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Towards a New Generation of Social Policy: Commonalities between Sustainable Welfare and the IPCC

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ABSTRACT

The climate crisis calls for a new generation of social policy compatible with planetary limits and economic postgrowth circumstances. This article analyses how some of the pillars of such a new generation of social policy may be conceptualized by highlighting commonalities between the most recent IPCC report and the sustainable welfare literature.

Methodologically triangulating content analysis of the IPCC report, literature review and qualitative data analysis from citizen forums, we argue that this convergence is particularly evident in four areas central to policymaking: the importance of human needs in eco-social policymaking; the identification of governance structures suitable for a social-ecological transformation; the requirement to co-develop policies via a deliberative, «bottom-up» element; and the need to decouple welfare provision from economic growth.

KEYWORDS *Climate crisis, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), sustainable welfare, eco-social policies, degrowth/postgrowth.*

1. Introduction

Social policy developed as an academic discipline to counter social risks

arising from capitalist development and industrialization (Flora and Heid-

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enheimer 1981; Johansson *et al.* 2016). Western welfare states were founded or expanded in the post-war decades on the premises of economic growth, high levels of employment and material welfare. However, welfare states and systems now face a range of multiple and interconnected challenges (Corlet Walker *et al.* 2021), including rising inequality, demographic challenges and, especially, the crises of the climate and ecological systems that suggest a structural transformation of the traditional Fordist welfare-work nexus. A range of authors (Büchs 2021a; Corlet Walker *et al.* 2021; Koch 2022a; Hirvilammi *et al.* 2023) have pointed out that the traditional answer to these challenges and climate change in particular cannot anymore be the provision of additional economic growth.

Comparative studies on the potential of absolutely decoupling GDP growth from environmental resource use and greenhouse gas emissions (Haberl *et al.* 2020) keep indicating that this has so far been achieved in short periods only and not at all at the required global level or at the required speed to meet climate targets. By contrast, the current result of economic expansion and corresponding greenhouse gas emissions is that the planet is now faced with a «climate emergency» (Gills and Morgan 2020; Ripple *et al.* 2021). Current global temperatures are already 1.2°C above pre-industrial levels with the last decade being the warmest on record (World Meteorological Organization 2021). Meeting the Paris targets of keeping global warming within 1.5°C is increasingly unlikely given that this would mean reducing global carbon emissions by 48% in 2030 and by 80% in 2040 (IPCC 2022a).

Taking a theoretical «sustainable welfare» perspective (Koch and Mont 2016), we ask in this paper how pillars of a new generation of social policy compatible with planetary boundaries and in an economic postgrowth context may be conceptualized. In discussing the enormous policy challenges that the climate emergency constitutes and contributing towards identifying possible mitigation pathways for the rich countries, we specifically build on Chapter 5 of the most recent IPCC (2022b) report: *Demand, services and social aspects of mitigation*. This chapter takes a social science perspective and was as such integrated in the IPCC reports for the first time. Given the enormous emissions reduction potential of demand-side solutions of between 40 and 70% across all sectors (IPCC 2022b, 505), we critically discuss the report's main insights with emphasis on its policy suggestions for social-ecological transformations, highlighting commonalities and synergies with the sustainable welfare literature (Büchs 2021b; Hirvilammi and Koch 2020).

Methodologically triangulating content analysis of the IPCC report, literature review and qualitative data analysis from citizen forums, we argue that this convergence is particularly evident in four central policy areas that we address successively. A first commonality between the sustainable welfare literature and the IPCC report is the centrality of

human needs when understanding welfare and wellbeing within planetary limits and the discussion of appropriate needs satisfiers. A second similarity relates to the identification of drivers and governance structures capable of bringing about social-ecological transformation. Third, there is the joint hypothesis that the development of a new generation of (eco-)social policy requires a deliberative, «bottom-up» element, which we elaborate using a case of citizen forums on needs satisfaction in Sweden. Lastly, the emphasis on the need to decouple welfare provision and social policy from economic growth is also shared by the sustainable welfare literature and the IPCC report. We develop this aspect by considering both demand and supply aspects of welfare. While sections 2-5 are dedicated to the four areas of convergence between sustainable welfare and the IPCC report, the conclusion summarizes the argument and delineates future research avenues.

