practices, values, attitudes, actions, forms of organisation, political models and environmental characteristics that are used to actualise need*”. The difference between needs and satisfiers are ultimately this, needs are universal and constant, meaning that they do not change or differ between time period or cultural setting whereas the satisfier manifests differently according to which society seeks to utilize them. The satisfiers do not translate into material goods and services themselves but rather as a leeway of how we satisfy the needs. Guillen Royo (2017 p46) makes an example of ‘formal education’ as a needs satisfier for *understanding*, which depending on context and the social strata of whom it concerns may be fulfilled with material goods such as laptops or smartphones and/or with institutions such as a university. As Max Neef (1991, p25, referenced from Guillen Royo 2015 p46) puts it, “*...while a satisfier is in an ultimate sense the way in which a need is expressed, goods are in a strict sense the means by which individuals will empower the satisfiers to meet their needs*”. This differs from positivism and perhaps more specifically from classical economic theory in the sense that one does not measure the wellbeing or

needs satisfaction of individuals or society in material or objective terms. In other terms, the demand that arises from preferences for specific goods does not describe the fulfilment of people's wellbeing. The HSD-proposal entails that one must understand economic goods as artefacts that might enhance our possibility to meet our needs through identified needs satisfiers and that the preferences for these are subjective as "the ways in which we experience our needs, hence the quality of our lives is, ultimately, subjective" (Max Neef et al. 1991 p26).

Max Neef and co-authors prescribe organizing forums as the method to collect material on how people fulfil their needs today and how a better society would fulfil the needs in the future. These forums are to be attended by local communities and/or actors with the desire to diagnose today's society and its challenges and imagine a utopian tomorrow. Max Neef's proposal (1991 p33-35) of the practical implementation of the forums is in short this; in three separate sessions participants will discuss and formulate what is dubbed as *negative*, *positive* and *bridging satisfiers*.

- *Negative satisfiers*: what hinders people, and in advance society itself, to fulfil their needs today and in prospect, in a sustainable manner
- *Positive satisfiers*: what would fulfil people's and society's needs in the future in a utopian way to maximize wellbeing and minimize unsustainable practices
- *Bridging satisfiers*: what could be implemented and achieved in the short-term to counter the effects of what ails people today and move towards the utopian future the group has formulated.

These satisfiers will serve as the material to understand how participants regard society and more specifically consumption today, how they imagine it should be and what they propose should be done.

The details of how to implement the forums described by Max Neef and colleagues in the HSD-proposal (1991) are suggestions and recommendations since they regard their proposal as provisional and recognize that the limitations of a taxonomy formulated in a specific time and context will be a product of its environment. The publication continually stresses the need for developing the theory and its application.

The description of the application of the theory in practical terms will be further developed in the methodology chapter.

3.2.1 The analytical framework - subjective eudemonic wellbeing

The framework of human needs proposed by Max-Neef and collaborators will provide the setting and theoretical understanding for the research. However, the theory of what a good life constitutes (the needs earlier described) does not reveal how or with what the participants wish to fulfil these needs in the future or how they experience their fulfilment today. This thesis seeks to analyse what the participants formulate as satisfiers in relation to the needs, which will be regarded as displays of how the group perceives and relates to consumption today, how they imagine a utopian future and what they propose should be done in the short-term. These perceptions are then plotted in the matrix as satisfiers. The analysis will be performed by combining the results from all forums and related matrixes and focus on those satisfiers related to consumption. Thus, the primary aim is to describe the output from all forums together whilst referencing specific discussions when needed.

These satisfiers will be regarded as the material from which the thesis will draw conclusions and are in essence subjective statements given in the context of objective wellbeing. Thus, the satisfiers are hedonistic (subjective) statements in relation to eudemonic (objective) needs. In other words, the thesis uses subjective assessment for objective content which places this study in the upper-right corner in the earlier introduced matrix of Büchs and Koch (2019, see figure 3). The primary aim will be to understand if and if so, how strongly the participants connect their material standards and consumption to their (anticipated) wellbeing.

3.3 Hypotheses

Two competing primary hypotheses will be one of the main focuses of the study; the theory of *adjustive preferences* and the theory of *loss aversion*. The theoretical

foundations for these stems from a debate within the degrowth-movement as previously presented.

3.3.1 Postulates

Before presenting the hypotheses, certain postulates must be defined. The research projects point of departure will be that the participants' current level of wellbeing is unconditional i.e. that they will not actively seek to reduce their level of wellbeing, jeopardize their ability for needs fulfilment or negotiate their life satisfaction. To do so would be counterintuitive from a theoretical as well as from a practical perspective. The core question would rather be whether the participants view their material standards as a prerequisite for their perceived and/or expected wellbeing or if they are able to imagine a scenario with a lower and more sustainable consumption and maintained wellbeing.

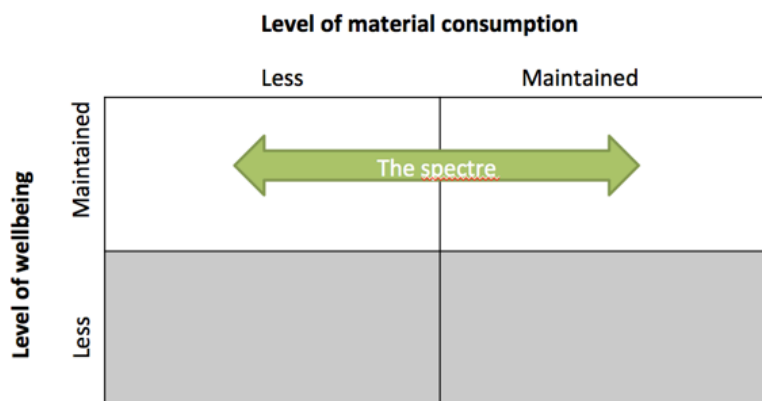


Figure 3 – Visualization of postulates

3.3.2 Adjustive preferences

To test if participators in the citizen forums would have adjustive preferences they would indicate that a loss in material standards would not presuppose a loss in the level of happiness or wellbeing they presume to have in such a scenario. They would thus de-couple their level of happiness or wellbeing from their consumption which is the basic argument for continued growth. For the participants to express adjustive preferences in relation to the act of consumption they would then propose

satisfiers calling for lessening consumption as this would not impose on their expected wellbeing.

3.3.3 Loss aversion

One competing hypothesis to the adjustive preferences is loss aversion, which unlike adjustive preferences means that a loss in material standards will surely provoke a loss in levels of wellbeing and happiness. For participants to indicate that they possess loss aversive preferences they will likely be opposed to any change in material standards as they will be unlikely to negotiate their level of current wellbeing. For the participants to possess loss aversion-preferences, they would therefore display preferences for maintaining current consumption levels. For reference, loss aversion presupposes that losses affect wellbeing negatively but makes no statement whether gains affect wellbeing positively, but as this research project will likely lead to proposals regarding reduced levels of consumption and not the opposite, this should not pose an issue.

3.3.4 Comments on the hypotheses

This material is not presenting exact evidence to what the two presented positions (hypotheses) are debating about. Sekulova and Büch and Koch are debating what the *actual* outcome of a retracting economy and lessening of material standards would produce in terms of wellbeing whilst this thesis presents material on *anticipated* outcomes for the same. However, as will later be explained, it is not possible to test the actual outcome as it has not yet occurred (and perhaps never will) and therefore we must make due of what is available to continue the debate. The anticipated outcome will therefore be analysed as how the participants diagnose today's society as well as what they imagine suggest in terms of satisfiers for the future. This is not the same as measuring the subjective wellbeing experienced in a retracted economy but does reveal what type of preferences the participants have and will provide supportive arguments for either position.

If participants indicate that they possess adjustive preferences it would support the argument of authors such as Sekulova within the degrowth literature and pave way for further studies of broad public support and which possible macro social policies based on reducing consumption and material throughput in the economy would be possible, or perhaps more accurately, *desirable*. The results would also delegitimize some core arguments of the green growth discourse, as continued economic growth would seem senseless if the same levels of wellbeing are achievable with a smaller or differently set up economy focused on sustainable consumption, by considering what the ultimate objective of the economy ought to be.

If the participants indicate that they possess loss aversion-preferences then Büchs and Koch's argument would be supported and subjective wellbeing should be anticipated to be affected negatively in case of reduced consumption. This would be discouraging for movements such as degrowth hoping to gain traction in raising public support for alternative policies. The need for reducing consumption nonetheless remains and alternative pathways should in such a case be explored. Thus, this should encourage further studies into what other activities and/or *sustainable* goods could complement or replace consumption such as it is today as an enabler of subjective wellbeing.

