When [we have] obtained those things necessary to life, there is another alternative than to obtain superfluities; and that is, to adventure on life now, [our] vacation from humbler toil having commenced. **– Henry David Thoreau**

**What would a sufficiency economy look like?**

**Samuel Alexander**

**1. Introduction**

The notion of ‘sufficiency’ has long been defended in wisdom and spiritual traditions throughout history and across the globe. Overlapping perspectives range from the Buddha’s ‘middle way’, to the ‘moderation’ of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Epicurus, to the ‘radical simplicity’ of Diogenes or Gandhi. Some practices of sufficiency have taken on social forms, such as the simple living Amish communities or contemporary ecovillages, while others, such as Henry Thoreau, have explored more individualistic forms. The Quakers ground their embrace of simplicity upon religious ideals, whereas a range of thinkers, from William Morris to Benjamin Franklin, recognize the political significance of enlightened material restraint. More recently, the ‘hippie’ counter-cultures of the 1960s and 70s, as well as the modern ‘voluntary simplicity’ movement, see lifestyles of sufficiency as a low-impact path to an increased quality of life (see generally, Alexander and McLeod, 2014).

On reflection it is quite remarkable the range and diversity of thinkers and movements that uphold the moral, hedonic and/or ecological benefits of material sufficiency, not only from across the political spectrum but also from within all the major religions. There must be something to it. At the same time, this rich history of sufficiency thinking and practice has always been marginalized and is certainly not reflected widely in mainstream discourse today. In an age when consumerist cultures are expanding across the globe, talk of sufficiency can seem old-fashioned, austere, or even anti-progress. Furthermore, social theorists have long pointed out that consumption reaches beyond our relationship to the material world, and is used to express and create identity and indicate belonging to a social group or class, making calls for reduced consumption problematic (see Douglas, 1976; Miller, 2008). Nevertheless, as I will argue in this chapter, sufficiency is a concept that is more relevant today than ever before, even if it must be reinterpreted and applied in context specific ways.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe a radical vision of sustainability, which I will call a ‘sufficiency economy’. This is an economy that has low energy and resource requirements relative to developed economies, but which sufficiently provides for local needs using mostly local resources. In contrast with growth-orientated economies (Purdey, 2010), a sufficiency economy would not be driven to expand continuously by the imperatives of profit-maximisation and consumerist cultures. Instead, the underlying goal would be to universalise a modest but sufficient material standard of living, where everyone has ‘enough’ to flourish within planetary limits (Princen, 2005; Latouche, 2009; Trainer, 2010; Alexander, 2015a).

The analysis begins by briefly outlining the overlapping problems humanity faces today, not for the purpose of providing a thorough review of the global situation but simply to contextualise the discussion that follows. If we do not have a clear understanding of the magnitude of the problems we face, we are unlikely to formulate an appropriate response. Focusing on the developed nations, the analysis then considers what life would be like if we gave up the limitless pursuit of growth and transitioned to a highly localised ‘sufficiency economy’ based on far lower resource and energy consumption.

The value of these envisioning exercises lies in their ability to expand the imagination and help people conceive of radically different forms of human flourishing and organization. Too often when discussing the world’s problems with students and colleagues I am faced with nodding heads, only to confront the rejoinder: ‘but what’s the alternative?’ By outlining a sufficiency-based alternative below, I hope to provide at least a partial answer to that important question. After all, if we do not have some relatively detailed vision of where we would like to end up – or may need to end up – it is very difficult to formulate coherent strategies for how to get there. In this sense the following exposition builds upon the history of utopian speculation (de Geus, 1999), for the exposition is designed to provoke thought about the possibility, feasibility, and even the desirability of alternative forms of life based on notions of sufficiency, moderation, and frugality.

**2. The Global Predicament**

Most people, including many environmentalists, seem to believe that affluent lifestyles and the growth economies that support them can be sustained and even globalised, provided the world transitions to systems of renewable energy and produces commodities more cleanly and efficiently. The following review briefly outlines some of the interrelated reasons why this assumption is invalid, providing evidential grounds for radically rethinking the nature of dominant economic structures and goals.