2. The centrality of human needs

Given the continuing lack of evidence for absolute decoupling of gross domestic product (GDP) growth, material resource use and carbon emissions, various growth-critical perspectives have been tabled to re-embed Western economies and societies in planetary boundaries and meet the Paris climate targets. «Degrowth» (Schmelzer *et al.* 2022), for example, aims to achieve this through a significant decrease in material and energy throughputs, while also reducing structural inequalities and maintaining critical levels of well-being. However, if (perceived and/or actual) wellbeing losses are to be kept within critical limits during the transformation, a range of social institutions, which historically evolved with and are currently coupled to the provision of economic growth, would need to change at roughly the same speed and various scales (local, national and global) (Büchs and Koch 2017). This opens up a range of questions and problems regarding the complexity of such change. The emerging concept of sustainable welfare (Koch and Mont 2016) contributes towards reducing this complexity by addressing the intersection of the environment and welfare. It raises normative questions such as whose welfare should actually be safeguarded and argues for an extension of the distributive principles underlying existing welfare systems to include those affected in other countries and in the future. Sustainable welfare is hence concerned with the satisfaction of basic needs for all humans (universalizability) now and in the future (intertemporality).

Just as sustainable welfare and degrowth approaches, chapter 5 of the mentioned report (IPCC 2022b, 512-513) pleads for an abandonment

of economic growth¹ as overall policy goal due to a lack of evidence of absolute decoupling of GDP growth from environmental resource use and greenhouse gas emissions: «Worldwide trends reveal that at best only relative decoupling (resource use grows at a slower pace than GDP) was the norm during the twentieth century», while «absolute decoupling (when material resource use declines as GDP grows) is rare, observed only during recessions or periods of low or no economic growth». Though potential for absolute decoupling is acknowledged for OECD countries, the scales for this to happen are estimated as «insufficient for mitigation pathways» (IPCC 2022b, 513). Also, the policy conclusions drawn from this are very similar to the sustainable welfare and degrowth/postgrowth literatures (Büchs and Koch 2017): that economic growth should be deprioritized in policymaking and replaced by eudaimonic wellbeing parameters, specifically human needs. While, in contrast to «wants» and subjective wellbeing parameters, needs are assumed to be constant over generations and space as well as limited in number, needs satisfiers vary with social, economic, cultural, national and local contexts and can be more or less environmentally sustainable (Doyal and Gough 1990; Max-Neef 1991; see 4. below).

If, as the sustainable welfare literature has highlighted, basic or universal human needs are useful conceptualizations of wellbeing within planetary boundaries, we now argue that the IPCC (2022b, 514) Decent Living Standards (DLS) framework constitutes an appropriate way to identify and operationalize low-carbon needs satisfiers which may be supplied to individuals and groups/communities, in locally contextualized divisions of labour between markets, states (as *primus inter pares*, see section 3), civil society and commons. Consumption, for example, correlates with vital dimensions of human wellbeing, but «only», as the IPCC (2022b, 514) stresses, «up to a threshold» (see also Fuchs *et al.* 2021). DLS indicators can be applied to serve as «tools to clarify this socio-economic benchmark and identify well-being for all compatible [with] mitigation potential» (IPCC 2022b, 516). When discussing provisioning patterns of human needs, the IPCC emphasizes the role of participation, trust-building and interrelational solutions that also provide greater equality.