However, the hypotheses will not compete in a sense of winner-takes-all as it must be acknowledged as well as anticipated that the results will not produce such a clear outcome as to dismiss one hypothesis and accept the other. The results will most likely indicate support for both types of preferences both from the perspective of the group as a whole as well as from the individual perspective, as the forums will evolve around several areas of consumption activities. One may presume that one type of consumption pattern identified as environmentally harmful will be non-negotiable for some, whereas others hold other types of harmful consumption more dearly. That is to say that as the hypotheses of preferences will serve as two types of extreme, ideal types, to guide the analysis and aid us in reasoning which of the preferences prevail according to needs satisfiers proposed by the participants.

Alas, this thesis aims to contribute to an ongoing debate within the academic degrowth movement by presenting empirical material to the discussion on

wellbeing. By utilizing an objective wellbeing framework for analysing subjective wellbeing statements, the discussion in this thesis will hopefully add something new to the conversation of such a crucial topic for the way forward during this immediate crisis.

4 Research design and methodology

This chapter is divided into four parts; research design and case selection, the theoretical methodological considerations, the selection process and material and finally reflections on the methodology. The research design will explain the epistemological and ontological position of the thesis. The sub-section on case selection will discuss which participants that are in the target group and explain why the case of Sweden is intriguing. The section concerning theoretical considerations will introduce the methodology and theoretical considerations related to these. In the section concerning selection process and material the reader will be presented with the criterion and definitions of the target group, an overview of the process of organizing and implementing the forums as well as a description of the material. The final section offers the reader some reflections on the chosen methodology.

4.1 Research design and case selection

4.1.1 Research design

This research will align itself with an interpretivist tradition as we will not seek to identify causation or inference, as would be sought by a foundationalist or positivist researcher (Marsh and Stoker 2010). However, we must clarify the epistemological and ontological position, as an interpretivist position might seem ambiguous in relation to the research question. Marsh and Stoker describes the position of ‘modern interpretivists’ well while referring to Parsons which summarizes the epistemological approach of this research as; “...*If we set up careful research designs, and submit our arguments to open debate among a wide range of people with different views, then we can arrive at pragmatically acceptable claims of how the world really works*” (Parsons in Marsh and Stoker 2010 p200). The staunch interpretivist tradition regards the world as socially constructed and refutes claims

about objective and observable truths as they are deemed to be contextual, which cannot be understood independently of the interpretation. This research takes a more moderate position, as described above, and acknowledges that objective knowledge might be unattainable in a definitive sense whilst recognizing the need and ability of the scientific community to openly discuss findings and generate understanding. Thus, in accordance with the HSD-proposal, we shall advocate for inter-disciplinary research to attain the best possible understanding of the world, as opposed to a definitive understanding.

The research will as previously described utilize the theory of human basic needs which must be understood as a set of collective needs derived deductively from an inter-disciplinary understanding of humans and their nature. The theoretical and empirical contributions for the human needs approach are vast, thus this research will cohere to a continuing academic discussion. Furthermore, the authors behind the HSD-proposal argue that “there is nothing in the proposal that advocates a final solution, since we are fully aware that human beings and their surroundings are part of a permanent flow which cannot be arrested by rigid and static models” (Max Neef et al 1991 p12) which has set the theoretical foundation for this research. As Hancké describes it (2010), the academic social sciences are constructed as continuing debates involving numberless people with their opinions, understandings and solutions.

Criticism for applying this epistemological approach is expected and to some extent legitimate. A researcher from a positivist position will most likely argue that this research lacks validity, as the analysis in interpretivist research tends to favour contextual claims rather than making generalizable statements (Marsh and Stoker 2010). For this research project one must however acknowledge that the point of departure is the fact that there is clearly a lack of empirical material since

- i. There are few examples of contracting economies historically
- ii. None of the cases of contracting economies have been voluntary and democratically negotiated (Büchs and Koch 2017).

These two facts make the research question for this research particularly interesting. Other research projects have aimed their inquiries at exploring the relationship between GDP and subjective wellbeing historically (see Easterlin et al 1974 and 2010, Fritz and Koch 2016, Deaton 2008) but the evidence is inconclusive, as it seems to depend on samples and scales (Büchs and Koch 2018). This research takes a different position, using parts of the forums from the research project *Sustainable Welfare for a New Generation of Social Policy*, it explores how a relatively small sample of people diagnose today's society whilst proposing utopian views of a sustainable future and consequently map the road in between.

This provides indicative empirical material of possible social reactions to societal economic downscaling. This exploratory approach using interpretive analysis could be regarded as mere fiction by orthodox positivist as its validity and replicability does not meet the standards of for example a widely used data-set. But considering the lack of available evidence and the possible future necessity (if one assumes a degrowth narrative it would be assumed as *definite* rather than *possible*) of degrowth or a steady-state economy, one could argue that it is of uttermost essence to try to understand the implications of wellbeing regardless of how generalizable the results might be of this study alone. This research should produce results of strong *internal validity* meaning in such a way that the resulting claims and conclusions will be valid for this sample. What might be lacking is *external validity*, as generalizability would not be possible from this sample alone. However, as qualitative studies rarely seek generalizability, this should not pose a problem (Marsh and Stoker 2010 p255).

The research question is constructed as open ended; "*to which degree...*" which implies that we do not seek to strengthen or challenge a previously accepted theory but rather it entails that we are seeking to understand something that has not been agreed upon within a wider debate. It is also not falsifiable, as the yielding results will not be generalizable to the extent that a fellow researcher might reproduce the same study and expect the exact same results, or the opposite. This might sting a bit to political scientists working within rigid frameworks of what constitutes "proper" science. However, as the epistemological position of the paper constitutes transparency, the final material, results and conclusions will be available to the

academic community for revision and it is encouraged to propose different understanding or conclusions from the material as well as complementing it with additional research with the same aim.

4.1.2 Case selection

There obviously does not exist global consensus on whether climate change is detrimental for humans and even less so on how to tackle the phenomena. It could be interesting to trace the logic of the so called “climate-sceptics” and how they resonate about consumption in relation to wellbeing according their belief system but the more interesting puzzle lies with those who acknowledge the severity of the situation. It is from those who recognize climate change as an existential threat this research seeks to discern the willingness to adjust consumption patterns, as this a burning issue identified by the growth debate as a potential mitigator. The people who have acknowledged the fact (*objective* knowledge if there ever was some) of climate change could be regarded as the primary target group of this research as they are deductively more likely to resonate critically about their behaviour in the light of the crisis as opposed to aforementioned sceptics who would be expected to consequentially oppose any behavioural change as the need for it simply does not exist. It must however be stated that the participants in the citizen forums who will constitute and produce the material are chosen by the team of researchers working within the project organization of *Sustainable Welfare for a New Generation of Social Policy* and as such case selection for this research project is therefore pre-determined (although co-determined would be the more accurate description). Thus, as this is a *complementing study* to the greater project utilizing the material gathered by the same, using the same cases is a rather a methodological strength rather than a weakness, as the generalizability towards other people than the participants would be problematic. Hence, we do not exclude ‘climate sceptics’ as part of the material, partially because they likely represent a substantial part of the population and since the methodology of the HSD proposes a diverse set of participants to encourage discussion and exchange of ideas.

The forums were held in Skåne, which is the southernmost region of Sweden. It is home to the University of Lund that employed the working group of the project.

The selection of Skåne as the region to arrange forums in was decided by the senior researchers. It is partly due to a principle of proximity; the working group did not need to travel in excess and thereby cause pollution and the language barrier between researchers and participants were not a hindrance in most cases. Moreover, using a region in Sweden was compelling, attributable to the fact that in the Special Eurobarometer on climate change (SB 490, European Commission 2019) Sweden ranked the highest in the EU on regarding climate change as being the greatest threat the world faces. In the same report, Sweden also ranked highest (number of respondents agreeing compared to other EU-countries) in regarding the national state as the institution responsible of tackling climate change. Sweden ranked second only to Malta in amount of respondents indicating that they have personally taken action towards fighting climate change during the last six months whereas 99 % of Swedish respondents had at least done one of a number of listed actions which qualified as taking individual responsibility of reducing their impact on the environment (SB 490, European Commission 2019). This indicates that Sweden is suitable to use as an *extreme case* since consciousness and awareness about the threat of climate change seems to be generally higher than its European neighbours (see case selection strategy in Seewright and Gerring 2008). This makes it particularly intriguing to explore how preferences for (un-)sustainable consumption are discussed within the forums and how it relates to wellbeing in order to pursue and inform future research.

