How do COVID-19 lockdown practices relate to sustainable well-being? Lessons from Oslo and Geneva

Orlane Moynat, a, Johannes Volden, b and Marlyne Sahakian, c

Institute of Sociological Research, University of Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland; Centre for Development and the Environment, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to changes in everyday lives through restrictions that resulted in lockdown practices in the home, whereby practices were reassessed, changed, renewed, or newly established. Based on a qualitative study of lockdown practices following the first wave of the pandemic in two European cities with high living standards, Oslo and Geneva, we studied how changes in practices led to need (non)satisfaction and (un)sustainable consumption, demonstrating the significance of social interactions in how practices were coordinated. We then highlight the practice elements that favored or impeded need satisfaction, recognizing what material arrangements, skills, and competencies were necessary. Finally, we discuss the “normative accountability” of lockdown practices in discourse, in that the mutual accountability of various practices during the lockdown revealed the need for coordination between people sharing the same space. We find that social interactions are critical toward understanding how the lockdown practices were coordinated in given space-time configurations. Need satisfaction required grappling with social differentiation, as people with strong social relations, generous indoor spaces, and access to outdoor natural environments experienced higher levels of well-being. This situation has implications for policy making in terms of how societies can be reorganized to ensure “sustainable well-being” as a normative aim.

Introduction

In 2020, a year severely characterized by the COVID-19 pandemic, people traveled less, worked from home, and, in some instances, consumed differently, leading to new work-life arrangements in everyday lives. Such changes have attracted increasing research interest, particularly in relation to everyday social practices (e.g., Ehgartner and Boons 2020). People also lost their ability to move about freely and to have contact with loved ones, among other deprivations. These changes have led to some speculation on whether the pandemic could spark a sustainable consumption transition (Cohen 2020) or how it might serve as a rehearsal for future challenges, such as the climate crisis (Latour 2021). While (un)sustainable consumption is often understood in its environmental dimension, as the using up of resources with associated impacts, there is also a need to consider how changes in consumption relate to well-being, or what it means to live a good life in a world of limits (Guillem-Royo and Wilhite 2015; Jackson 2016; Fuchs et al. 2021). Sustainable well-being considers as a normative aim “what is needed for a safe climate and the prospects for a just and flourishing society” (Gough 2017, 12). While the impact of the pandemic in relation to climate change has yet to be fully understood, we can study these adjustments in work-life arrangements in relation to how and in what ways people have been able to live a good life and to flourish, despite – and in some instances because of – the associated disruptions.

Inspired by Wallenborn and Wilhite (2013, 2227), we frame the pandemic and related lockdown measures as “unplanned” or “accidental experiments,” referring to “how the blocking of usual practices forces experimentation and can lead to reassessment and change.” We refer broadly to “lockdown practices” as those practices that were reassessed, changed, renewed, or established during the period of lockdown measures. The pandemic can also be seen as a moment of change in a life course through which “people’s daily routines are disrupted, and need to be reconsidered.
before new routines emerge” (Burningham and Venn 2020, 104). This moment of change involves a series of practices – such as getting around or preparing a meal – but it also involves social interactions with others. At a time when physical distancing was regarded as the preferred intervention for halting the spread of the virus, how people engaged in everyday practices brought about new meanings, tied to how things ought or should be. This situation, in turn, allowed for reflections around what can be accounted for as “normal” practices (Rouse 2007; Sahakian 2019), along with the significance of social interactions (Halkier 2020) in practices, with people in and outside of the home, through physical or virtual interactions.

Through qualitative studies in Oslo and Geneva, we explore how people were able to satisfy human needs, inferred from our analysis of semi structured in-depth interviews and informed by a list of needs developed by Max-Neef (1991). In these two cities with relatively high standards of living, we consider a sample of individuals representing households with different compositions and income levels. The respondents were generally not deprived from means of livelihood but nonetheless experienced changes in consumption and well-being. As part of the research design, we focused on consumption domains that are considered to have significant environmental impacts such as mobility, food, and leisure. We studied how people engaged in practices associated with these domains in relation to human-needs satisfaction; we then push the analysis further to explore the elements of practices that are necessary for need satisfaction such as material arrangements, skills, and competencies. Focusing on the normative dimension of practices, we also examine how the pandemic created new meanings around how things ought or should be, meanings that were negotiated in relation to others, through social interactions. Thus, social interactions seem to be an important factor when it comes to uncovering how people can achieve sustainable well-being as a normative aim, and can be considered as part of the resources people draw on for making sense of new practices in times of disruption.

In the section that follows, we describe our conceptual approach, based on bringing together social practice theoretical reflections with human-needs theories. We then present our research methodology and the two research sites. In our analysis, we discuss how changes in practices relate to need satisfaction. We conclude with a discussion on the relevance of our approach to sustainable consumption studies of everyday life.

**Conceptual framework**

Different theories focused on need satisfaction have emerged with varying approaches: some propose an operationalization of the good life through needs that deserve protection in society (Di Giulio and Defila 2019) while others focus on basic and intermediary needs as preconditions for well-being (Doyal and Gough 1984, 1991). Many lists share the idea of human needs as universal, nonhierarchical, and satiable. We use Manfred Max-Neef’s (1991) Fundamental Human Needs Theory which relates to a horizontal taxonomy of nine needs: subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, idleness, creation, identity, and freedom. These nine “axiological” needs are organized in relation to four “existential” needs, namely being, having, doing, and interacting (see Appendix 1). Although need satisfaction can be studied at the individual level, needs are satisfied through the socio-material organization of everyday life, and represent what all people should be able to satisfy. If human needs are fixed, their means of fulfillment – through what Max-Neef terms “satisfiers” – are highly context-dependent. Satisfiers include, among other things, “forms of organization, political structures, social practices, subjective conditions, values and norms, spaces, contexts, modes, types of behaviour and attitudes” (Max-Neef 1991, 24), that may or may not satisfy needs and lead to well-being. The concept of satisfiers suggests that the ways in which societies organize need satisfaction can vary greatly.

Max-Neef (1991, 31) introduces various types of satisfiers in his work and they range from destroyers (or violators) of needs which “annihilate the possibility of (need) satisfaction over time” and “impair the adequate satisfaction of other needs” to pseudo satisfiers which “generate a false sense of satisfaction of a given need.” Synergic satisfiers, meanwhile, satisfy “a given need, simultaneously stimulating and contributing to the fulfillment of other needs” (Max-Neef, 1991, 34). In a study of four cities of South and Southeast Asia, involving interviews with park users, Sahakian and Anantharaman (2020) found green public spaces to be synergic satisfiers – in that the practice of “going to the park” can satisfy multiple needs in relation to having contact with nature or being part of a community. In research focused on factors that impede or promote human-need satisfaction, based on participatory workshops in Catalonia, Guitten-Royo (2010, 391) found that people are able to express what she terms utopian satisfiers, or the wish to have more time sovereignty through flexible work hours.