While we return to the transformational potential of deliberative methods towards achieving sustainable welfare in section 4, we would like to stress here the critical importance of a policy strategy that takes the unprecedented amount of structural inequality as point of departure (Piketty 2014) as this translates to different challenges for different

¹ Other chapters of the IPCC report take a less growth critical perspective. In contrast to these chapters and just like it is customary in the sustainable welfare literature, chapter 5 thoroughly engages with the academic literature on the potentials of (relative and absolute) decoupling of GDP growth from material resource use and greenhouse gas emissions.

household groups. High-income households, on the one hand, consume and demand energy far greater than necessary for DLS. This is exemplified by the fact that just 2-4% of the global population flew in 2018 with 1% emitting 50% of CO₂ from aviation. Since, in an environmentally constrained world, the lifestyles of the rich contribute towards undermining the potentials for needs satisfaction of poorer households, we second the IPCC's call to regulate, at various including global scales, what it refers to as the «polluter elite» (IPCC 2022b, 524). This could take the form of wealth taxation or caps on income and/or wealth beyond which a 100% taxation rate would kick in (Buch-Hansen and Koch 2019 and 5. below). Conversely, low-income households are often in need of basic infrastructures to satisfy their needs. Sustainable-welfare authors (Bohnenberger 2020; Büchs 2021a) have here pointed out that policymakers may facilitate basic need satisfaction via the provision of universal basic incomes (UBI), universal basic services (UBS) or combinations of the two.

Going some way towards identifying a «virtuous» policy circle (Hirvilammi 2020) of sustainable welfare in postgrowth contexts, the IPCC's Avoid, Shift, Improve (ASI) framework translates DLS into more concrete policy suggestions (IPCC 2022b, 527), often serving as what Max-Neef (1991) called synergetic needs satisfiers, that is, targeting and sustainably satisfying more than one human need at a time. Under «Avoid» fall, among many other things, flights, food waste and processed food, cars, meat and unnecessary packaging. «Support» policies include the facilitation of cycling, walking, public transport, vegetarian, organic and seasonal diets, while «Improve» recommendations stretch from the expansion of renewable electricity and passive houses via the facilitation of own food production to optimized recycling facilities.

3. Governance structures

Chapter 5 of the IPCC report (IPCC 2022b, 564-569) identifies behavioural, socio-cultural and institutional drivers of both current growth-oriented as well as alternative sufficiency-oriented production and consumption patterns and discusses the corresponding potentials of alternative symbolic meanings, social practices and governance structures. Again, it is remarkable that the sustainable welfare and degrowth literatures have developed similar arguments taking into account horizontal and vertical governance issues (Sabato *et al.* 2018) many of which cut across the administrative borders of nation states. We refer here mostly to alternative governance structures.

The IPCC (2022b, 556) discusses the nature and likely sequence of social-ecological transformation processes, highlighting the significance of «bottom-up» collective action by civil-society groups and social

movements (see 4. below). It also stresses the transformative potential of what initially may constitute niche solutions following local initiatives when upscaled to national and transnational (especially EU) regulatory levels, without ignoring the difficult issues associated with upscaling of local solutions. This speaks to the debate on governance and, specifically, the role of the state within sustainable welfare and degrowth circles (Koch 2022b; Barlow *et al.* 2022). Though states, including welfare states, have co-evolved with growth-based capitalism, they can nevertheless play an important role within a transformation towards sustainable welfare in postgrowth contexts (Koch 2020). While state capacity to act in the environmental domain would increase significantly if the growth proviso were replaced by a sustainability proviso, state power could then be used to build transnational, especially European, networks and to act as *primus inter pares* together with various private, semi-private, and non-profit actors to ensure the respect of ecological limits in production and consumption patterns. Since higher-level coordination of ecological and social objectives, legal frameworks and (re-)distributive decisions remain important in postgrowth contexts, states (at local, national and transnational scales and in their steering role of multi-level governance frameworks) remain for the time being indispensable actors in social-ecological transformation processes.