4.2 Theoretical considerations

4.2.1 Participatory methods

Participatory methods came as a reaction to developmental efforts failing to include the imagined beneficiaries. The reaction stemmed from a critique, much like the one Max-Neef along with colleagues (1991) put forward in their HSD-proposal, of global western institutions and its copies exporting governing practices and developmental ideas onto societies without a concern for the recipients and their prerequisites. Participatory methods occupy the position that insists on that locals must be included in the decision-

making processes that effect themselves. Perhaps the most prominent modern author of this approach is Chambers that proposed the PRA-approach (Participatory Rural Appraisal), which emphasises the need to empower rural (or local) communities to reach their potential and regarding outsiders (such as NGO's or national governments) as catalysts rather than leaders (1994).

The value of participatory research is the ability to generate knowledge from the perspective of the subject to understand socio-cultural, economic and political factors that influence the behaviour and practices of the local communities (Beazley 2006). To which degree a method is participatory is up for debate. Beazley (2006) cites Chambers (1994) to discuss how the degree of involvement steers whether one can title research as 'participatory'. Beazley states that if the researcher provides research question, method or framing for producing material and if the results are taken away to a distant university to analyse – then there is little reason to call the research 'participatory'. However, she goes on to cite Chambers by stating that the most important principle of participatory research is for the researcher to adopt a self-critical mind-set and to aid participants with expressing themselves and formulate problem as well as solution. The researcher's role should thus be one of facilitator and catalyst to aid communities in helping themselves. One could now pose the question of how participatory this research is in light of what was presented as rough definitions by Beazley and Chambers. As the working group provides both research question together with method and brings the material to "a distant university", alas the research would not qualify as participatory in the strict sense. Be that as it may, the guiding principles of the researchers in participatory research as put forward by Chambers are very much a part of the project and 'the participants in the citizen forums were given space to steer the discussions to the extent that the role of the researchers become facilitators and mediators. One may then dub the frame of the project as *quasi-participatory* since some but not all criterion applies.

While there are numerous positive aspects of participatory research, there are some downsides as well. Often only vulnerable groups are included in participatory research and fails to include people of privilege or in power. The intended output or action is therefore often non-satisfactory. This is however not likely to be the case for the forums

in question as previously explained and the intended output is not so action-oriented as the participants themselves are expected to implement any changes.

4.2.2 Interviews - the deliberative forums

Contrary to the extensive literature on ‘elite interviewing’ that has been immensely popular within political science, this thesis focuses on understanding society and societal sentiments from a bottom-up perspective rather than a top-down. The thesis will utilize *deliberative forums* meaning that the data will be gathered by interacting with subjects in a group setting.

Deliberative forums stem from the ideal of deliberative democracy, meaning in essence public argumentation and discussion to solve issues. The approach is strongly linked to the concept of *legitimacy* within policy and politics due to the methods high engagement of presupposed recipients. Deliberative forums consist of “selected citizens who meet for a period to study an issue, deliberate, and finally offer a judgement or an advice on a specific question” (Grönlund et al. 2014).

In the *Handbook for deliberative democracy* published online by the city of Pittsburgh in collaboration with Carnegie Mellon University the idea of citizen forums and deliberative forums is that the forums are attended and guided by authorities on the matter at hand. In the publication deliberation is referred to as citizen discussion guided by advisory expert panels present at the meeting to produce legitimate and informed opinions on issues and policy (2016). The citizen forums used in this thesis will not combine expert panels with citizen discussion but will focus on the latter as to keep the aim of the discussions to personal reflections and thoughts on the matter. Also, the HSD-proposal and participatory approaches in general tend imply that the focus of the study should be on the participants and not to be intruded by the language, objectives and opinions of authorities and/or experts. Max-Neef et al comment on the HSD-proposals fundamental nature of the methodology as being *anti-authoritarian* emphasising the need to separate the ‘powerless’ from the ‘powerful’ for enhancing the legitimacy of the discussion in the forums for the criterion of an actual bottom-up

perspective to be met. To which extent the participants are indeed ‘powerless’ or representing ‘ordinary people’ is a question that would need further profiling of the participants and this have purposively not been done as not to exclude individuals. The working group is however assured after analysing the content that experts or representatives of any institutions did not occupy the discussions in the forums.

Deliberate forums are generally organized to treat a democratic deficit but there is a debate within the literature concerning to which extent a deliberate forum could be regarded as actually representing ‘*the public*’ (Goldberg 2018) and to some extent the criticism of lack of generalizability is valid as previously touched upon. We circumvent that issue in this thesis by not constructing general claims about a wider public but instead narrow our claims to the participants in our forums and to some extent to the characteristics they represent.

Deliberative forums are generally led by one or several facilitators to present the framework of the discussions and organize discussion surrounding the topic at hand. The role of facilitator should not be viewed as equal to one of interviewer although the roles share the responsibility of taking the lead of the situation. The facilitator encourages discussions and ensure that participants engage in the discussion but do not ‘ask question’ in the same sense as an interviewer who usually have a set of questions they wish to address. In forums or workshops using the humans needs theory the facilitator (called *seminal coordinator* in Max Neef et al 1991) is ideally either passive or engages in discussions as a participant if not regarded as an authority. This is underpinned by fact that these forums are generally more time-consuming than the forums used in this thesis as the duration of the forums affect the need for engagement by the facilitator. Shorter time available calls for more engagement by the facilitator to; steer discussion towards the purpose, encourage engagement by all participants to make sure everybody’s opinion is heard as well as to introduce the format of the forum and make the participants familiar with the structure. Ideally one would have an unlimited amount of time to arrange and implement the forums so as to limit the engagement of facilitators and make sure that all possible angles are covered in the discussions. However, in reality time is a currency people tend to spend with care. Thus, to make sure that the forums

are covered in a correct way while staying within reasonable time limits, one has to be pragmatic.

4.3 Selection process and material

4.3.1 Selection process

The material gathered consists of written and recorded material gathered during the forums. The participants of the forums produced the material in a participatory fashion, meaning that the researchers provided the framework but the discussions will be guided by the thoughts the participants co-produce in between themselves.

The selection strategy follows the logic of purposive sampling rather than considerations of strict representativeness or random sampling (Marsh and Stoker 2010). The qualitative research design is ill suited to produce generalizations but it does allow one to aim recruiting efforts at individuals that are likely to be willing to participate and has an interest or experience in the topic to be discussed. The results will therefore be less likely to be generalizable onto the wider public but rather for people with a certain characteristic. Unfortunately estimates of how big this sub-section of the population (interest in sustainable practices and welfare politics) is not available. As the greater project *Sustainable Welfare for a New Generation of Social Policy* will use the results of the citizen forums to design surveys, which will emphasize representativeness in sampling the total population of Sweden, the representativeness of the material for the forums are of less importance than if they would stand as the sole source of material. It does however entail that the results of this thesis will be of most value along with similar studies and complementing material.

As the target group was *citizens in the Skåne region* (1,4 million inhabitants as of September 2019, Region Skåne 2020), a substantial group of people were eligible to participate. Getting a sample should then not be too complicated. However, as the forums were to be held during a whole day, the investment in time for the

participants was not minor. This entailed that the participants had to have some personal motivation for attending, primarily an interest in the questions to be discussed. Previous discussions (before the entry of me as a research assistant, authors note) amongst the senior researchers had identified *associations* (in Swedish: *föreningar*) as the primary target groups as it was presumed to be more favourable to organize and plan meetings with participants that are affiliated and regularly attend activities together. It also meant that the working group could target associations that were deemed to be interested in the topic. Each forum was supposed to be attended by one association, which meant that eight associations were to be scheduled during the spring of 2020. An initial set of associations with different characteristics (purpose, organizational form, size, degree of activity, geographical bond etc.) were identified by senior researchers from personal and occupational contacts and complemented by input from the research assistants. Initial contacts were made after dividing responsibility onto the different members of the working group to identify which association would have an interest of participating and how many participants were likely to attend.

The selection process for participants was continuously made by working group of the *Sustainable Welfare for a New Generation of Social Policy* project from December 2019 and onwards. A reflection that could be shared before describing the actual process was that the research group planning was characterized by pragmatism and flexibility from the start whilst still respecting the theoretical framework that had been agreed upon. This mind-set simplified the process given that the situation both for the project and for society as a whole drastically changed during the spring of 2020 due to the outbreak and spread of the covid-19 virus.

The initial plan was to hold the citizen forums as meetings with actual physical presence. In the beginning of the spring however, the WHO classified the outbreak of the covid-19 virus as a pandemic. As state after state introduced lock-downs for their population, restrictions and recommendations were adopted and social distancing became almost a universal law, physical meetings were no longer an option. Considering this, the working group had to cancel the planned forums in the near term, while the coming meetings had to be carried out digitally so that attendants did not face any potential risks. The guiding principle was that of “data

saturation” (Morris 2015), meaning that from the point where the researchers do not anticipate that more data would add value to the study. Ten forums were ultimately conducted; 3 with physical attendance and 7 with digital attendance. The number of total forums was raised since the digital format was better suited for smaller groups of 4-6 people. As a forum is approximately four hours long of discussions (six hours in total), the total material consists of approximately 35-40 hours in total. One should however regard the concept of data saturation as a way to present *a* data set, and not all the data sets theoretically available. As the project targets; emotions, desires and dreams for the future, the number of theoretically possible data sets are infinite as individuals are in essence unique.