2.1. *Ecological Overshoot and the Limits of Technology*

The ecological footprint of the global economy now exceeds the sustainable carrying capacity of the planet by 50% (Global Footprint Network, 2012). Despite decades of extraordinary technological advance, the overall ecological impacts of economic activity continue to increase (Jackson, 2009, Ch. 4; Wiedmann et al, 2015). To be sure, human beings are getting better at producing commodities more cleanly and efficiently. But we are also producing more commodities due to economic growth, and it turns out that those production increases outweigh the efficiency gains in production, leading to an overall increase in the impacts of economic activity, not a decrease. Efficiency without sufficiency is lost (Alexander, 2015b, Ch. 1).

When we do the arithmetic of growth, the impossibility of a technological fix to environmental problems becomes perfectly clear. If the developed nations were to grow their economies, in terms of GDP, at a modest 2% over coming decades and by 2050 the poorest nations had caught up, then by that stage the global economy, which is already in ecological overshoot, would be almost 15 times larger than it is today (Jackson, 2009, p. 81). This means, for example, that if we are to meet the emissions targets of the IPCC (2007) then the carbon intensity of global economic output must be 130 times lower than it is today, requiring 11% reductions every year. And yet efficiency improvements over the period 1990-2007 were merely 0.7% per year (Jackson, 2009, p. 79). These hard numbers ought to shatter the faith of techno-optimists. Technology alone cannot make a growth economy sustainable. The extent of decoupling required is simply too great. As will be argued below, the consumer class also needs to consume less – a lot less.

2.2. *Poverty amidst Plenty*

The harsh reality of ecological overshoot is even more challenging when we bear in mind that in the poorest parts of the world today great multitudes are living lives oppressed by extreme poverty. The human community therefore must find a way to *raise* the material standards of living of the world’s poorest people – who surely have a right to develop their economic capacities in some form – while at the same time *reducing* humanity’s overall ecological footprint (Meadows et al, 2004: p. xv). What is clear is that the current ‘trickle down’ approach to poverty alleviation is neither working sufficiently well nor ecologically sustainable, as evidenced by a report from the New Economics Foundation (Woodard and Simms, 2006). This study shows that between 1990 and 2001, for every $100 of growth in the world’s average income per capita, merely $0.60 contributed to reducing poverty below the ‘$1 per day’ line. This means that to achieve $1 of poverty reduction at that ratio, an extra $166 of global production and consumption is required. Not only do these figures expose global growth as an extremely inefficient means of reducing poverty, it also implies that the amount of growth needed to alleviate poverty would be, without question, environmentally unsupportable.

2.3. *Overpopulation*

Exacerbating these issues further is the fact that global human population is expected to exceed nine billion by mid-century and reach eleven billion by the end of the century (Gerland *et al*, 2014). Obviously, this will intensify greatly the already intense competition over access to the world’s limited natural resources and put further pressure on fragile ecosystems. But even if humanity somehow managed to stabilise population at once and thereby avoid the expected increases, the global economy would nevertheless remain in gross ecological overshoot. This again points to the need to rethink the current economic model based on growth and the pursuit of affluence. Sustainability means globalising sufficiency, not affluence.

2.4 *Consumer Malaise*

A final reason to abandon the growth-orientated economy is that high consumption lifestyles, so often held up as the peak of human development, have actually achieved disappointing results in terms of happiness and life satisfaction (Lane, 2000; Pickett and Wilkinson, 2010). There is a mounting body of sociological and psychological evidence (Alexander, 2015, Ch. 2; Kasser, 2002) indicating that lives orientated around achieving high levels of consumption often result in such things as time poverty, stress, physical and mental illness, wasteful status competition, loss of community, disconnection from nature, unhappiness, and even a sense of meaninglessness or alienation in life.

Fortunately, however, this evidence raises the tantalising possibility that members of the global consumer class could live more fulfilling and meaningful lives by *reducing* their consumption, perhaps in exchange for more time, while at the same time reducing their ecological footprint and leaving more resources for those in greater need (Jackson, 2005; Brown and Kasser, 2005; Alexander and Ussher, 2012).