A needs-based approach to well-being is known as “eudemonic,” in that it is based on the notion that people should have the capacity to live well, participate in society, and flourish. By contrast, hedonic approaches to well-being relate to life satisfaction and happiness (see Brand-Correa and
Steinberger (2017) for a discussion of this distinction. For Diener et al. (1998, 33–34), a eudemonic approach to well-being pays no attention “to people’s values, emotions, and evaluation,” granting “complete hegemony to the external judgments of behavioral experts.” On one hand, such a critique can to some extent be attenuated through participatory forms of research where respondents express their own judgments as to what represents well-being to them, but also through instances where both hedonic and eudemonic approaches are combined. On the other hand, eudemonic approaches are deemed to be more effective for addressing sustainability issues, as needs are both satiable and non-substitutable, as opposed to untrammeled human desires or wishes (Guillen-Royo and Wilhite 2015; Gough 2017; Brand-Correa et al. 2018). Eudemonic approaches are increasingly being used by researchers working on sustainability issues. They allow consideration of both environmental sustainability and well-being, by focusing on “what is needed for a safe climate and the prospects for a just and flourishing society” (Gough 2017, 12). Eudemonic approaches also offer the possibility of intercultural considerations on “what constitutes a good life, but remain specific enough to measure and operationalize the theory in practice” (Brand-Correa and Steinberger 2017, 3). Subsequently, researchers argue that this approach is “better suited to address questions of sustainability and climate governance” (Brand-Correa and Steinberger 2017, 43). How different satisfiers might be organized at a societal level to achieve more sustainable forms of consumption, without affecting well-being remains to be studied (Jackson 2016). Researchers interested in well-being also bring with them certain normative understandings of how society should be organized, valuing for example “sustainable consumption” over “economic growth” as more desirable.

The different ways of satisfying human needs are associated with activities, thus offering a bridge to social practice theories. Practices are “social” insofar that they are normatively reproduced in similar ways based on some form of collective understanding, shared among members of a given society or social group (Welch and Yates 2018). What constitutes a practice differs according to different scholars. For Warde (2005), building on Schatzki (1996), practices are comprised of understandings, procedures, and forms of engagement. We draw on Shove, Pantzar, and Watson (2012) for this study, recognizing that practices involve materials, meanings, and competencies. If needs are satisfied through practices, it follows that different practices may affect well-being in different ways (Max-Neef 1991, 32). For example, relaxing and playing are two practices-as-satisfiers tied to the need for idleness; and riding a bicycle might be a synergic practice, as it can be used for subsistence (in getting to and from work) and for achieving a sense of freedom. For Sahakian and Anantharaman (2020), it is important to uncover the elements of practices that allow some needs to be satisfied over others, such as specific material arrangements or know-how.

While there is an assumption in the literature that much of everyday life is made up of tacit meanings, an understanding of how the tacit and reflexive are intertwined (Halkier 2020) is often overlooked in social practice theoretical reflections. We draw on the work of Halkier (2020, 4) to explore the role of social interaction in assessing this dynamic, defined as “open-ended embodied and discursive co-enactments, enabled and conditioned by what is socially do-able.” We engage with social interaction in the following ways: we seek to understand how activities during the lockdown measures, which stipulated forms of “social distancing,” were performed with others, or in relation to others, and were given social validity in this process. This relates to normativity in practices (Rouse 2007), or how different practices become mutually accountable, with some degree of coherence and harmony between them, or rather, in tension with each other (Sahakian 2019).

As such, we also consider how different practices intersect with each other, which necessitate “bodily and discursive” social interactions of adaptation and negotiation (Halkier 2020, 5). Social interaction also allows us to consider the routinized and reflexive aspects of consumption as a continuum, where people can experience different degrees of reflexivity in their everyday lives. This is particularly relevant to changing practices during the lockdown period, which led to moments of reflexivity around how everyday life is organized with others. We interpret social interactions as including interactions between people (as carriers of practices), but also in terms of how such interactions are made evident when practices also interact in a moment of change.

**Methodology**

We investigate the link between disruptions in everyday life during the COVID-19 pandemic and the relation to “sustainable well-being” in two mid-sized European cities: Oslo, Norway and Geneva, Switzerland. Qualitative data from semi-structured in-depth interviews with individuals from 48 Norwegian and Swiss households – conducted in June and July of 2020 during the wake of the first lockdown – provide the empirical material for this study. We recruited participants using a combination of purposeful sampling through social
networks and online self-recruitment, with an emphasis on achieving a diverse sample (see Appendix 2). Approximately two thirds of the households were centrally located in the respective cities and the rest lived in suburbs. While the overall sample is distributed between the two countries, we analyzed the households in aggregate and the study was not designed as a cross-cultural comparison.

Oslo and Geneva were the cities most affected by the first wave of pandemic in their respective countries in terms of infection rates and implemented lockdown measures. In both cases, the stay-at-home directives were introduced in mid-March and lasted for approximately five weeks before restrictions were gradually eased, along with declining infection rates. The respective governments further loosened controls over the summer before a second wave warranted new restrictions in the fall. Compared to other European nations, the lockdowns can be characterized as “partial” and “soft” in both cases (the measures were primarily framed as government and health-authority advice but not necessarily sanctioned by law). Official and public discourse emphasized individual and public responsibility, collective cooperation, and solidarity between citizens. In Norway, “a high level of compliance to and acceptance of infection prevention measures” has been noted, likely due to high public trust in both people and government (Helsingen et al. 2020, 9). Despite the lack of strong legal enforcement in Switzerland at this time, regulations were followed by a majority of the population. Appendix 3 provides an overview of lockdown measures in both cities.

Through semi-structured in-depth interviews, we sought to capture disruptions in practices that are relevant in terms of environmental sustainability such as daily mobility, food provisioning, and leisure activities – as this was part of the research design. The study reported here is part of a larger research project on everyday life in a pandemic. Interviews lasted up to 90 minutes and were recorded, with participants’ consent. Most interviews were held via videoconferencing calls. Building on Shove, Pantzar, and Watson’s (2012) approach, participants were asked about how they performed certain practices before, during, and following the lockdown measures, aided by prompts for reflections on associated meanings, socio-material arrangements, skills, and competencies. Through these conversations, and despite the fact that in situ observations were not possible at the time, we sought, following Hitchings (2012), to encourage reflexivity around how everyday practices were playing out. The interviews were conducted and transcribed by different researchers in the two cities, using a shared template as an interview guide.

While the research design oriented the choice of categories relevant to sustainability, and proposed a specific understanding of practices, we made no decisions on how to relate the data to well-being and human need satisfaction prior to the fieldwork. The significance of well-being emerged through the analysis, not least in the ability of the respondents to discuss needs as nonsubstitutable, to differentiate them from desires that in their opinion were nonsatisfiable, and to begin to distinguish human needs from their means of satisfaction. The data were first coded and analyzed inductively, allowing us to reveal overarching themes, and then deductively, whereby we used Max-Neef’s (1991) nine fundamental needs to aid with analysis. When quoting participants in this article, we include their pseudonyms, ages, and cities.