Ensuring a wide range of socio-economic background among the participants in the citizen forums was one of the criteria the research project *Sustainable Welfare for a New Generation of Social Policy* had set. However, during the initial meetings the senior researchers concluded that aiming the recruitment efforts at associations rather than specific individuals would be more advisable as to ensure that the forums would be attended by a satisfactory number of participants. The working group discussed the characteristics of each association and considered how the anticipated disposition of participants in each forum would complement other forums. Therefore, each forum along with its participants could be regarded as representing some characteristics; the primary focus or aim of the association provided indications of fields of interest and roughly which age group and the geographical affiliation indicating in which part of Skåne the participants were likely to live. The approach did not however aid the project in ensuring due representation of social status, economic conditions and ethnical background as none of this was requested as background information of individual attendees before or during the forum. This must be regarded as a potential skew in the material, although efforts were later made to attract single individuals with different characteristics than those that were present in earlier forums. As the approach led the group to focusing on associations, this entailed that only participants being members of or engaging with associations would be within the scope of the study for the forums. This potential bias would however be sorted out by the changed prerequisites presented by the emergence of the covid-19 virus.

As several meetings were either cancelled or rescheduled for an upcoming date, the number of expected attendees was lower than to be desired. The working group came to the conclusion in the midst of the pandemic to have open calls for a few forums that were now to be held digitally which was a suitable and pragmatic solution for maintaining the course and schedule of the project. The group still contacted associations but also posted information online on social media urging interested individuals to contact one of the researchers and sign up to one of a few selected dates. This approach dealt with the bias of only contacting associations but it did present another potential skew as the researchers used their personal profiles on social media, which resulted in that the reached audience consisted of people that were a part of the social network of the working group. Considering the old saying ‘birds of a feather stick together’, the reached audience via personal contacts would perhaps not be as representative of the wider population and the validity of the results could then be questioned. The complementing approach with online advertising via personal social media accounts was also generally excluding to non-internet or social media users but there were occasions where contacts were established over the phone.

A reflection on the selection and recruitment process is that while conducting research ‘close to home’, (the working group were all living in the region at the time) it was both tempting and practical to make use of personal contacts for contacting and convincing participants to join the forums. This would however not be as accessible if the project was aimed at exploring the topic somewhere else in the world. One example of a different recruiting strategy is Gullien-Royo’s (2017) HSD-workshops in Peru where the research group made use of an on-going survey on the same general topic to contact respondents and inquire about interest in participating in the equivalent to citizen forums.

4.3.2 Material

Ten different matrixes were produced during the ten separate forums and the material consequently consists of input from roughly 70 participants ranging from the ages of 14 to 75. Eight of the forums were held during one whole day which consisted of roughly five hours of effective discussions and deliberation between

the participants. During these eight full-length forums the matrix was actively used by the research group to capture the discussions. The two remaining forums were reduced in terms of duration as they were conducted as a part of the participants workday (both were held in collaboration with local associations managing publicly funded projects). These two reduced forums lasted approximately two hours and did not utilize the matrix during the forums although the material was later added to the structure of the matrix to ensure coherence in the format. Three of the forums were held with physical attendance and the rest were held digitally via the online-meeting tool Zoom. Two of the forums were held in English to reach non-natives (although the attendance of these forums was a mix of both natives and non-natives) whereas the rest were held in Swedish. This did not seemingly affect the nature of the results as the satisfiers were not inherently different. It may however be some obscurity in some of the satisfiers that were translated from Swedish into English as the translation was first done by a machine translator and were later reviewed manually.

	Full length	Reduced length	Swedish	English	Digital presence	Physical presence
Forum 1	x		x			x
Forum 2	x		x		x	
Forum 3	x		x		x	
Forum 4	x		x		x	
Forum 5		x	x			x
Forum 6	x			x	x	
Forum 7	x		x		x	
Forum 8	x		x		x	
Forum 9	x			x	x	
Forum 10		x	x			x
Total	8	2	8	2	7	3

Figure 4 – Characterization of the ten forums

The forums were led by a senior researcher that guided the participants through the process by assigning them to discuss the fundamental needs one by one (horizontally in the matrix). The participants were not presented with the matrix during the discussions and were thus not asked to relate their thoughts to the structure of it and could discuss freely. Two research assistants listened carefully to the discussions amongst the participants and plotted the matrix simultaneously according to what was being said. The participants were offered to co-create the satisfiers (the material inputted into the matrix) in the physical forums to engage them further in the process, whereas all participants were offered the chance to review the matrix during the afternoon to correct potential misunderstandings. After

the forums, the participants were also sent the matrixes via e-mail by a senior researcher with the same intentions.

To process the data, the matrixes were translated and added together to form one single matrix (hence named the *master-matrix*) from which the presented results are derived. Exact copies of needs satisfiers (albeit different wording or phrasing) were deleted so that the material exclusively consists of unique data. Some data points will cover the same general topic or theme but be coded as either differing categories or suggesting slight differences in the level of abstraction. For example; “*marketing around unhealthy products*” and “*junk-food advertising*” both cover the same general topic captured in the data point “*marketing around unhealthy products*” but differ in what the participant(s) were emphasising during their discussion. The rationale for keeping both data points is to keep the nuances and to reflect the diversity of language as well as differing perceptions between the participants. Furthermore, as the focal point of the analysis is the subjective eudemonic assessment, the diversity of perspectives will provide leeway for more reliable conclusions. The exclusion of more or less identical data points was done to keep the material manageable for the scope of this process, and since no quantitative analysis will be performed, there was need for frequencies.

The satisfiers were classified according to main and secondary theme. 17 specific themes were identified (see annex table 2). All satisfiers related to the theme *consumption* was separated and formed the material used for this thesis.

4.4 Reflections on the methodology

The methodology of deliberative forums is more or less given when choosing to adopt and utilize the theory of human needs in combination with the HSD-approach. This does, however, not mean that there are no other alternative ways of confronting the research question. Lamont and Swindler (2014) argue that methodological pluralism is the way forward for the social sciences and embraces mixed-methods. In the same article, the authors defend the position of interviewing, and in a broader sense; meaning-seeking, as an important and complementary (in relation to

statistical methods or narrow behaviouralism), way to understand the world. They position interviewing against behavioural approaches within an interpretivist setting whilst highlighting the fact that the two positions more often than not conflate. An alternative way going forward for this thesis project could have been to adopt a behavioural approach and stronger ethnographical conception to seek answers about consumption behaviour related to environmental harm. This alternative ethnographic approach could have taken place “in the real world” via observations, e.g. not in a closed environment as the deliberative forums and would provide context that the current approach lacks. The theory and research question, however, would have made it impossible not to interact with the subjects as it entails that we seek meaning and explanations about behaviour such as imagined realities, cultural beliefs and emotional states (Lamont and Swindler 2014 p157). Here follows a list of arguments for choosing interviews (capacious conception of the method) over an ethnographic approach of observing behaviour;

- Ethnographic observations could have provided more robust material about ‘actual’ behaviour but would have produced a number of other practical issues such as accessibility to an adequate number of subjects for a sufficient amount of time
- A more presence-based approach would certainly need to be complemented with some form of interviewing to make sense of the ‘what’ and ‘why’ in relation to this project’s research question
- A more ethnographic study complemented with interaction would also actualize the scientist-subject relationship and posed roughly the same methodological implications, meaning that it would not have been an easier path to take.
- Interviewing (as a broad field) is generally the more affordable alternative to ethnographic studies as it condenses the time of interaction with subjects in the field

Hence, as the project seeks to understand meaning and emotion rather than behaviour and agency, interviews in the form of deliberative forums prevail as the more effective method within an interpretivist context.

Concerning the chosen methodology, and its limitations, there is one aspect which should be addressed as to not cause concern. All forums were recorded, either by a dictaphone or via the digital program Zoom. However, seeing as the raw-material amounts to approximately 40 hours of recordings, transcription was not achievable within the scope of this thesis. As such, no quotes will be provided as correct reproduction would be too burdensome for one (1) individual. The material used was instead the written material produced during the course of the forums, both the matrixes and notes from one or two researchers (depending on forum). This means that there is a level of filter, consisting of the research team's understanding and interpretation, between what was being said by the participants and what constitutes the material in this thesis. To combat misunderstandings, the participants were offered the opportunity to review the material during and after the forums, which should have minimized potential misconceptions.