Interestingly, the prospect of ‘living more on less’ has been a line of argument employed by most advocates of sufficiency throughout history. This is a point worthy of emphasis, because calls for sufficiency will surely speak to a broader audience if people come to see that their own lives may actually be enriched by avoiding superfluous consumption and instead seeking the good life in non-materialistic sources of meaning and fulfillment. As the ancient Chinese philosopher Lao-Tzu once said: ‘He who knows he has enough is rich’, which implies that those who have enough, but who do not know it, are poor.

**3. Envisioning a Prosperous Descent**

For all of the above reasons we must explore alternative ways to flourish beyond consumer culture, and embracing a post-growth economy based on material sufficiency is one means of doing so, and evidently a necessary means. Accordingly, the remainder of this chapter is dedicated to providing some of those details, at least as far as they apply to urban contexts in the developed world. By attempting to envision a sufficiency economy, in something of a utopian spirit, my hope is to advance the debate around what genuine sustainability actually means for daily life. Some readers may find the nature of this economic vision confronting, and want to dismiss it in advance as being too frugal and austere. But in a context of gross ecological overshoot and seven billion people, I contend that a ‘fair share’ ecological footprint would demand changes similar to what is described below (Odum and Odum, 2001; Trainer, 2010).

4.1. *Water*

In most urban contexts the amount of roof space available to collect water would be insufficient to secure the necessary water supplies for such dense populations. What this means is that urban contexts *require* the water mains to exist, at least for the foreseeable future, for if this system failed for more than a few days most people would quickly perish. Accordingly, a sufficiency economy must at least have the energy supply and stability to maintain the water mains at a sufficiently high level of regularity and safety.

Despite a relatively conventional mains system remaining in place, in a sufficiency economy attitudes to water consumption and collection would undergo a revolution. Today, average daily household water consumption in the United States is around 370 litres per person. The United Nations and the World Health Organisation advise that 20 litres per person, per day, is the minimum needed for the most basic subsistence (drinking, cooking, and sanitation). In a sufficiency economy, domestic water consumption would fall to a fraction of average US consumption – perhaps somewhere between 50-70 litres per person, per day – which is enough to live a dignified existence without leaving much room for waste.

In order to reduce water consumption so drastically, various steps would be taken. First of all, every household would maximise its roof water collection via water tanks. People will become proficient in creating and connecting systems of water collection and reuse. Greywater systems, for example, will become the household norm, including the use of tank water to flush the toilet. Similarly, water could be collected in a bucket while showering to flush the toilet. Eventually, composting toilets could replace the flush toilet, further reducing water consumption (Jenkins, 2005).

In those times when people are required to draw from the mains, frugality and conservation are key. Being conscientious of water consumption when preparing food and cleaning dishes, and never watering (or even having) lawns, are important and easily implemented conservation strategies. Perhaps the largest savings in the domestic sphere can come from how we wash our clothes and ourselves. Clothes could be washed less often and showers could be taken less regularly, as well as reduced to a minute or two. In fact, in a context of extreme water scarcity, cleaning occasionally with a bucket of water and some soap would be perfectly adequate for cleanliness and hygiene.

4.2. *Food*

In a sufficiency economy, food production would be highly localised and produced organically, in order to decarbonise the food system and build resilience (Holmgren, 2002). One of the most significant, but often overlooked, implications of the transition away from industrial food production is the increased labour needed for organic production. The increased labour requirements arise primarily from the absence or great reduction of mechanised (oil-dependent) farm machinery, but organic fertiliser production and pest control are also typically more time intensive than industrialised techniques.

A transition to organic food production, however, will have many benefits, including environmental benefits, reconnecting communities with the local land base upon which they depend for subsistence, and the health benefits associated with moving away from sedentary office or factory work toward the more active and outdoor work of farming. Governments should do everything they can to support localised, organic agriculture, starting by putting a price on carbon. But communities can get to work now without waiting for the state.