It is important to note that the study has several limitations, the first being the relatively socio-economically privileged and financially stable characteristics of the sample: most participants retained their jobs during the pandemic and many of them were able to work from home. Norway and Switzerland have among the highest wages in the world and this feature may have affected how different social groups were able to cope through the lockdown period. The choice of the two cities was further motivated by growing evidence that the affluent people of the world are more responsible than others for negative environmental impacts (Wiedmann et al. 2020). Relatively affluent groups may be more resistant to changing their practices, not least due to “expectations to conform to luxurious and unsustainable patterns of consumption” (Guillen-Royo 2010, 388) or what has been termed social lock-in effects (Sahakian 2017). The selection of these two cities thus allowed for the study of how comparatively well-off populations came to be more reflexive regarding sustainability and well-being during the first wave of the pandemic. Though not designed as a comparative study, expanding the site of data collection beyond only one European country allowed for consideration of affluence in a similar manner across two research sites.

Moreover, roughly two thirds of the sample identify as women. With this in mind, the experiences reflected in our findings must be interpreted as potentially classed and gendered. However, as Appendix 2 indicates, the sample does cover different age groups, life stages (students, workers, retirees), household types (single adults, couples, families), housing types (houses, apartments, shared flats), and household-income levels.
The second main limitation pertains to the capturing of data during the first phase of the pandemic; a similar study conducted at a later point might have generated very different results as people may have been experimenting with change in an initial stage and in the short term and not coping with longer lasting changes. As interviews were conducted three or more months after the lockdowns were initiated, there could also have been a memory bias in how people recounted practices in relation to well-being during the early days of the lockdown. Online interviews also represent a limitation, in that we might have missed insights that could have been gleaned from more informal interactions before and after an interview or through observations in an interview setting. Finally, this study represents an interest of the research team in sustainability and well-being, understood through human-needs approaches and social practices. Another normative aim and approach may have yielded different insights.

Analysis: needs satisfaction through lockdown practices

We start with an overview of how practices changed in the two cities during the lockdown and how the associated measures broadly affected well-being and sustainability. We then point to how needs satisfaction depended on certain elements of practices. We end by discussing how participants reflected on well-being in relation to how social practices were performed, with a focus on the distinction between desires and needs as well as increased reflexivity.

Lockdown practices and need satisfaction: how changes relate to social interactions

Several overarching domains of practices – such as getting around and working – were significantly altered during and immediately after the lockdown in both Oslo and Geneva. When much of daily life became relocated to the home and local neighborhood, lockdown practices emerged such as new ways of working from home (henceforth WFH), food provisioning and eating, experiencing leisure, and engaging in physical activities. These practices also involved social interactions, between people and in relation to interacting practices, and led to certain forms of needs fulfillment.

Most of our participants made adaptations during the lockdown, particularly in relation to WFH, and these adjustments had an “orchestrating” effect (Watson 2016) on other practices, including food preparation and childcare. This situation led to a change in the rhythm and geography of work life that implied adapting home life to fit with work in different ways. In many cases, WFH helped fulfill several of the needs proposed by Max-Neef’s (1991) framework. For some respondents, the need for freedom was satisfied, thanks to more autonomy and temporal/spatial plasticity in daily life while for others the need for idleness was satisfied through more free time and opportunities to relax and engage in hobbies. WFH also led to more flexible time management and personalized schedules: “all of a sudden I had flexibility when I normally work fixed hours….I was able to rush less… I really appreciated having this free time management, meaning that at a given moment… I could fit in things [to do]” (Michelle, 47, Geneva). If most people appreciated the flexibility offered during the lockdown, others struggled to continue working while trying to cope with the stressful pandemic situation – or going on with daily life without satisfying the need for protection and understanding. As Lena explained (36, Geneva), “the thing that was more difficult on a daily basis, the biggest routine that changed was to continue to work on certain things while having the impression of being in a[n]… alarming situation.”

WFH also competed for space and time with childcare responsibilities, particularly for those with young children at home, when schools and kindergartens were closed in both cities. As Adèle (32, Geneva) explained, “oh, but then the ‘work,’ forget about it, I didn’t do anything… my work during the lockdown was the children.” This may not have put in peril the need for subsistence, but it certainly hindered the ability for some people to participate in their work lives – as they had done prior to the pandemic. Others may have compensated for childcare time by working at odd hours or for what was experienced as more hours. As Nicolas (38, Geneva) stated, “work didn’t really decrease and at times it clearly increased.” Like many others, Ingrid (32, Oslo) struggled to set limits to work: “get up at 6 [am] and work till 10 [pm], like, there isn’t really any boundary between what’s work and what’s private life anymore.” Spending more time with family members, including through caring for children, could also satisfy the need for affection. For instance, Sigurd (38, Oslo) described the joy of spending time outside with his son “bonding in the forest” together. If WFH was ambiguous in relation to need satisfaction, something similar can be said with respect to environmental sustainability. While fuel-based mobility for transit and work-related travel was reduced overall, most respondents described higher household-energy bills from spending more time at home – including energy used for heating and for appliances.
Food consumption was central for most respondents, as “good food” was associated with “comfort” and being “a treat” (Olaug, 43, Oslo). Moreover, food relates to a series of lockdown practices that involved provisioning for, preparing, and sharing meals. Meals became a new boundary marker between activities as a ritual moment in the day, as Henriette (25, Oslo) put it, “before I had to eat when I found time for it, but now everything is centered around the food… I’ve eaten more, organized daily life around meals.” With more time to plan and cook meals, people described experimenting with healthier food recipes, with more plant-based meals, but excessive food consumption also took place. Sharing a flat with two other students who were not close friends, Henriette (25, Oslo) experienced boredom and turned to eating as a form of keeping occupied during the initial lockdown and joked about having “gotten a little fat.” Thus, food could be a satisfier that met or hindered need satisfaction, including the need for subsistence and protection.

Food-related practices went beyond preparing meals and also involved time spent with others planning and cooking meals. As such, these practices also satisfied the need for affection, idleness, creation, and identity. Edouard (28, Geneva), a student living with six other flatmates, explained, “what was cool was that we cooked together, in the evening we tried to make food, as much as possible with those who were there.” In Oslo, one person began cooking foods from around the world, in alphabetical order by country; in Geneva, a similar approach was used to experiment with meals based on letters of the alphabet. As Mette (26, Oslo) explained, “I’ve… spent a little more time trying things and been a little more creative with using leftovers.” In terms of environmental sustainability, many respondents claimed that this time and space given to food allowed them to better manage food stocks and to reduce packaging and food waste. In Geneva, local produce was privileged – whereby people began exploring farms in the region or testing the delivery of food baskets with local produce. At the same time, however, some interviewees ordered online and stocked household items. In sum, the sustainability gains from food-related practices during lockdown appeared around doing more cooking at home which gave people more time to manage food stocks and to reduce food waste, but which also contributed to the increase in household-energy usage.