4.4.1 Reflections of the role as a researcher

Reflecting upon one's role as a researcher in conducting participatory research within communities is of great importance (Johnson 2017). The whole research group for *Sustainable Welfare for a New Generation of Social Policy* participated in the forums even though there was only one senior researcher actively participating in guiding the discussions whereas the others were filling out the matrix and taking notes. Even though there were limited interaction with the participants, one's mere presence might have affected the participants to act or discuss ways in a certain manner which should be taken into account when reading the material. The research group continuously discussed and reflected together about our own and the participants' roles and characteristics after the forums in order to improve the conditions and make the participants as comfortable as possible to encourage open discussions. Every forum started with a short introduction of the participating researchers and the participants as a way to establish a connection between the researcher and participants as well as among the participants. This seemingly worked well as no conflicts arose, and participants often referenced their own and others characteristics as a way to contextualize ideas or opinions for others to understand. The forums also introduced some "rules" for

participation, including allowing others to speak their mind and to be respectful of differing opinions intending to create an understanding environment.

The research team carried inherent privileges in terms of professional roles but were mindful of communicating as equals and being open-minded both during discussions and in informal chats during recess. In cases where there were language barriers between or among participants and researchers, the group participated in defining and explaining potential misunderstandings in a tolerant atmosphere. There were no observed difficulties arising from these. All the participants were informed about the project and that the material would be utilized in part for this thesis, and written consent was collected where appropriate.

5 Results and analysis

5.1 Results

5.1.1 An overview of the results

A total of 1665 needs satisfiers were identified during the ten citizen forums. The needs satisfiers were manually imported to a two-dimensional matrix according; to fundamental need, existential need and category (positive, negative or bridging). Each needs satisfier was classified with a primary and secondary theme for analytical purposes. Each needs satisfier assigned to either the primary or secondary theme *consumption* was separated and will serve as the basis of analysis for the scope of this thesis. This is approach comes with a price as much of the reasoning surrounding the needs satisfiers was lost. Moreover, some needs satisfiers that would provide context to the consumption-related material used in this thesis were excluded as they were classified as primarily belonging to other thematic categories. The material utilized for this thesis comprised of 137 needs satisfier, representing roughly 8 % of the total material collected (if treating each needs satisfier as one unit of analysis).

The distribution of satisfiers in the consumption-matrix differs from the master-matrix as the participants touched upon consumption-related discussions whilst discussing some needs more than others.

	Being	Having	Doing	Interacting	Sum	Distribution
Nutrition and health	42	125	94	41	302	18%
Protection and support	34	96	73	39	242	15%
Proximity and love	39	50	44	39	172	10%
Understanding and knowledge	57	72	58	16	203	12%
Participation	35	78	56	21	190	11%
Idleness	29	68	40	14	151	9%
Creation	18	59	36	16	129	8%
Identity and belonging	41	45	27	13	126	8%
Freedom and independence	27	70	39	14	150	9%
Sum	322	663	467	213	1665	100%
Distribution	19%	40%	28%	13%	100%	

Figure 5. Frequency table for the master-matrix

	Being	Having	Doing	Interacting	Sum	Distribution
Nutrition and health	5	11	23	5	44	32%
Protection and support	2	12	2	1	17	12%
Proximity and love		6		2	8	6%
Understanding and knowledge	3	3	2	1	9	7%
Participation	1		1	1	3	2%
Idleness	2	7	2	2	13	9%
Creation	1	6	9	3	19	14%
Identity and belonging	1	4			5	4%
Freedom and independence	1	10	6	2	19	14%
Sum	16	59	45	17	137	100%
Distribution	12%	43%	33%	12%	100%	

Figure 6. *Frequency table for consumption-matrix*

5.1.2 The consumption matrix

The matrix relating to consumption is presented in the annex table 1. The satisfiers represent the opinion of one or some of the participating individuals and should not be equated to representing all of the 70 participants.

Nutrition and health

Whilst discussing the ails of today in relation to the need for nutrition and health, some participants highlighted negative aspects generally associated with consumerist society; the stress of over too many choices, brand-dependency and that food is seen as an ordinary consumption item rather than a need and/or a given right. They also focused discussions on the pricing and quality of food, suggesting that "healthy" food is expensive and esoteric.

The positive and utopian needs satisfiers were correspondingly related to pricing, quality and distribution of food calling for locally produced and distributed sustainable food and producing more for one's own usage.

The bridging satisfiers suggest demand for circular and co-ownership solutions for supplying food as well as interventive policy such as prohibiting food-waste and limiting the supply of harmful and unsustainable goods. The participants also called for affordable non-carbon dependent means of transportation to be supplied by the public sector. One identified bridging satisfier was the call for more people to buy services in order to make time for other activities which stands out as a consumerist viewpoint on how to solve the puzzle of making end meet time-wise.

An interesting note is that the majority of participants seemed to be in accordance with the opinion that healthy food should be more widely available and unhealthy food should play a less significant part of people's dietary habits. This prevails as the most concretized and perhaps most widely shared opinion since it recurred in all forums, albeit with different contexts surrounding the discussion.

Protection and support

The consumption-related negative satisfiers for the need of protection and support critiques aspects related to consumerist society; too much focus on GDP-growth, the commodification of housing and former public services and consumeristic behaviour. Some participants also raised questions concerning equality in consumption as well as personal fears and insecurity that one may face altered economic circumstances in the future. The latter one is significant since it is an obvious statement of a loss aversion-preference, suggesting that the participant anticipates that a loss of income would affect their ability to consume and cause a loss of subjective wellbeing. The "gig-economy" was also raised as a problem relating to how consumers make use of services provided by economically disadvantaged groups.

The utopian future the participants imagined in relation to consumption was fairly limited in terms of identified needs satisfiers and were related to themes such as; the sharing economy, financial security via publicly redistributed funds and free public transport. The call for more financial security provided by the state could be regarded as a wish to maintain one's disposable income in case of unfortunate events which in turn would suggest some degree of loss aversion preferences. This is however, merely a suggestion since the discussion surrounding the satisfier did not reveal the rationale. Another identified needs satisfier was the call for 'simpler existence' i.e. the idea that 'less is more' suggesting an inverted relationship between wellbeing and material consumption for some and a clear reference to adaptive preferences.

The bridging satisfiers related to protection and support were mostly practical to their nature; requesting "allemansträtten" to substitute long haul flights as holiday alternatives, suggesting how to deal with free-riders in public transport and

carpools. Further, collective action and co-ownership structures were identified as desired actions in order to move towards a sustainable future.

Proximity and love

“*Consumption hysteria*” was identified as hindering the fulfilment of the need for proximity and love along with critiquing the system that prioritizes economic and productivist values above collectivist and anthropogenic. Several participants also pointed to the commercialization of human interaction and the physical spaces dedicated to consumption as negative satisfiers for the individual need for proximity and love. Epitomizing the negative satisfiers for the need is “*growth society*” which reflects much of the discussions surrounding the need. Given such an eloquent example of a degrowth-associated critique of consumerist society, it must, however, be reaffirmed that each satisfier was named in one or in some cases a few of the forums and should thus not reflect the opinions of all 70 participants. It is, however telling that no positive satisfier was identified related to consumption for the need. This could perhaps lead one to the conclusion that the participants regard consumption in itself as an obstacle in fulfilling our need for love and proximity and plays no part in the fulfilment of the need in a utopian society. The bridging satisfiers identified were ‘circular economy with local jobs’ and ‘spaces free from consumption requirements.

Understanding and knowledge

The participants focused on discussing ‘commercialism and lobbyism’ as obstructive satisfiers related to consumption as well as ‘advertising’ which steers our understanding of what needs we have and how we might fulfil them. They also discussed the ‘consumer society’ which impedes our understanding about, and participation in, society as it takes up too much space in our collective consciousness.

Concerning a sustainable future, the participants focused their discussions around how knowledge and understanding about sustainable lifestyles (including but not exclusively connected to consumption and re-usage) and the input of labour and capital into production processes would create a better society and aid in fulfilling our need of understanding the world. One participant also expressed the feeling of

true liberty when having less money to spend as it allowed this person to focus more on reflection and introspection. This satisfier was not formulated by the same participant who called for a 'simpler existence' but is another display of adaptive preferences from a participant.

The identified bridging satisfiers that would lead to a better future was to stop prioritizing economic growth and move towards a more "slow society" which entails less focus on production and consumption. There was also a demand for more "reko-rings" which is a platform or community where individuals buy food and produce directly from the producer and often have the ability to visit and participate in cultivation and/or animal keeping.

Participation

Only negative satisfiers were identified by the participants relating to the need of participation, indicating that consumption holds less sway over a future outlook on how the participants wish to participate in society. Consumption was interestingly identified as a *false satisfier* by one participant, corresponding to the concept of a pseudo-satisfier proposed by Max Neef with colleagues. A pseudo-satisfier is, in essence, negative because it seemingly seems to fulfil a need or even does so in the short-term, but actually hinders the fulfilment of the need in a long-term perspective or obstructs the fulfilment of other needs.