In multi-level and multi-scalar frameworks, higher level frameworks will be required to set ecological and social targets and to facilitate the (re-) distribution of resources to reduce regional and social inequalities. Such redistribution mechanisms will be required at the global level, not least considering the enormous amount of climate debt owed by the global north to the south (Hickel 2020). While such global frameworks are arguably difficult to establish, an example for the European context would be the introduction of caps on wealth and income which would best be carried out at EU level to minimize capital flight across EU member states (Buch-Hansen and Koch 2019). This could be combined with regulation at lower levels about more concrete measures to achieve environmental and social targets as actors at that level have more direct information about local needs and circumstances. Hence, to continue with the example of income and wealth caps, the European level could define a spectrum within which local maximum incomes may oscillate.

4. Deliberating eco-social policies

Both the existing sustainable welfare literature and Chapter 5 of the IPCC report emphasize the importance of participation, trust-building and solutions based on interpersonal relations that provide greater equality when developing integrated eco-social policies and that aid policy implementation (IPCC 2022b, 525). Harnessing participatory and

deliberative policy making processes are however not without challenges, including the difficulties in ensuring equal opportunities for participation as well as the risk of stressing the virtue of consensus at the expense of suppressing transformative ideas which might cause disagreement and disruption (Holdo and Sagrelus 2019; Machin 2019). «Bottom-up» collective initiatives by civil society groups and social movements such as the «just transition» or «degrowth» movements are therefore crucial. In this section we briefly illustrate a research-led process of creating alternative social spaces, through which we can understand behavioural and socio-cultural drivers of social and ecological transformation.

A case in point is deliberative citizen forums on sustainable needs satisfaction in Sweden conducted during 2020, using Max-Neef's Human Scale Development (HSD) methodology (Max-Neef 1991; Koch *et al.* 2021; Lindellee *et al.* 2021; Lee *et al.* 2023). In total eleven forums were conducted (84 participants), four of them in person and the rest digitally due to the pandemic. The participants included residents of large cities, smaller cities as well as countryside in the southern part of Sweden, ranging from teenagers to elderly retirees with various occupational backgrounds. The aim of the forums was to create opportunities for generating new insights and ideas for sustainable welfare, attracting mostly people who are already interested in environmental and social issues and diverse transition initiatives. Therefore, our forum results cannot be said to represent the wishes of the general Swedish public. Neither did we aim to achieve representativeness in terms of socio-demographic backgrounds of the forum participants. For the majority of our forums (7) the participants were already established groups, having met each other previously through various types of community organizations. A few others (4) were open forums for which we used online communication to recruit volunteers. Each meeting lasted about 6 hours, excluding breaks, and the discussions held were recorded and separate notes were taken.

Following Guillen-Royo's (2015) development of Max-Neef's methodology, forum participants discussed each of Max-Neef's fundamental needs (subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, idleness, creation, identity, freedom). The point of departure of the forums was acknowledging the fact that the current ways of satisfying our needs are unsustainable. The participants were encouraged to think about alternative ways of satisfying our needs by reflecting on our concrete daily practices involving the areas such as work, housing, food, and transport. First, the participants critically reflected upon how our current ways of satisfying needs are unsustainable, or that some of our fundamental needs are not met due to certain practices, norms, or institutions («negative satisfiers»). Secondly, the participants discussed how they would imagine to satisfy their needs in environmentally sustainable ways («positive/utopian satisfiers»). The last phase of the

forums focused on discussing action-oriented measures and policy ideas that could bring us closer to the utopian scenarios («bridging satisfiers»), as well as on how certain alternative ways of satisfying our needs might have synergetic effects when combined («synergetic needs satisfiers»). Discussions at the forums covered a wide variety of topics and here we highlight only two principles: the sufficiency perspective and the participatory governance ideal, both of which are also highlighted in the recent IPCC report.