In terms of leisure activities, several needs were satisfied by “lockdown practices” that involved taking up old pastimes such as playing videogames or starting to run again. Alternatively, some respondents found time to experiment with new hobbies, for example, learning to play an instrument or baking new foods. Different household chores were also given time such as refurbishing or gardening. These practices satisfied the needs for creation, idleness, and identity as they allowed people to focus on projects that were important to them. The need for affection was met through different forms of sensorial experiences: being in nature and outdoors, alone, or with others – as we discuss in the section below. Many respondents sought to deliberately get out of the house and claimed that they had discovered the joy of being outside, as well as the possibility of simply wandering or bicycling around their neighborhood and city. Oliver (32, Oslo), for instance, “just started taking long walks. Sometimes to meet someone, other times just to go for a stroll and see new places.” Referring to the first few weeks of the lockdown, Olaf (39, Oslo) said, “[w]e were much outside, then. We hiked, in the woods near Oslo, went more often on bike rides with all four of us… to other parts of town, playgrounds we’d heard were nice. Not only with the family, but with neighbors as well.”

Many of the participants had also begun bicycling more to be able to move around in the city and to get to a workplace, without using public transport, which met the need for subsistence, but also protection. As Solène (18, Geneva) noted, “since the lockdown, I’ve travelled a lot by bike as I don’t have my driving licence… before I used to take the bus or the train, now I’ve really avoided it.” In Oslo and Geneva, electric bicycle sales increased and allowed people to integrate this mode of travel into their commuting routines. This adjustment relates to environmental sustainability in two ways: in terms of bicycling and walking more and thus reducing reliance on fossil fuels for mobility and with respect to experiencing what Max-Neef (1991) called relationships with nature. And yet, the low rate of public transport usage in both cities is also concerning from a sustainability perspective, as we will further discuss below.

Figuring out new routines for navigating different practices at (or close to) home required social interaction among participants in those practices, with people both in and outside of the home. Activities that might have taken place outside of the home were now re-interpreted as occurring within the home. Drinks with friends were organized through virtual meeting platforms and in Oslo a couple created an at-home date night. For some people, digital forms of leisure were a panacea for the lack of physical proximity; for others, the need for affection could not be satisfied in this way. Nadia (47, Geneva), attempted to organize a digital aperitif but
had limited success. “At the beginning of the lockdown I tried the famous apéro on Zoom but there was only one that I maintained with my best friends once every two, three weeks but not more than that.” She was not comfortable socializing with larger groups through this interface. Zoom was therefore a pseudo-satisfier of needs.

For some interviewees, the lockdown was an opportunity to connect with old friends. Linnea (36, Oslo) observed: “I made a list of people I hadn’t spoken with in a long time, and tried to… be a bit more social, it was actually a little, well, paradoxical, in that situation, that I felt that I got in better touch with quite a lot [of people].” Respondents satisfied the need for affection by spending time with others as well as the need for participation by planning and organizing activities together. For example, children engaged more in preparing meals in both cities. Partners sharing the “home as office” led to ambiguities in terms of need satisfaction. For instance, a sense of freedom could have been hindered due to the need to share working and living space with another person on a full-time basis. And yet affection, protection, and idleness were made possible, often thanks to partners who were able to share moments together and through mutual support. In some other cases, the needs for affection and participation were hard to fulfill; this was especially the case for several of the eleven informants who were at the time living alone. For instance, Valerie (63, Geneva), recently retired, suffered from a lack of social life created by the lockdown, even though she appreciated the silence in the streets outside of her home. The environmental implications of these forms of leisure relate to tradeoffs between travel to be with others versus digital forms of communication and exchange. What this might mean in the longer term remains to be seen. While some respondents may have experimented with new ways of connecting digitally rather than traveling, or taking local vacations or “staycations,” others expressed a desire to travel again as soon as possible.

**Practice configurations and need satisfaction: the role of materials, competencies, and meanings**

How needs are satisfied can be understood in relation to social practices, accounting for different elements of practices (material arrangements, meanings, and competencies) and the varying ways in which practices are performed (Sahakian and Anantharaman 2020). Understanding and discussing this relation reveals social differentiation in how needs are satisfied, in terms of access to certain practice configurations by particular groups of people. Since “both the character of ‘critical moments’ faced and access to the economic, cultural and social resources which enable successful navigation of such ‘moments’ vary along the lines of social inequality” (Burningham and Venn 2020, 115), it follows that the relatively privileged position of our respondents in Oslo and Geneva resulted in higher need satisfaction. How to reduce the material and energy requirements of need satisfaction is a critical question that could be achieved through “synergetic” sets of practices, whereby the combination of certain practices and their elements can lead to multiple “need” satisfaction and more “sustainable well-being.” We structure this section as follows based on the practice elements of “materials,” “meanings,” and “competences” (Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012) and end with reflections on social interactions in practices (Halkier 2020).

As a satisfier, the most central material arrangements involved households’ access to adequate indoor and outdoor spaces for work and recreation; safe and practical means of acquiring good, healthy, and enjoyable food; adequate equipment for enabling digital solutions and services; and facilities to enable WFH in general. Suboptimal arrangements in the home and oftentimes small living spaces were recurring barriers for leveraging the flexibility and temporal plasticity of the home office toward needs satisfaction. The success of WFH as a “lockdown practice” depended not only on the fulfillment of affection and participation at home, but also on the extent to which the need for freedom through access to personal space was domestically satisfied, as discussed above. Some multi-person households, notably nuclear families, living in sizable houses with gardens and/or close access to nature, were relatively unrestricted by the confines of the home. Ingrid (35, Oslo) and her partner who lived in the forested outskirts of Oslo generally thrived at home, even with three children in “home” school and kindergarten: “I think we’ve been very lucky; we’ve got space, everyone [in the family] can find their area [in the house]… you can always go out and up in the forest… being out here is so easy.”

However, respondents living in confined spaces with others expressed frustration about having to constantly negotiate the use of space. Dagny (30, Oslo), for instance, shared a studio flat with her partner, where they spent most of the time together, sharing a kitchen table when working. Lacking personal space affected not only work but also their relationship. She explained that “we… normally appreciate being able to have a little time alone, and you don’t get that when you’re always sitting in the same room.” However, living in a suburb, they had access to green areas and the forest that they used
more frequently than before the pandemic to compensate for this lack of indoor space. In the same vein, a participant living with six people in a flat declared, “there are a lot of us and it’s true that it was a bit of a burden in the first week of lockdown … and it amplified my need to be alone at certain times” (Edouard, 28, Geneva). Here we see a tension between need satisfaction and environmental sustainability: access to generous private space was clearly regarded as contributing to a sense of freedom, yet larger and more “comfortable” living areas can be seen as not aligned with sustainable energy consumption (Ellsworth-Krebs, Reid, and Hunter 2021). This situation suggests that more attention could be given in research and policies to public spaces as synergic satisfiers of needs (Sahakian et al. 2020), such as parks that can be collectively accessed by more people, or safe co-working spaces that are close to residential areas.

