

HOW CAN MUNICIPALITIES SUPPORT LOCAL SUFFICIENCY INITIATIVES?

FULFILL worked with citizens, who get together to foster sufficiency in their communities, for example, by founding cargo-bike initiatives, living in co-housing spaces or advocating for clean air. This policy brief explains how municipalities can better support local sufficiency initiatives in their strive towards more sufficient communities that benefit both the planet and the well-being of its inhabitants.

Urban sufficiency initiatives have an antagonistic relation towards dominant unsustainable rationalities and practice, offering recessive alternatives development options. They are always endangered because they work against the prevailing rationalities and selection pressures of industrial societies. However, these pockets of alternative futures should be preserved because they could become pivotal when ecological limitations begin to shape the development of urban systems.

In a short-term perspective strategic niche management (SNM) could offer protection from the full force of prevailing selection pressures within unsustainable urban systems (Kemp, et al 2000). FULFILL identified four areas of strategic niche management – similar to Moser et al. (2018) - where municipalities can support local sufficiency initiatives:

Resources and competences



Sufficiency initiatives rely on voluntary work. Cities can offer financial support and training especially in financial, administrative, and legal matters, which are usually not a core competence of local sufficiency initiatives.

Infrastructure and legal conditions



Physical infrastructures, economic and legal frameworks usually promote material and energy-intensive production and consumption patterns (e.g. roads for cars, regulations on food hygiene, expansive land-use planning). Municipalities can adapt urban transport infrastructures and sometimes have scope for developing flexible responses to sufficiency objectives in other areas such as food processing and end-of-life use, planning of the built environment or land-use.

Formal support, venues, and networking



Sufficiency initiatives are usually valuable organizations of benefit for the public and should be officially recognized and treated as such. They should have central contact persons and guidance when dealing with local administrations. Ideally, local networking and mutual learning among the initiatives also in cooperation with municipal staff could be encouraged, e.g., by offering venues, communication, and training facilities. Furthermore, municipalities can offer space and venues for meetings and public engagement, including collaborations with local housing cooperatives and neighbourhood associations.

Political legitimization and communicative support



Many sufficiency initiatives struggle to survive. A continuous challenge is the recruiting of a voluntary and active membership. During our interactions with the initiatives, they often indicated difficulties reaching the general public. In that context, they would welcome public recognition and support. Municipalities could directly inform citizens about existing initiatives in their community, but they could also be a mediator between sufficiency initiatives and potential donors. For example, they could mediate public private partnerships, networking, and association. Eventually, sufficiency initiatives could become partners in the planning and development of cities and towns. Sufficiency principles could be integrated in municipal strategies and planning. There is evidence that especially, the introduction of concrete targets and timetables seem to motivate cooperation, e.g., with the introducing carbon budgets at municipal level. Regional food cooperatives as well as repair and sharing initiatives could make valuable contributions not only to meeting climate change mitigation targets, but also to improving neighbourhoods, citizenship and social cohesion.