The sufficiency principle endorsed by the recent IPCC report in reference to DLS (section 2) was highly discernable in many positive needs-satisfiers identified by the forum participants. For instance, they argued that the imperative of economic growth should be abandoned and that community needs, instead of commercial interests of large corporations, should steer the production and distribution of essential goods and services. Forum participants also problematized limitless wealth accumulation and that excessive consumption would need to be harnessed by, for instance, introducing global wealth taxation, advertisement-free public spaces, and facilitating non-monetary compensation for productivity gains and performances. Many forum participants advocated a range of participatory governance ideas, such as citizen assemblies at local level, to facilitate shaping our socio-economic systems that are in line with local community needs rather than subordinated to the goals such as economic growth or national competitiveness. As positive needs satisfiers, participatory budgeting, life-long learning opportunity for grassroots democracy and civic engagement, sabbatical years for community engagement, and long-term funding schemes for community initiatives (as opposed to short-term, project-based fundings) were proposed (Koch *et al.* 2021).

Chapter 5 of the IPCC report recognizes that there is a scholarly consensus around the importance of socio-economic equality for participatory governance, impacting the demand-side climate change mitigation policy (IPCC 2022b, 570). In line with this argument, in the Swedish deliberative citizen forums socio-economic equality at the global scale was frequently mentioned as a synergetic needs satisfier - or even as «the meta needs satisfier» - by some participants. This is because collectively reflecting on the ways in which our basic needs are satisfied in our daily life has become an increasingly challenging task, as the material conditions faced by different social groups have diverged greatly due to the unprecedented level of large global inequalities (Piketty 2014; Chancel *et al.* 2022). The forum participants therefore argued for the importance of reducing inequalities as an absolute pre-condition for making broad deliberative discussions in relation to sustainable needs satisfaction.

These forum results - stressing the importance of the sufficiency principle and addressing inequalities - may appear more progressive than the general public opinion. We may interpret these results as a

consequence of the very framing of the citizen forums where the point of departure was to envision utopian scenarios where everyone's fundamental needs are satisfied in sustainable ways, and within planetary boundaries. Such deliberative forums for policy development, however, face challenges in ensuring broad participation of different socio-economic groups and this limitation should be considered in interpretation of the results. Designing policy forums with socio-economically representative pools of populations can therefore increase the legitimacy of outcomes and the general public support for policy suggestions resulting from such processes. Remunerating citizens' participation in participatory governance processes could be one way to encourage economically marginalized groups, as exemplified by the recent French Citizen's Convention for Climate where each participant received a daily allowance (Giraudet *et al.* 2022). Such measures can provide opportunities for participation for the socio-economically disadvantaged groups, who otherwise cannot afford to allocate their time to such time-consuming deliberative practice.

5. Welfare without growth: demand and supply aspects

Both chapter 5 of the IPCC report and the sustainable welfare literature start from the fact that the customary prioritization of economic growth in policymaking is no longer a sustainable answer to the challenges outlined above (Haberl *et al.* 2020; section 1). In this section, we outline the ways in which growth and welfare currently interact, that is, how existing welfare systems rely on and in fact promote growth. We then discuss how the two could be decoupled, considering both the «supply side» of welfare which are sources of welfare state funding and political support for the welfare state, and the «demand side» which refers to the dynamics that create the need for welfare spending and intervention in the first place (Büchs 2021b).

The relationship between welfare and growth is complex and bidirectional. On the one hand, current welfare states depend on economic growth (Bailey 2015; Büchs 2021b; Corlet Walker *et al.* 2021). On the other hand, welfare states influence growth and are usually designed to support growth in these ways (Büchs and Koch 2017; Büchs 2021b). There are several reasons for the current growth dependency of welfare states. First, most welfare spending is currently financed through social insurance contributions and taxes, but these shrink during times of economic crises just when demand for spending increases. While deficit spending can be used to meet demand, future economic growth is then required so that governments are able to service the debt plus interest (Bailey 2015). In the long term however, there is a positive relationship between economic growth and welfare spending as growth has provided the means for

increased welfare state spending. A concern is therefore that an end of economic growth would put an end to welfare state expansion. The second major reason for the growth dependency of welfare states relates to demographic change, i.e. «ageing societies», which generate greater demand for pensions, health and social care (Rouzet *et al.* 2019). These trends are taken to argue that economic growth is required to fund such increasing demand in the future.