Among our sample, having easy access to nature and green areas in the neighborhood made it possible for people to engage in various leisure and social activities while maintaining distance to others outside, thus helping to satisfy the need for freedom and affection. Cars were used to safely reach green areas, as exemplified by Olaf (39, Oslo) and his family: instead of taking public transport, as was usually the case, they opted to drive to hiking trails. As mentioned above, some respondents bought new bicycles or e-bikes, which also provided a renewed sense of freedom. “I’ve bought a bike … now it’s for everything … I actually think it’s absolutely amazing, all that freedom that it gives [me] now, and I do feel that a lot more now than before” (Berit, 62, Oslo). The bicycle, as a synergic satisfier, met several needs, such as freedom, subsistence in relation to mobility and health, participation in being with others, and protection from health risk. Geneva’s municipal government created new bicycle lanes during the lockdown, through measures that were already being planned but were accelerated during the first wave of the pandemic. This new material arrangement contributed to supporting the “lockdown practice” of cycling. Some households claimed that they would be considering slow or local travel as part of upcoming vacations in light of the fact that air travel was seen as undesirable. The contribution in this special issue by Guillen-Royo (2022) also uses a social practices approach and a well-being perspective to address future possibilities for a consumption shift in Norway and suggests that flying less for work might be considered as a synergic satisfier.

The privilege of having enough space and recreational facilities at home allowed some respondents to envision an urban “staycation.” In both cities, interest in public transport waned – as it was seen as riskier and less secure, thus not contributing to the need for protection. How to guarantee safe and secure means of public transport will be an important environmental issue in the months and years ahead with the bicycle emerging as a contender to the car for some interviewees but surely not all (see Greene et al., in press).

How people are able to satisfy needs through practices also has to do with certain skill sets or relevant competencies, for example, in the ability to plan a day, to organize meals, to manage work-leisure boundaries, or to navigate virtual spaces. Respondents who managed to set real boundaries generally enjoyed WFH, being able to work efficiently while spending more time on socializing and leisure, thus satisfying a range of fundamental needs (subsistence, protection, affection, identity). This relates to how certain skill sets and material arrangements become synergic satisfiers in some cases, or destroyers of needs in others. For example, having access to technological equipment and Internet connectivity, as well as specific skills and competencies, was a prerequisite for working from home and for engaging in social and leisure activities that were moved to the digital arena – as was the case for most people in our sample. Moreover, some respondents used the lockdown as an opportunity to shift toward new online platforms for shopping and grocery delivery which made it easier to perform routine consumption practices with restricted mobility – the environmental impacts of which are complex. The capacity to discern if and when digital social interactions were necessary, and for how much time, was difficult for some participants. This ambivalence toward connected devices, seen as both a source of support and also anxiety, was also observed prior to the pandemic in the Swiss case (Sahakian and Bertho 2018). This challenge relates to skills around setting limits, in addition to more technical skills related to the appliances. The need for affection was made possible through Zoom aperitifs in Geneva, showing how a cultural ritual was transferred online with varying levels of success. In Oslo, Jorunn (37) found that digital communication not only replaced physical mobility but also made it possible to socially connect in new ways.

I’ve also met people digitally that I wouldn’t have met otherwise because they live in another place in the country. So, it’s actually not just a replacement for meetings we were having anyways, but we’ve met digitally like something extra.

But for many respondents, having a large number of people on a digital platform interfered with the flow of communication and could thus destroy the
need for participation and affection, as mentioned above. As this research was conducted after the first lockdown period, further investigation would be needed to understand the role of technology as a satisfier over the long term. It seems relevant to consider how needs are satisfied, providing people with necessary skills and competencies to navigate increasingly digitalized worlds, but also on how to disconnect and reduce time online.

As the lockdown measures created disruption in everyday life, what had previously been normalized in routine and habitual practices was called into question. The meanings around “work” clearly changed, as its associated tasks were no longer located in a space outside of the home and the ability to WFH could lead to need satisfaction for those who were able to coordinate such activities with other activities in the home. The meanings around food also changed, as discussed above. For instance, daily meals at home became more frequent and meal preparation was regarded as a leisure activity and a way of passing time rather than a way to cater to a biophysical need. For some families, breakfast and lunch became a chore, as it competed for time with other activities in the home. The meanings around food also changed, as discussed above. For instance, daily meals at home became more frequent and meal preparation was regarded as a leisure activity and a way of passing time rather than a way to cater to a biophysical need. For some families, breakfast and lunch became a chore, as it competed for time with other activities in the home.

Before [the pandemic]... we were never all five [together] for breakfast [during weekdays]... I think that’s almost never happened... and then these changes came... the travel part [in the mornings] disappeared, and then it was also natural that we... saw each other in the mornings, all of us... What meant most to me, that’s that time with my family which I haven’t had before... I could be working, of course, but then there’s a value in... having the opportunity to sit [out] here on the porch and eat [together] now this morning.

And yet, meal preparation for people living alone could also be a chore, as it competed for time with other practices such as WFH. As Lena (36, Geneva), who lived by herself, explained, cooking for one person multiple times a day had become a constraint whereas in the past it had been a pleasure and a hobby. She missed the cafeteria at her workplace and had a hard time working while cooking all of her meals alone. Other ways in which meanings, combined with other elements of practices, could lead to needs not being satisfied might involve, for example, situations where a person’s need for affection through physical contact cannot be substituted by virtual exchanges.

Having social relations in and outside of the home was one way of satisfying multiple needs because these forms of “social interactions” (Halkier 2020) had a coordinating effect across practices. They relate to the practices of socializing and maintaining social relations with others, but also have to do with household configurations and the presence (or not) of children in homes. Those living alone expressed the most frustration about the lack of mobility and social interactions, as well as affection and idleness as human needs were harder for them to satisfy. Lena (36, Geneva) continued to explain that

Well, two things are linked: not going to work, which was the rhythm of the week, and living alone, which was the moment of daily socialization... there’s been no more physical movement, and as a result, there’s been no more human contact, that’s the two big things.

Nevertheless, some respondents managed to fulfill social needs in new ways, relying on renewed or new spaces of togetherness, considered by Max-Neef (1991) as a satisfier to the need for affection. Bjørg (42, Oslo) declared that “there were lots of other people out there who wanted to be social. So, I’ve talked a lot more with my friends on Zoom, for instance... Suddenly I met with them a lot more often than previously. I’ve got a lot of friends in Germany, who I talked to on a regular basis.” If multiple and intersecting practices are to satisfy needs and achieve “sustainable well-being,” it follows that how these practices are performed and coordinated by different people sharing a certain space-time configuration (such as the home) would need to maintain common meanings around what the “good life” or “sustainable consumption” entail, the adequate material arrangements required to perform a specific practice, and the complementary skills and competencies. We now turn to the role of social interactions in making the meanings around “lockdown practices” explicit and what this reveals about the normativity of social practices.