In one of the shorter forums, one of the participants stated, whilst discussing the need for food and sustenance, that differentiation of pricing in different parts of a city creates incentives for economically disadvantaged groups, often migrants according to this person, to settle in parts of the city that offer supply of groceries that corresponds to their income level creating hubs of non-natives.

Furthermore, once again, the satisfier concerning commercial spaces in the public sphere was dubbed to be hindering the need of participation as it excludes people without or limited purchasing power to interact and participate in the environment. The example of shopping centres was given by one participant as such an environment, and social activities in relation to these, which in its essence are private property but where much of modern public interaction takes place.

Idleness

In relation to idleness, the negative satisfiers brought up touched upon the act of comparing and cultural values supporting consumerist behaviour. The notion that people experience pressure by the act of comparing material goods can be supported by what was previously mentioned as positional goods and the idea that increasing consumption of these has no or little positive impact on experienced wellbeing. The participants also believed that the wear-and-tear mentality was damaging as it increases consumption as well as lead to a race-to-bottom in terms of working conditions to maximize profits, which in turn harms precarious workers in other parts of the world.

The utopian satisfiers related to acceptance of limits and a reduction of material throughput in the economy as a result of decreased consumption. Some also suggested that advertisement-free zones should exist to offer the opportunity to “log out” and be more present.

Others believed that advertisement-free zones would instead be a bridging satisfier, as to create an ideal environment for idleness but not as a mean in itself. Along with this, it was suggested that an active conversation amongst citizen about reducing consumption would lead the way forward whilst another satisfier formulated that society should abandon the idea that the individual consumer possesses any influence over production patterns and the process of climate change. The comprehension of the individual as an agent for change was frequently discussed, especially in relation to democratic participation, and the perceptions differed among the participants. Some recognized the power of individuals or collective action from the bottom-up and expressed desire and hopes that systemic reform would take place from that perspective whilst others put their belief in the political and business sector to advance the sustainability agenda (representing a traditional top-down perspective).

Creation

Two consumption-related negative satisfiers for the need of creation emphasised that people tend to identify themselves as a consumer first and foremost and that

this bears precedence over identifying oneself as creator instead. Other satisfiers concerned pricing, a couple of participants saying it was too expensive to grow one's own food and too cheap to buy food at supermarkets while others argued that it was too expensive to purchase ready-made and processed food. One satisfier pointed to the fact that creating oneself is too expensive while another suggested that the ability to always have access to goods and the ability to purchase what one desires is detrimental.

In a utopian future, much of the participant's discussion surrounding consumption revolved around the idea that people will create things needed themselves instead of buying, which would allow us to consume less and create emotional bonds to items. This would discourage wear-and-tear usage and encourage recycling and reuse.

Participants from several forums suggested practical ideas of bridging satisfiers, including; subsidised repair shops, sharing-economy facilities, a halt to production of goods that are in abundance (the example of bicycles was given by a participant in one of the longer forums) and to regulate production to cease manufacturers from constructing items with integrated flaws. These satisfiers are clear displays of non-consumerism and align with much of the degrowth-agenda. Some of the satisfiers outlined above could, however, be tied to a green-growth paradigm as well (sharing economy services for example), a depiction of the complexity in classifying the satisfiers as examples of an ideological understanding of growth and consumption.

Identity

The main identified problem concerning the need of identity and the act of consumption is that the two are too closely related. Participants from several forums said that much of how people construct their identity was through consumption of material goods (positional goods) which in itself was a problem as the link erodes collectiveness and fuels one's need to consume in order to express oneself. Several participants from different forums once again formulated that there was pressure to consume and stated that commercialism was eroding wellbeing. No positive nor bridging satisfiers were identified that related to consumption as primary or secondary themes for the need of *identity*. However, satisfiers such as “*decoupled*

work from livelihood” (doing, positive) could provide context to how participants have discussed income without going to depths with how this income would be utilized.

Freedom and independence

Several forums focused on discussing consumption in relation to freedom and pointed to the expectations and norms of society to consume. One participant discussed how parenthood accelerates one’s consumption levels as one is expected to participate in activities connected to the children which would otherwise (a situation without responsibility for a child) be avoidable. The notion of freedom of choice, relating to the seemingly endless variety of goods and services was also debated and critiqued for being confused with freedom in its own sense by several participants.

Freedom and independence were phrased by one participant as determined by income as this was related to what and how one could consume. The participant argued that equal distribution of income and wealth would grant equal access to what one could consume and therefore increase freedom and independence for those disadvantaged by the unequal distribution today.

Travel and tourism were identified as harmful activities by participants in one forum and the discussion revolved around long-haul flights and border shopping as examples of unsustainable activities and were regarded as unnecessary for wellbeing.

To be happy with less and that one’s dreams should be sustainable were identified as utopian satisfiers, implying a desire for a future with less material consumption and throughput in the economy, suggesting adaptive preferences. The satisfier “advertisement-free zones” were once again brought up as a utopian scenario.

Two bridging satisfiers called for a change of pricing in the transport sector, making unsustainable means of transport more expensive and subsidizing sustainable alternatives. These types of satisfiers align with a green-growth perspective on how behaviour and consumption might be adjusted within the current paradigm.

The participants also expressed the will to limit travel as to avoid ‘overtourism’ and excessive travelling and that more goods should be produced locally for sustainability reasons. In one forum, the participants also talked about limiting consumption and unnecessary transport of goods (complicated logistic chains due to administrative hindrances leading to the phenomena of border-shop, for example).

In one forum, the participants expressed a desire to de-commodify goods and services that have already been commodified, such as traditional welfare services (schools and healthcare). The reasoning was that a process of marketization had privatized and incentivized profits to that which should be public goods or services.

5.2 Discussion

5.2.1 Comments on the matrix

The matrix used for this thesis only contains the consumption-classified satisfiers excluding satisfiers that could have been classified as consumption related if there would not have been more fittingly primary or secondary themes, and including satisfiers that had more to do with consumption than any other defined theme. This resulted in a matrix which is quite unorthodox compared to other matrixes produced according to the HSD-proposal as it does not provide the reader with an elaborate diagnose of society or imagined utopian future. To fully grasp the narratives that have been repeated during the forums, one should undertake the challenge of reading all the matrixes separately. However, the presented matrix provides an understanding of how today’s consumption is regarded and what future and ways forward concerning this the 70 participants imagined.

Another reflection that may be shared is the distribution of satisfiers in the matrix. As shown in the overview, there is a predominance of satisfiers for the needs at the top of the matrix. This has most likely occurred since the research team used the

same sequence of process in all forums, starting with the need for *Nutrition and Health* and ending with *Freedom and Independence*. This was something that ought to have been detected earlier and adjusted, but as the forums took place over a period of four months with a few weeks apart, the research team did not reflect upon the distribution until the material was compiled into raw data points and classified. The distribution most likely occurred since some participants grew tired as the forums progressed during the day and thus were less motivated to discuss as actively.

5.2.2 Discussion of the results

The results

This matrix (as well as the rest of the material) reflect a desire amongst the participants to move past *individualism* and towards more *collectivism* and *collective action*. This is shown in the satisfiers calling for more forums and structures to ease and advance interacting among people as well as the desire to be locally self-sufficient *in collaboration* with others, whether it concerns food or other material goods. Many participants expressed a desire to move past dependence on markets and complex systems and advocated for more local and peer-to-peer solutions. This shows that the material has a vast potential for further studies concerned with other themes and inquiries.

In relation to this thesis' research question, it is apparent that consumption in excess and the perceived paradigm of consumerism is generally regarded as unsustainable. A vast majority of the negative satisfiers are a direct and blatant critique of consumerism and all that it entails. The feelings of *stress*, *anonymity* and *passivity* as well as perceived *pressure to constantly consume* reveal dissatisfaction with consumerist society and values. One recurring satisfier, both in the fundamental needs and between a majority of the forums was *advertisement-free zones* which derive from several discussions on the constant bombardment with messages to consume in public spaces. In addition, several participants formulated their critique to address consumerism directly, which suggest a previous understanding of the issue by some participants.

The proportionally few positive satisfiers were not revolutionary and pioneering but revealed a desire for a slower-paced life and more sustainable and inclusive practices. These were not comprehensive alternatives to consumerism, although some satisfiers called for less consumption and reduced material standards. The relatively few positive and utopian satisfiers furthermore reveal the difficulty of participants in settings such as these to imagine and dream of alternative futures, which corresponds with earlier findings (Garcia and Martinez-Iglesias 2017). However, if more attention would have been directed towards consumption as a primary theme and/or focal point for the discussions, this deficit could perhaps have been avoided, or at least reduced.