However, the sustainable welfare literature has emphasized that welfare states not only depend on economic growth but are often designed to promote growth. While neoliberal economists and policy makers insist that the welfare state hinders growth by «distorting markets», it can be argued that welfare states support growth in various ways, e.g. through redistribution which keeps the rise of inequality, poverty and social exclusion in check (O'Connor 1973; Gough 1979; Offe 1984). While redistribution is seen by neoliberal economists as dampening incentives to invest and work hard, it increases consumer demand and reduces social conflict which are beneficial for growth. Welfare states also seek to increase labour productivity, and hence growth, by improving education, skills and health of the population. They also strengthen consumer demand during economic crises through social security measures and support economic stability through industrial relations. Shifts from «passive» to «activating» social security and labour market policies since the 1990s have also been interpreted as an attempt to support economic growth (Hassel and Palier 2020). These measures seek to increase labour market participation which in itself can contribute to economic growth if formerly informal work now takes place on the market and if it increases production and consumption. «Activation» often involves incentives for social security recipients to take part in training measures which has been understood as an «investment» approach with the aim to increase productivity (Hassel and Palier 2020).

This complex and bi-directional relationship between economic growth and welfare states raises important questions about ways in which the two could be decoupled and how sustainable welfare - needs satisfaction for all within planetary boundaries - could be achieved within a postgrowth context. The sustainable welfare literature has started to discuss proposals for ways in which welfare could be financed without economic growth, especially through alternative types of taxes. Taxes on wealth (assets including land, physical and financial capital, inheritance) are thought to be less dependent on economic growth and have therefore been proposed as possible alternative sources for welfare spending in a postgrowth context (Büchs 2021b; Koch 2022a). In contrast to income and consumption which are flows, assets are stocks which are less affected by economic growth. Taxes on pollution or emission trading schemes are other potential alternative sources for welfare spending. While these instruments can contribute to achieving environmental objectives, they

have limited value as a long-term source of welfare state spending as revenues will decline over time if these objectives are achieved and pollution declines (Speck 2017). As with all other policies, it is important to consider distributional impacts of environmental taxes or trading schemes. Taxes on necessities such as domestic energy usually have regressive impacts, burdening low-income households more than high income households relative to income (Owen and Barrett 2020, Büchs *et al.* 2021a). Progressive distributional impacts have only been observed for taxes on «luxuries» such as air travel, because richer people remain far more likely to participate in air travel and to fly more frequently (Büchs and Mattioli 2022). Distributional impacts from emission trading schemes are harder to assess because the design of schemes differs widely.

A more transformative approach to creating sustainable welfare systems in a postgrowth context would require addressing the demand side for welfare. As mentioned above, the long-term relationship between economic growth and welfare spending has been positive. One possible reason for this is that economic growth has not only provided the means for welfare state expansion but also created new needs for welfare spending. Particularly important here are increases in inequality and labour market insecurity over the last few decades, including in Europe and the United States (Piketty 2014; Chancel *et al.* 2022). As scholars such as Piketty (2014) have argued, inequality in capitalist economic systems tends to increase because the wealthy in society accumulate an ever-growing share of economic resources over time. Wealth inequalities are even more pronounced than income inequalities, and income and wealth at the very top have become more and more concentrated over time (*ibidem*). Inequality can generate a range of issues, for instance lower levels of health and education (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009) as well as social conflict and instability. Most governments therefore put redistributive measures in place to reduce inequality, and analysis shows that these measures do indeed decrease inequality to an extent (Chancel *et al.* 2022). Evidently, this redistributive spending has not been able to contain overall increases in inequality, but merely prevented an even steeper increase in inequality.

Without welfare state intervention, economic growth also tends to increase economic insecurity for some groups in society. Increases in productivity and technological change are among the drivers of economic growth. While these changes create new job opportunities in some sectors, they also involve outdateding of skills and job losses in other sectors. In addition, through rising outsourcing of manufacturing and service jobs from richer to lower income countries, economic growth has been associated with increasing job insecurity in affected sectors. The rise of the «gig economy» has further contributed to an increase in job insecurity and deterioration in the quality of jobs (Fleming 2017).