**Distinguishing needs from desires in discourses: toward “normative accountability” in practices**

The lockdown period resulted in a specific time-space configuration that prompted reflections on how people understand the good life – with relevant discursive expressions finding their way into our interviews. We draw on the “social interaction” concept to discuss a dynamic in which new ways of doing were thought to be (un)desirable, thus addressing the normative accountability of practices (Halkier 2020; see also Rouse 2007). Through in-depth discussions, respondents were able to distinguish between what we as researchers could analyze as “fundamental human needs” (clearly not named as such in the interviews) and what they themselves understood to be less essential desires. While in the previous sections, we interpreted changes in practices in relation to satisfiers and needs, we now draw...
from the reflections made spontaneously by research participants. These reflections were spurred both by practices that people were missing – such as socializing in person and mobility that satisfy the needs for affection and freedom, respectively – and through new “lockdown practices” that had emerged. For instance, Julia (31, Geneva) said, “I need freedom of movement…[but] I realized that my material needs were possibly less than what I had envisaged.” How people came to terms with missed or shifted practices during times of disruptions has implications for sustainable well-being studies, as some people recognized their ability to meet needs and achieve high levels of well-being with less material and energy. Although we were neither able to quantify actual impacts nor to measure well-being objectively, the analysis of people’s discourses around their understanding of “the good life” in relation to everyday practices was quite revealing.

While typical “wants” or “desires” discursively reproduced in consumer society may be tied to traveling across the world, going on shopping sprees, or eating convenience food, the lockdown seemed to create a heightened sense of awareness around other kinds of needs such as being able to have social relations, to create spaces of togetherness with household members, or to access fulfilling activities, among others. As Carol (61, Geneva) noted, “The fact of being locked down, of not being able to move around in terms of consumption, you limit yourself to things that are important and that you really need.” Some respondents applied this line of thinking in relation to their consumption choices, which led to reflections around how much is enough, living simply, or what we might term sufficiency principles, as aptly captured in Yvonne’s (30, Oslo) reflections.

I thought about it here the other day, about what we actually need in this life. And I don’t know if any actual changes have come out of it, but I do know that I’ve thought more about it…materially speaking. I don’t need that much stuff, I don’t need that fancy food, I can be happy without that. I don’t need to see friends every day, I can get by with a much simpler life on many levels. I don’t need to travel that much, I’m alright. So, I’ve at least become more conscious…around me not kind of having such a large need for so many things in life…simple [living] can be pretty nice.

Many respondents were able to make a clear link between maintaining good health and well-being given the restriction of movement and the overall sanitary situation. Exercising was explicitly referred to as a “need,” as one respondent put it: “I’ve noticed that I had a greater need for…moving and working out than I’ve realized; to be able to go to training [sessions], it’s…actually a big ‘everyday need’” (Anna, 24, Oslo). In this remark, Anna apparently saw as a need something that might qualify as a satisfier for the need for subsistence, leisure, or freedom. Having both been laid off work for a while and suffering an injury, Oliver (32, Oslo) also reflected on what he saw as a “need” for movement and contact with nature, although the former would again be qualified as a satisfier for subsistence, leisure, or freedom and the later as a satisfier for affection or leisure.

As soon as I became inactive and couldn’t work out either, my energy levels fell drastically. And I’ve realized that the…more I sit on the sofa, the less energy I have…To go for walks, get out. The need for that is big. Social needs I was aware about before. But to just get out and get fresh air; how much that affects the mood and [sense of] joy…quite a lot.

Participants were also able to identify contextual factors – what we understand and interpret as “satisfiers” – which have to be in place for different needs to be satisfied in a lockdown situation, particularly tied to living situations. This was most evident for people who could benefit from spacious indoor accommodation and access to outdoor spaces. One participant, Adele (32, Geneva), who moved with two small children from an apartment in downtown Geneva to a friend’s apartment in the mountains for a few weeks during the lockdown, explained how access to these spaces led her to reconsider her living arrangements.

Yeah, my need for space, greenery, to be in a place where I am able to welcome people, in fact that’s what made me….finally, I realized that in a flat I can’t have a party, I can’t welcome people, I can’t welcome my friends with their kids or friends without kids, you see, I just want to have a huge garden where I can have a barbecue and….well I think that the big lesson for me is to accept that the city center is not for me anymore, and that life in the countryside may not be so bad.

Reflexivity was therefore oriented toward “lockdown practices” but also around future imaginaries of “the good life.” A notable theme in the participants’ discursive reflection was tied to the pace of life. Many realized that they experienced well-being through “slow living,” by allowing more time for performing certain practices, or by participating in fewer events and activities. Jeanne (40, Geneva) explained, “The rhythm has slowed down, I’m much more relaxed and I think more before doing things…I really didn’t have a minute, whereas now I listen to myself more, to my rhythm.” Helena (57, Oslo), too, echoed this sentiment and framed it as a lesson learned for herself and her family.
And then I hope that...life is a little calmer, personally I think that it’s very nice. That we’re more outside in nature, more out hiking...I won’t say that I’m that stressed out, but there’s something about it being absolutely alright to live a little more slowly as well...I really hope that will continue...The fact that we’ve been this much at home and haven’t been able to travel or be very social has given [us] a calmness. It’s nice not having as many choices. Just be, and not having to go anywhere.

There were many similar experiences. For example, Emma (27, Geneva) reported, “the lockdown was amazing because you don’t do anything, there’s no choice ‘oh, sorry there is COVID.’” Elsa (27, Geneva) remarked similarly, after a long day of work, “I knew I had that call [with a girlfriend] so that was enough for me, I didn’t need to fill up my day and do a thousand things all the time. Now I feel like I can be satisfied with less.” Respondents who worked less during the lockdown also reflected on work-life balance which has implications for “sustainable well-being” – as curtailed revenues can also lead to reduced environmental impacts, although long-term effects on well-being would need to be ascertained. Due to the pandemic, Linnea (36, Oslo) had been partially laid-off from her job, which had until that time kept her very busy. She found that the slower pace of life enabled by less work made her happy. She thus contemplated changing jobs in the future to have more free time. On these grounds, we note that the lockdowns provided a certain “deceleration” effect as an antidote to what Rosa (2003) has termed the “social acceleration” of society – a crucial feature of modernity whereby the pace of life and scope of quotidian activities constantly increase to new normative standards. With this deceleration comes growing levels of, and expectations for, consumption that “ratchets up” along with increasingly resource-intensive practices (Shove 2003, 3). This “deceleration” effect, then, was not only brought about by lockdown measures but also by people’s discursive reflections on needs and desires.

However, the changes experienced by respondents were not always positive. Jeanne (40, Geneva) reflected on lessons learned from the early stages of the lockdown when restrictions were the most severe, involving injunctions to stay home, with restaurants, bars, and gathering places closed, and very limited interactions with others.