The bridging satisfiers were constructive and imaginably realizable as a way to redirect society from consumerism as this was the main feature for the majority of them. These reveal a dissatisfaction with mechanisms that encourages unsustainable and excessive consumption and the satisfiers propose policies, institutions and encourages behaviour that combats consumerism.

In relation to the research question, overall the majority of the forums expressed a willingness to reduce consumption, or at least alter it so that it does not induce increased pollution and material throughput in the economy. There were however mixed opinions of whom should be responsible for enacting such a change or how it should be done as some discussions were pragmatic and others more metaphysical and philosophical. It should again be stated that some participants were actively engaged in discussions surrounding consumption whereas others did not reflect upon issues concerning the same at all, meaning that the material perhaps is not generalizable even for the participating individuals. Yet, everyone was invited to oppose the opinions of others, but unfortunately, that did not occur very frequently, either suggesting that the more passive participants agreed with what was being said or that the format did not encourage this type of exchange enough. This aspect should be further reviewed and compared with similar studies to enhance the robustness of the material.

Alternative hedonism

One might refer to Soper's alternative hedonism proposition to explain the dissatisfaction with consumerism expressed in the forums. The findings mainly suggest that wellbeing is not dependent on the level of material consumption for the participants but on meaningful relationships and activities. Some satisfiers such as crafting and creating things on your own as well as self-sustaining cultivation also suggest some inherent pleasures in the alternatives to consumerism, supporting Soper's theory that some affluent people (global perspective, if not in Sweden) find hedonic wellbeing in consuming differently irrespective of other positive effects. The findings also suggest that Soper's diagnose of today's society is shared by the participants as several satisfiers revolved around consumerism's harmful effects on the subjective wellbeing of people.

Outliers

There were however, two outliers regarding collectivism and consumption. The forums (number 5 and 10 in the presented table above) that were held during a shorter session, rather than a full day, did not explicitly reflect or express satisfiers associated with collectivism or reducing consumption. The reason for this could be several, for example;

- They were not presented with the matrix and thus did not have grapple with the nine fundamental needs. They were instead presented with four themes (income, housing, transport and nutrition) to discuss freely. The nine fundamental needs themselves do not prescribe collectivism or reduced consumption, but the format (focus on needs versus themes) in which the groups discussed may have had an influence on what satisfiers were suggested.
- The time limit may have imposed a different way of expressing oneself and lead participants to focus on either more practical or more abstract matters.
- The composition of the eight full-length forums differed quite a bit from the two shortened ones;
 - the full-length forums were completely voluntary, and the participants had registered themselves (even though contact was made with an association in some cases, the attendance was non-

obligatory). This assumingly means that the participants had a desire to participate since the theme or the format was appealing. The full-length forums were to a large degree attended by people with a native background and/or with tertiary education.

- The shortened ones were held with participants that attended as a part of their scheduled working hours. These forums were organized together with publicly financed projects, and attendance was thus compulsory for the participants even though they had the ability to opt-out of attending the forum and instead perform other tasks. They had therefore not expressed interest in attending the forums though they consented to participation. These two forums were to a large degree attended by people with non-native descent, one consisting of only youth participants with no tertiary education (due to young age) and the other forum of women from migrant backgrounds with mixed educational background.

These differences in approach may all have been influencing the nature of the results but a, perhaps unsurprising, hypothesis derived from this study is that of ‘the level of current material resources’ is influencing one’s stance on if and how consumption is to be reduced. Although the participants were not surveyed, the observation from the forums is that there was a distinct difference in prosperity among the participants in the full-length forums and the reduced forums, derived from how they reflected upon income and work.

The participants in the reduced forums were either young people or non-natives employed by a public-funded project. A common attribute amongst the participants in the redacted forums was the emphasis on gaining access to employment and raising the capacity for future employment which most likely relates to their own current situation, indicating a lower level of prosperity and income levels. The full-length forums instead accentuated fewer working hours and universal basic income to substitute wage-earnings to provide people with more time and space to fulfil fundamental needs apart from those who can be achieved whilst working for wages. This indicates that these participants generally have a higher level of prosperity and income levels than those participating in the redacted forums. This is also underpinned by the fact that the participants in both the redacted forums raised the

point that groceries and food were too expensive whereas the other forums rather insisted on raising prices for unsustainably produced foods and/or limiting the supply or range of products.

There might also be skewed results due to the selection strategy. The full-length forums required the participants to register and thus attend based on their own interest in the subject, suggesting that the framing of the forums was appealing to these participants which might suggest a certain profile with characteristics more prone to object unsustainable practices and discuss according to a previous understanding. The redacted forums were, although voluntary, not requiring the participants in these to have had expressed interest in participating and for that reason, it might suggest that these might be more generalizable to a broader population.

The hypotheses

The results also lend support to the hypothesis of adjustive preferences as proposed by Sekulova, as the majority of relevant satisfiers call for lessening, altering (e.g. increasing prices) or imposing limits on consumption indicating that the participants do not expect a lower level of wellbeing in a less material-intensive future society. Satisfiers that were thematically recurring in relation to consumption were *consumption pressure, a simpler existence, and advertisement-free zones*, all suggesting that several participants anticipated that a reduction of consumption would increase (or at least not reduce) subjective wellbeing. Nevertheless, one identified satisfier gives leeway for discussing loss aversion preferences, “*worry and fear that one's life situation will change*” which implies that a potential loss of consumption would result in reduced happiness. In addition to this, there were the two outlier forums that did not provide satisfiers directly related to consumption but where the participating individuals highlighted their need for gaining access to formal employment and integrating into societal structures. One should, however, bear in mind that there was little evidence to suggest that the participants in the reduced length forums advocated for *increased* consumption, therefore not suggesting that increased consumption levels should increase subjective wellbeing. In classic liberal terms, to maximize subjective wellbeing and decrease

environmentally-harmful consumption, perhaps there exists a need for dual and parallel processes where the more prosperous strata in society decrease their consumption to increase or maintain wellbeing whereas the less prosperous strata perhaps should maintain their current consumption levels as not to negotiate their level of wellbeing.

Nonetheless, such processes must still relate to planetary boundaries, and thus it might entail that both wealthy and less wealthy strata within prosperous states *must* reduce or alter consumption in order to achieve sustainable practices and combat climate change. We as a society might, in other words, need to alter our behaviour no matter what implications this has on our collective or individual subjective wellbeing as to reduce the risk of making the planet inhabitable. Conceivably then, the implications for subjective wellbeing is of minor relevance. The anticipated subjective wellbeing discussed in this thesis is perhaps first and foremost something to consider for policymakers as an aid to navigate the path forward for introducing eco-social policies with enough public support which should aim to limit emissions.

Summarizing the discussion

As concluding remarks for the discussion and as an answer to the research question, the results show *that the participants in a majority of the citizens' forums were generally willing to reduce their unsustainable consumption to a rather large degree*. The material primarily supports the hypothesis of (anticipated) adaptive preferences with some important provisos. There were two outlier forums which did not display adaptive preferences but leaned towards displaying loss-aversion preferences. This is something which merits further research. There were also satisfiers stemming from the full-length forums that were clear displays of loss aversion preferences proving that the anticipation of ambiguous results was reasonable.

Furthermore, the results do provide some support for a wider degrowth narrative as much of the focus of the discussions, particularly within the full-length forums, emphasize a slower paced society, less material throughput in the economy and a dismissal of consumerist values. There are nevertheless also signs of green-growth ideas in the sample since some of the satisfiers, particularly the bridging, call for

reforming consumer practices into sustainable alternatives and most satisfiers do not suggest an abrupt halt to society as we know it. This might be expected as the bridging satisfiers were not called to be formulated as revolutionary ideas. There was however little to suggest that even the utopian satisfiers would presuppose a different paradigm than a capitalist society embedded with growth and consumption, even though there were calls to limit aspects of it. We might then also consider the complexity of imagining alternative futures as aggravating in studying support for more radical alternative future scenarios. As such, the empirical data presented in this thesis could provide assistance for such studies in the future.

6 Conclusion

This thesis sought to investigate the connection between consumption and anticipated subjective wellbeing using the framework of Human Scale Development developed by Max Neef and colleagues (1991). The work intends to contribute to a wider discussion within the academic degrowth movement concerning the effects of a retracting economy on the experienced subjective wellbeing. The analysis showed that a majority of the identified material supported Sekulova's theory of adaptive preferences, implying that the participants expressing these did not expect a lower level of subjective wellbeing would they to reduce consumption, especially the perceived unsustainable sort. The research question was posed as open-ended due to the explorative and innovative nature of the project and was phrased as "*to what degree do participants in the citizen forums indicate that they are willing to decrease environmentally harmful consumption?*". The conclusion is that participants in a majority of the conducted forums supported reducing consumption to a large degree.