A sufficiency economy would aim to maximise organic food production *within* the urban boundary. This would involve digging up lawns and turning them into productive vegetable gardens, and planting fruit trees in all available spaces. Nature strips would be cultivated; parks would be turned into small farms or community gardens; suitable roofs would become productive, herbs would grow on balconies and windowsills, and generally all food producing potential would be realised. Most households in suburbia would keep chickens for eggs, bees for honey, and some might even keep small livestock, such as goats for milk and cheese. Animals are also a great source of manure for compost, and many permaculturalists build animals into their organic systems. There is also great potential for building raised beds on driveways, some footpaths or roads, and car parks. Mushrooms could be cultivated on the shady side of the house, and household or neighbourhood aquaculture systems could provide urban centres with some of their fish supply. Cuba provides an inspiring example of what can be achieved in terms of urban agriculture.

Even in a sufficiency economy, however, we can expect our households to ‘import’ various foods in various forms, if not from around the world, then certainly from rural contexts. This, in fact, would probably be a necessity in most urban contexts, because growing space probably does not permit strict self-sufficiency (MacRae et al, 2010). Even if urban agriculture was enthusiastically embraced, most large urban areas across the world would still need to import a significant portion of its fruit and vegetables, to say nothing of its meat, grains, minerals, and other goods.

The local and organic food production would also drastically change our consumption habits. Food would be eaten ‘in season’ in order to avoid having to import non-seasonal foods from the other side of the world. Preserving foods would be the most appropriate way to access those foods out of season. Generally, food would be unprocessed and require no disposable packaging. In order to minimise the environmental impact of our diets, demand for meat, fish, and dairy would be greatly reduced. This would open up huge tracts of land for human food production that are currently used to produce grain for animals.

Finally, as well as composting human waste for ‘humanure’ via composting toilets (Jenkins, 2005), a sufficiency economy would vigilantly compost all its organic food wastes in order to supply the growing need for organic fertilisers, reducing the amount of so-called ‘waste’ currently sent to landfill.

4.3. *Clothing*

The primary function of clothing is to keep us warm, and its secondary function, is to cover nakedness. In consumer societies today, however, the purpose of clothing has evolved to become primarily about expressing one’s identity or social status. In a sufficiency economy, the fashion industry would be considered a superfluous luxury and accordingly it would be amongst the first industries to disappear. Of course, people will always want to express themselves through what they wear, so ‘style’ would not disappear so much as evolve. A new aesthetic of sufficiency would develop, and soon enough the social expectation to look fashionable would become a quirk of history, incomprehensible to the new generation.

In a sufficiency economy, we would salvage, swap, and reuse clothing diligently, as well as get very good at sewing and mending. For the next few decades we can do this adequately by simply reusing and recycling the abundance of clothing produced in consumer society. In the future, when new clothing is needed, the primary aims of production would be functionality and sustainability, not profit-maximisation strategies playing on the pernicious desire for ever-changing styles. Fabrics like nylon and polyester would be minimised as they are made from petrochemicals and are non-biodegradable; and cotton requires extensive use of pesticides. Functional, low-impact fabrics would be used instead, such as agricultural hemp and organic wool.

4.4. *Housing*

The issue of housing is particularly difficult and complex. Sometimes well-meaning environmentalists give the impression that we can move directly, in the next few decades to an agrarian village scenario where everyone is living in self-built cob houses or ‘Earthships’. The fact is, however, that over the next few critical decades, most people are going to find themselves living in an urban environment that already exists – suburbia. In other words, the houses and apartment blocks that already exist now, in most cases, will remain over coming decades, no matter how inadequate they are from an ecological perspective.

Given this reality, the immediate task is making best use of existing infrastructure (Holmgren, 2012). This might involve things like taking in boarders or putting a caravan in the driveway to help resist further urban sprawl, or putting up thick curtains and sealing gaps in windows and doors to increase energy efficiency. It might involve changing all the light bulbs or going to the expense of getting an energy efficient fridge or another water tank. It would certainly involve refusing to spend large amounts of money renovating for purely aesthetic reasons or extending the house to create a games room. Of course, much of the existing housing stock is poorly designed so there are real limits to what retrofitting can achieve. But much can be done to improve the ecological performance of existing housing. We are hardly going to knock down the suburbs and start again.

In the longer term, the housing stock will need to be replaced, and within a sufficiency economy there would be certain expectations about how to do this. Materials should be sourced as locally as possible, and designed for long-term durability and energy efficiency. Straw-bale or mud-brick houses may become common. More people and communities would take part in the construction of their own homes to reduce costs. To limit the resources required, as well as limit the spaces needed to heat and cool, houses would be much smaller and densely inhabited than is typically the case today. But they would be sufficient.