Yeah, there were some complicated moments... it’s a pretty dark and obscure memory, but one that I don’t forget and that makes me feel better today, so in the end... it allowed me to open my eyes... so it made me move forward, it made me grow so much... I listen to myself more and I live day by day, and I take advantage of the present moment, and then I learn to accept myself as I am with what I have, and to feel good on my own.

Regardless of how people experienced “lockdown practices,” their ability to distinguish between what they felt they really needed – upon reflection – and what they themselves qualified as unnecessary was heightened due to measures that restricted their individual freedom and choices. The distinction between needs and satisfiers was not clearly expressed as such, but people also seemed to realize the difference between the goal of achieving well-being and the means necessary to do so. Through this analysis, we also see the importance of more subjective readings of well-being such as happiness or life satisfaction, but also other emotions such as loneliness and anxiety.

Interview participants were focused primarily on personal well-being and that of their immediate friends and family. Fewer reflections were made on how the lockdown might have led people to reflect on societal or collective well-being. This may have been due to the research design, as questions were oriented toward everyday practices in the home. It may also be the case that “caring for others” was the backdrop against which people’s lives were playing out, as the injunction to stay home was presumably to protect the spread of the virus to the wider society. When participants did reflect on societal well-being, such statements were linked to overconsumption and how reduced consumption, as experienced during the lockdown, would be better for society as a whole. Shorter work hours were also seen as beneficial to well-being, if organized at a societal level. More generally, some participants did reflect on how the lockdown was a period during which people reassessed what is important at a societal level, as explained by one participant:

Well, I’m thinking that... this [lockdown] period has given us the opportunity to reflect and to consider how we live our lives otherwise... perhaps first and foremost... one has seen that the local environment [i.e., physical and social environment, local community; Norwegian: nærmiljøet] is important, that one should kind of build up the local environment as much as possible (Aksel, 33, Oslo).

For many respondents, the sense of community seemed to be more oriented toward an immediate community and not, for example, a sense of global solidarity.

Discussion and conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to disruptions in everyday lives, with implications for resource use and associated environmental impacts, but also for how people have been able to live a “good life” during an unsettling period, where new practices may have emerged, old practices renewed, or existing
practices transformed. In consumption studies, social practice theory has been applied to understand how changes in the past and the present can be understood as embedded in everyday life, involving materials, skills, and meanings, and, more recently, social interactions, but notably also connections between these elements and intersections between practices. We build on previous studies that see social practices as “satisfiers” for meeting human needs (Sahakian and Anantharaman 2020). Our results demonstrate that there is great variability in how this plays out. In some instances, needs can be satisfied by specific practice configurations. For example, WFH as a lockdown practice was an “orchestrating” practice (Watson 2016) which had implications for how other practices were organized and coordinated and, in turn, how needs were satisfied. In some instances, WFH led to greater flexibility toward achieving work-life balance, thus satisfying needs for subsistence and affection. But in other instances, different elements – such as insufficient indoor space, solely virtual social relations, or inability to set boundaries between work and leisure times – could lead to the non-satisfaction of needs around WFH.

During the lockdown, practices intersected in new ways. For instance, social activity and leisure projects became increasingly attached to food-related practices such as home cooking with household members and to outdoor activities such as going for bicycle rides or taking long walks to meet non-household members. Building on Halkier (2020), we note that social interactions are crucial to understanding how and in what way (more or less sustainable) practices are performed through different configurations and how this relates to human-need satisfaction. Social interactions are all the more relevant in moments of disruption as new ways of doing must be coordinated with others, for people living in common space-time configurations, but also with those who may be at a physical distance but nonetheless virtually “appear” in the household through digital means. For people sharing the same physical space and in the case of WFH, this lockdown practice led to new ways of organizing everyday life with others that involved tradeoffs in how spaces and digital bandwidth are used for different activities in the home such as schooling and cooking, but also discussions around the meaning of work and work-life balance.

Having to maneuver home spaces in this way implies that there may be tradeoffs between how different needs are satisfied, depending on social interactions in the home: satisfying a need for one person (for subsistence, by WFH) may hinder the possibility of another person to satisfy their need (for affection or freedom, for example). This links to research by Hargreaves and Middlemiss (2020, 195) on the importance of social relationships in influencing energy demand where they stress that “how we consume [energy] is shaped by relationship of conflict, consensus, collaboration, companionship, solidarity and oppression with our fellow human beings.” For needs to be satisfied for all people in the same household, intersecting practices need to be understood in the same way, and carried out in ways that are normatively agreed upon with others as the way they ought to or should be done. Such forms of coordination related to the opportunities for discursive reflection that the lockdown measures made possible was a disruption that allowed people to pay renewed attention to routine aspects of daily life. This emergent reflexivity emphasizes the fluid boundaries between tacit routine and explicit reflection in practice performances (Halkier 2020). Some respondents reflected on what they lacked – equipment, space, social relations, activity – while others described the privileges that helped them to satisfy needs and to perform various practices. The situation sparked an awareness around not only needs themselves, but the means required to satisfy them. For instance, many participants realized that various forms of “slow living” achieved through greater work-life flexibility contributed positively to their sense of well-being. In many ways, learning that they could fulfill needs while having and doing less, some respondents were able to reflexively distinguish fundamental needs from their (potentially infinite) desires.

Turning to the environmental sustainability of changing practices in the lockdown context, we must recognize that any environmental benefits or negative impacts would need to be assessed holistically and ascertained over the long term. We note, however, that working, cooking, and relying on digital tools for social interaction increased energy use in the home. Food consumption is more ambiguous, as some people preferred to experiment with plant-based diets or were more careful with food waste, while others cooked excessively and experienced weight gain. In terms of mobility, many participants claimed that driving or bicycling was more desirable than public transport as private automobiles and bicycles became “sanctuaries” (Urry 2016) from infection risk. For leisure, long-distance travel came to a halt and shopping in physical stores was limited to only essential goods. Yet, people shopped online, and – though not in the scope of this study – airline travel picked up when restrictions were eased and vaccinations began to be rolled out. This relates to the need to distinguish between voluntary versus imposed limits. As Kallis (2019, 61)
suggests, “we shouldn’t limit ourselves just because there are limits, but because we want to do so.” By framing some forms of limitation as “part of a desire for freedom, justice and sustainability,” Kallis (2019, 56) links the concept of “voluntary limitation” to the notion of autonomy, building on Gorz (1989). The practices that were reconfigured due to the lockdown were performed under both constraint and autonomy, depending on the extent to which new practice configurations were embraced or reluctantly adopted. This observation relates to normativity in practices and how their performance was coordinated with others, or social interactions.