There were, however, ambiguous results, which although was expected, that merits further attention in future research. Two of the conducted citizen forums, where participants did not themselves register to attend, did not display adaptive preferences but rather leaned toward demonstrating loss aversion, which is intriguing. They were also not suggesting satisfiers critiquing consumption or suggesting alternative futures with reduced consumption. This could suggest that the participants that were attending according to expressed interest in the subject would be more likely to display adaptive preferences. The displayed preferences might also relate to the participants' current economic state but as this was not established by inquiry, it is rather weak evidence for a potential link. Future studies could, and should, thus utilize the HSD-framework and complement this study by assigning participants to groups based on certain characteristics in order to establish stronger hypotheses on whom is more likely to display the different preferences. This should assist in assessing potential support for policies directed at reducing harmful consumption. Such an approach, that includes

people from all strata in society, would have significant value and should be undertaken in all societies in need of a sustainable transformation.

The thesis only made use of a fraction of all the collected material for the project *Sustainable Welfare for a New Generation of Social Policy* as it focused on satisfiers related to the theme *consumption*. There is, therefore, significant potential to further elaborate the analysis by including different themes and differentiating further between the forums. The full material shows a narrative that indicates support for many ideas expressed by the degrowth literature and critics of consumerist society. For instance, one frequently recurring satisfier that was desired was *advertisement-free zones* which strongly connects to the fatigue associated by the constant pressure to consume. There were also practical discussions of food, and its production means and the general consensus was that more local and small-scale production would be both good for the environment and for people's subjective wellbeing (see the previous discussion of alternative hedonism). As there are several alternatives to supermarket-consumption of food; reko-rings and eco-villages for instance, future studies could aim to evaluate and compare subjective wellbeing in between individuals engaging in modern conventional consumption of food (buying) and the alternative of producing or co-producing for one's own consumption advocated by several participants.

The survey to be distributed to a representative sample of the Swedish population for the project *Sustainable Welfare for a New Generation of Social Policy* (planned for 2021) should be able to discern the level of public support for some of the satisfiers identified by the participants related to consumption. The results will hopefully add further context to which characteristics are associated with the will to reduce consumption and provide more empirical material to the continuing debate on the effects of contracting economies on subjective wellbeing.

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Annex

Annex table 1 – The consumption matrix

The colour coding depicts the categories to which the satisfier relates to;

green = positive

purple = negative

yellow = bridging.

	Being Physical and psychological qualities (can be individual or collective)	Having Societal structures, policies, norms and attitudes	Doing Individual or collective actions	Interacting Physical spaces and the social surrounding
Nutrition and health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unawareness of the standards of eco-labels • Associating consumption of products/services with our own value • Stress over too many choices • People are not informed about local alternatives (farm shops) • Dependence on brands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System to facilitate the purchase of sustainable food • Prices so that everyone can buy food • Cheaper food • Expectation/practice assuming that we can purchase services/products to individually enhance our mental wellbeing • Organic is not the norm, but an active choice must be made • Food seen as just a consumption item • Healthy foods are often expensive • High prices for food globally • Common structures that contribute to fairer, more fair-trade products • Circular economy • Cooperative country trade 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities to purchase locally and sustainable in urban areas • Prioritize quality over price • Grow and sell food yourself • More expensive but sustainable food • Exchange of local producers • Sharing produce from agriculture • Growing our own food for consuming • Eat less meat • Free public transport • Food waste • Expensive public transportation • Eat too much meat • People eat too much take-away and not enough home cooked • Raise food prices • Work for circular economy, for example cooperative rural trade • Using/buying services to save time • Create local distribution channels for food • Adjust the choice of products according to the seasons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local country stores that can distribute food to the local area • Marketing around unhealthy products • Junk food advertising • Reko-ringar directly to consumer • Sustainable consumption, create advantageous structures for circular economy and collective ownership

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take advantage of food waste, for example to sell cheaper • Prohibit food waste and make it easier to take advantage of what today becomes waste (large wholesalers prioritizing selling soon to expire products) • Supplying free bike services • Lower food prices → increase availability • Limit the supply of harmful products such as cigarettes, alcohol and sugar • Redistribute the goods that are thrown away today (food from schools, shops, etc.) • Free bicycles and electric scooters 	
Protection and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acceptance of unequal distribution even if we as a society have an abundance of resources • Worry and fear that one's life situation will change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing system eg with cars • Having nothing is having everything, less is more • Economic assistance when needed - if one's life situation changes • Financial security • Free public transport • Too much focus on growth through increased GDP because it is due to increased consumption, which harms others • Consumerism • Tenants viewed as assets and products of the landlords • Market for needs-satisfiers (protection and support are for sale) • Basically everything is privatized and owned by someone • Gig-economy • Improved structures for co-ownership and collective action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Allemansrätten" as a holiday alternative • Do not punish those who use public transport without a valid ticket with a fine, but require that the person must instead buy a monthly ticket 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Car pools

<p>Proximity and love</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The system is mostly focused on consumption / production but not to flourish together. • Consumption hysteria • Commercialization of interactions/transactions with other people • Growth society • Circular economy with local jobs 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical spaces based on consumption • Spaces free from consumption requirements
<p>Understanding and knowledge</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling of liberation when not being able to spend money • Understanding of the time and work behind products • The slow society - stop prioritizing economic growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Widely available information on sustainable lifestyle • The consumer society creates less active individuals - strengthened by the digital • Reko ring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recycling and re-using • Lobbyism and commercialism influences us and hinders us from reflection and gaining knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertising that governs our perception of what needs we have
<p>Participation</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumption as a false satisfier of needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buying food from the most popular grocery stores is expensive, makes people in economic hardship seek cheaper alternatives - often in segregated areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercial spaces in the public sphere (excluding)
<p>Idleness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accepting of how we are and not constantly try to change and produce more • Scrap the idea of consumer power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structural transformation as a result of less consumption and labor • Parents compare and compete in children's development and in what they consume • Wear and tear mentality, business benefits on precarious workers • Capitalist culture that creates desire • Non-stop presence of things we are supposed to consume • Consumption culture • Economic instruments to control consumption 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We compare ourselves with everyone else (what they want we want) • Talk more about consuming less 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertisement-free zones - be able to log out • Advertisement-free zones

<p>Creation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We identify ourselves as consumers more than creators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Wear and tear" society - mass production • Too cheap and easy to cook - it consumes too much resources to have such a large selection • Expensive to create (eg clothes / furniture) - cheaper to buy • The opportunity to always be able to quickly buy what you want • Creation vs consumption, idea that we don't have the right to produce or create • Rot-Rut for efforts around recycling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create more of what we need instead of buying • We co-create to create emotional bonds to things • Identifies us more with what we consume than what we create • Buying ready-made food as unsustainable consumption - also more expensive • Commercialization • Growing your own food is expensive, compared to buying in the store • Production stoppage for things that already exist in abundance (eg bicycles) • Rules for manufacturing (that you must not build in weaknesses in the product, eg that the battery only lasts x number of years) • Support creation which are not for commercialization purposes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loan banks for tools • Available places where you can fix things (instead of buying new) • "Recovery mall"
<p>Identity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pressure to consume 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive identity markers • Commercialism (increasingly commercial consumption in how we build our identity) • The link between consumption and identity • Consumption of identity markers erodes our understanding of us as a collective 		
<p>Freedom and independence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be happy with less 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dreams which are sustainable • Individualism seduces us in our search for happiness in a simpler existence • Consumer society that encourages unnecessary consumption - eg travel and shopping • Society that requires a high level of material consumption - parenthood requires participation in society's framework and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel as an expression of freedom (abroad, long flights) • Produce more locally, clothes etc. Sustainability from a social and ecological perspective • Limit travel / tourism to certain areas → number of people etc. • Raise the aviation tax and the tax on fossil fuels • Subsidize sustainable means of transport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertising-free zones • Society as a squirrel wheel that must continue to spin

		<p>thus forces consumption</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passion and dreams related to material items (due to societal norms) • Freedom perceived as freedom of choice (The market is seen as freedom) • Paradox of being able to choose and having more options not equaling more freedom • Freedom based and dependent on our income • Limit unnecessary consumption and unnecessary transport of goods (bordershop) • Decommodification of that which is already commodified 		
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Table 1 – Consumption-matrix derived from the 10 Citizen forums

Annex table 2 – *The list of themes derived from the analysis of satisfiers*

Climate Shift
Consumption
Democracy
Digitization
Equality
Feeling and Actions
Food and Agriculture
Health and Exercise
Housing
Integration
Nature and Animals
Participation
Places and Environments
Education
Security
Transport
Work and Income