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Sufficiency: A systematic literature review

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Discussion Research ID	DPR-2026-1197
Year	2022
Field	Environmental Science
DOI	10.1016/j.ecolecon.2022.107380
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Licence	CC-BY
Original source	Ecological Economics
Permanent link	https://discussionpublishers.com/research/5ebff0d8-d968-4e99-add8-92ebc7b745ae
Publisher	Discussion Publishers discussionpublishers.com

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Cite as: Jessica Jungell-Michelsson, Pasi Heikkurinen (2022). Sufficiency: A systematic literature review. Discussion Publishers,

Abstract

The making of sustainable economies calls for sufficiency in production and consumption. The discussion, however, lacks a shared understanding on what it means to operationalize sufficiency. In this article, we review and analyze the concept of sufficiency with a focus on its linkages to different economic scales (with a focus on micro- and macroeconomics) and economic actors (particularly consumers and producers). Altogether 307 articles were screened, resulting in a final data set of 94 peer-reviewed articles. In addition to the core assumption of enoughness, we found three premises describing the concept: (1) complementarity of capitals, (2) social metabolism, and (3) altruism. In the reviewed literature, sufficiency is understood as both an end in itself and a means for bringing consumption and production within ecological limits. By conducting the first systematic literature review on sufficiency, the study explicates a more integrated understanding of sufficiency and highlights the need to treat sufficiency across economic scales and actors. In future research, empirical work should be emphasized to grasp the contextual varieties in the operationalization of sufficiency.

Keywords: sufficiency, sustainable economy, ecological limits, social metabolism, altruism, consumers, produce

Full text

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Original record: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2022.107380
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2022.107380