Certain households in both Oslo and Geneva had an advantage when it came to achieving well-being under a situation of societal constraint. People with larger homes, fewer care responsibilities, more time, and social support seemed to fare better than others sharing small spaces, balancing care with work responsibilities, or lacking social support – for example, living alone. While these households might be seen as being more privileged in terms of material goods, there were other skills and competencies that helped certain people get along better than others, such as the ability to manage their time or handle the digitalization of work and life activities. Lockdown practices thus revealed how social inequality can be a barrier for needs fulfillment: those in our sample with access to larger private spaces were more satisfied with how they experienced the pandemic than those living alone in smaller spaces. The question of inequality in access to space was all the more exacerbated among less privileged groups, including those in the lower income ranges in our study. Another study in this special issue by Sahakian et al. (2022) – focused on students and their changing practices during the pandemic – also demonstrates the significance of access to space. Inequalities moreover relate to how people are able to cope with what is normatively accepted as the proper way to do things and the skills they make use of when negotiating this normativity with others. Living with others can be a form of support, but it can also require skills in managing tradeoffs between how different practices are performed. This is concerning, as it suggests that future constraints – such as those that might be brought on by erratic climate conditions and their resulting negative social and environmental impacts – will be more burdensome to people with fewer means. It is for this reason that policy measures must ensure that everyone is able to obtain the resources that might be needed under duress, as is proposed, for example, by the notion of universal basic services (Coote and Percy 2020). Providing access to green public spaces, safe and hygienic public transport, care services in or near the home, co-working spaces in proximate distance to residences, or secure bicycle lanes would allow people to achieve greater well-being during a pandemic or any other disruption to everyday life, along with services that might allow for development of various coping competencies, including time management and digital skills.

This finding leads us to finally emphasize some key questions that warrant more attention from researchers and policy makers: How is access to the various elements that support socially and environmentally sustainable lockdown practices unequally distributed in societies? Given the relative wealth of our participants in Oslo and Geneva, such a question is all the more necessary in contexts with greater inequalities. Further, what are the consequences of this unequal distribution on sustainable well-being and how does shifting to some of these practices pose new forms of risk for certain social groups? A first step might be to recognize how societies can plan for the delivery of basic services, which would ensure that “sustainable well-being” could be achieved for all people. Toward this aim, an understanding of the complex socio-material dynamics of living during a pandemic offers a glimpse into what practice configurations either hinder or support well-being.

Notes
1. Unless otherwise stated, “the lockdown” refers to the period from first lockdown in these countries (March–April 2020) until the time of data collection (June–July 2020). While society was partially reopened in both countries when the interviews were conducted, daily life was still characterized by restrictions and disrupted or changed practices.
2. Everyday Life in a Pandemic (https://everydaylifeinapandemic.wordpress.com).
3. For instance, all Norwegian and most Swiss households had access to high-speed Internet.
4. See, for example, Heidenstrøm and Hembøk (2022) who discuss the potential for online-food delivery and meal-box schemes to be more or less sustainable based on consumers’ practices related to food in Norway.

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ORCID
Orlane Moynat https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1381-9288
Johannes Volden https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1213-480X
Marlyne Sahakian https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0196-7865

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Appendix 1. Description of Max-Neef’s needs categories

| Needs according to axiological categories | Needs according to existential categories |
|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Being                                   | Having                                    |
| Refers to personal or collective attributes that are expressed as nouns (e.g., physical health, mental health, adaptability, self-esteem, sense of belonging) | Refers to institutions, norms, mechanisms, tools, laws, and so forth that can be expressed in one or more words (e.g., food, shelter, savings, friendships, work) |
| Doing                                   | Interacting                               |
| Refers to personal or collective actions that can be expressed as verbs (e.g., rest, cooperate, experiment, play) | Refers to locations or milieus in the sense of times and spaces (e.g., living environment, social setting, space of togetherness) |
| Subsistence                             | Physical and mental health, food, shelter, living environment |
| Protection                              | Security, autonomy, solidarity             |
| Affection                                | Friendship, relationship with nature, express emotions, space of togetherness |
| Understanding                            | Critical conscience, curiosity, experiment, communities |
| Participation                            | Adaptability, responsibilities, cooperate, interact, participative interaction |
| Idleness                                 | Imagination, games, peace of mind, relax, play, free time |
| Creation                                 | Passion, invent, design, spaces for expression, temporal freedom |
| Identity                                 | Self-esteem, values and norms, commit oneself, social rhythms |
| Freedom                                  | Autonomy, choose, temporal and spatial plasticity |

Note: Adapted from Max-Neef (1991).
Appendix 2. Households compositions, and configurations

Note: The Norwegian sample contains 28 households and 29 participants. In one household, two members took part in the interview. Both participants are included in the figures – therefore, $N = 49$. “Families” refers to households with children. “Home office” includes all respondents that were mainly WFH. Among these participants ($N = 32$), seven were (primarily) students. For those laid off, one was on temporary leave, three were on partial temporary leave, and one lost their internship permanently – all due to the pandemic. Those having “regular work days” still left their homes to work and included essential workers such as nurses and manual laborers.

Appendix 3. Lockdown measures in Geneva and Oslo

| Time period          | Geneva (Switzerland)                                                                 | Oslo (Norway)                                                                 |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| **Lockdown** (March–April) | • People asked and advised to stay home and to only leave the house for mandatory purposes (e.g., food shopping or medical appointment)  
• Universities, schools, and kindergartens closed  
• Cultural and sports facilities closed  
• Gathering of more than 5 people completely prohibited in public and private spaces, for some duration (fines applied)  
• Social events of more than 100 people prohibited  
• Restaurants, bars, and other gathering places closed, except for “essentials” (e.g., grocery stores)  
• Border closed and controls enacted (no more shopping tourism in France for Geneva-based people, whereby prices for food can be approximately 1/3 cheaper)  
• Social distancing recommended (1 meter outdoors, 2 meters indoors)  
• Home working compulsory (when possible, leading to some ambiguity)  
• Strong restrictions on international travel: list of at-risk regions and quarantines applied | • Advice against indoor socializing with non-household members  
• Gyms and swimming pools closed  
• Sport and culture events canceled  
• Shops, restaurants, and cafés allowed to remain open  
• Universities, schools, and kindergartens closed  
• Many workplaces closed; WFH recommendations  
• Social distancing recommended (1 meter outdoors, 2 meters indoors)  
• Bars closed and alcohol-serving banned in restaurants  
• Many services closed (e.g., hairdressers, tattoo parlors)  
• Strong restrictions on international travel; some restrictions on national travel. General advice against all unnecessary travel. Traveling to personal cabins (summer houses) or secondary residences in the countryside prohibited |
| **Post-lockdown** (May–June) | • Services that attract a limited volume of clients were allowed to open again (e.g., daycare facilities, hairdressers, self-service shops, beauty salons)  
• More shops and schools were reopened  
• Travel restrictions eased, list of at-risk regions updated often  
• Reopening of vocational schools, universities, museums, zoos, and libraries  
• People could slowly go back to work if wanted  
• Educational institutions, services, and bars gradually re-opened | • Travel restrictions slowly eased  
• Educational institutions, services, and bars gradually re-opened  
• Recommended social distance reduced to 1 meter indoors  
• Public events for up to 50 people allowed  
• Public transport capacity reduced to enable social distancing in transit  
• Continued WFH recommendations for most businesses  
• Continued advice against large gatherings and excessive travel |