Per capita health care spending has risen particularly fast out of all types of welfare spending. While population ageing will have been a factor

here, growth-based economic systems have likely also played a part, through cost increases in profit-oriented pharmaceutical and health care industries (Corlet Walker *et al.* 2021) and an increase in chronic diseases (Kyu *et al.* 2018) which are partly driven by profit-oriented systems of provision (Bayliss and Fine 2020) as well as environmental pollution (Fuller *et al.* 2022).

Taking a more preventative approach would hence be key to tackling the mutual dependency between growth and welfare. However, it needs to be acknowledged that such decoupling will face major challenges, not least because prioritising growth in policy-making (in welfare policy as well as all other policy areas) is rooted in existing institutions and socio-cultural contexts. The pursuit of economic growth is inherent in current capitalist relations of production and consumption (Koch 2018), and hence in the institutions that underpin these relations, for instance, if capital owners do not pursue accumulation of surplus value and reinvestment to increase productivity, they would eventually fail to survive in the competitive market dynamic. At the same time, growth prioritisation is rooted in people's minds and bodies, supported by and reflected in hegemonic discourses and social practices (*ibidem*). Examples are the dominance of neoclassical economics training at universities, as well as culturally hegemonic ideas about self-interest, self-responsibility for success, the value of hard work, etc. Further work is required to discuss ways in which institutional and cultural change that can support a transition to a post-growth economic can be promoted.

6. Conclusion

The climate emergency and related ecological threats suggest the development of a new generation of social policy compatible with planetary boundaries and in postgrowth contexts. Our paper contributed towards this by taking a «sustainable welfare» perspective and exploring commonalities and synergies with the social science chapter 5 of the most recent IPCC (2022b) report. We found a convergence of IPCC and sustainable welfare positions in four crucial policy areas:

A first commonality is the centrality of human needs when understanding welfare and wellbeing within planetary limits. Here, we identified the IPCC frameworks of DLS as welcome and innovative operationalizations of synergetic, sustainable and socially inclusive needs satisfiers with the ASI framework going some way towards identifying concrete eco-social policies and their integration.

A second convergence relates to the analysis of drivers of unsustainable production and consumption patterns and the identification of alternative sustainable governance structures capable of bringing about social-ecological transformation. Here, both literatures stress the central

importance of scale, that is, functioning governance networks across local, national and transnational (EU) levels, allowing for niche solutions to be upscaled. There is furthermore agreement that qualitatively different and growth-resilient «eco-social states» will, for the time being, be necessary to steer broader governance networks and to push through policies capable of initiating social-ecological transformations.

This, however, relates to the third convergence that such state action towards a new generation of (eco-)social policy is only feasible if sufficient «bottom-up» pressure is exerted on policymakers and corporations by civil society circles. We elaborated this by presenting key findings from citizen forums in Sweden and corresponding eco-social policy suggestions.

The final commonality is the shared emphasis on the need to decouple welfare provision and social policy from economic growth, both from the supply and demand side. We argue that fundamental economic changes are necessary to reduce inequality and guarantee critical levels of wellbeing to reduce demand for welfare spending, and hence the growth dependency of welfare systems. Future research would need to focus on questions such as how alternative taxation systems for financing welfare may look like, while considering global environmental and social justice.

Yet sustainable economic systems would need to distribute resources and power more evenly from the start, not merely through reactive redistribution. Future research could be designed to help develop economic systems in which working time is reduced and more evenly distributed. This would provide people with the required time to prepare healthier food from scratch, exercise and spend more time with family, friends, neighbours and communities, all of which could improve health and wellbeing in society. The focus should lie here on corresponding changes in labour markets, the health and care sector, community, education and spatial planning that could all lead to diminishing demand for welfare (Dengler and Lang 2022; Laruffa 2022) and how these various developments could be combined to establish a «virtuous circle» (Hirvilammi 2020) for a new generation of sustainable social policies.

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