4.5 *Energy*

In terms of energy use, the contrast between a growth economy and a sufficiency economy could hardly be starker. Whereas growth economies seek as much energy as possible at the lowest market price, a sufficiency economy requires only enough energy to provide a modest but sufficient material standard of living for all. This means much lower energy requirements, primarily through renewable sources. Even more important than ‘greening’ supply is reducing demand, because renewables are unlikely to ever be able to fully replace fossil fuels (Moriarty and Honnery, 2012). Therefore, a sufficiency economy implies an energy descent future (Odum and Odum, 2001; Alexander, 2015b).

Due to the close connection between energy and economy, reductions in energy would inevitably imply significantly reduced production and consumption (Latouche, 2009; Trainer, 2010). This would not necessarily be a problem, however, because as has already been made clear, consumption levels in a sufficiency economy would be considerably lower than in consumer societies today, thus requiring much less energy to support them. As well as economic contraction, efficiency improvements and conservation efforts would also lessen the energy requirements of a sufficiency economy.

Hydro, solar, and wind would provide the bulk of electricity provision, and some limited use of biofuels can be expected for critical transport and machine fuels. Fossil fuels will be phased out, although some limited but ongoing use will be required to assist on the transition to a fully renewable energy system. The use of neighborhood methane gas digesters could be used to provide some domestic gas for heating and cooking.

4.6. *Transport*

In a sufficiency economy major reductions in transport energy will be achieved through the relocalisation of economies (Rubin, 2009). To the limited extent that international trade continues, it will probably be conducted in the main by sail, as it was prior to the petroleum age.

Transport savings achieved through relocalisation especially applies to food production. Industrial food systems are highly dependent on oil not only for transport, but also for things like pesticides and plastic packaging. As noted above, post-industrial food system will mean more localised, organic food production, and therefore vastly reduced energy requirements for transport and production. Some of the food for cities would be imported from rural contexts, mainly by electric trains.

The other major area of energy savings relates to driving cars. In order to decarbonise the economy, people will need to drive much less, or not at all. Electric cars will not be able to escape this imperative, because producing them depends on fossil fuels, and also for most people electric cars are and will remain unaffordable. Just as importantly, it would take many decades or even a century to replace the one billion petroleum-powered vehicles on the roads today with electric vehicles, and we do not have that much time to mitigate the effects of peak oil and climate change. The only solution is driving less (Moriarty and Honnery, 2008).

Various studies have estimated that around half of all car trips are less than 5 kilometres, and around one third are less than 3km (Ludlum, 2012, p. 21). In many cases those could be replaced with walking, cycling, or public transport. In order to make these options viable, governments will need to invest heavily in a good system of electricity-powered public transport, such as light trains or trams, as well as networks of bike lanes.[[1]](#footnote-1) Putting a price on carbon will also provide appropriate economic incentives to reduce car dependence and build a post-carbon infrastructure.

In the longer term, however, the most significant reductions in car dependence will result from economic relocalisation. If this transformation were to occur, driving would be unnecessary for many people, as their place of work would be either at home or a short walk down the road. Longer distances would be covered on bicycle or public transport.

4.7. *Work and Production*

The most significant changes to work and production, noted immediately above, is that the household would once again become a place of production. Rather than hiring other people to grow all our food, cook our meals, make our clothes, build our furniture, look after our children, maintain our houses, etc., we would generally take care of such things ourselves, so far as it were possible (see Astyk, 2012). Furthermore, households would sometimes produce goods for trade or barter, such as furniture, crockery, clothes, or food, and thereby contribute to the broader local economy. Artisans might also produce speciality goods at the household level, such as musical instruments, paintings, or various tools.

Nevertheless, the sufficiency economy should not be understood to mean strict self-sufficiency at the household level. It would still be desirable for much production to take place beyond the household, but the nature of what would be produced and the values motivating production would be very different. The provision of basic needs – such as food, clothing, shelter, tools, and medicine – would be the primary focus of production, and the motivation would be to produce what was necessary and sufficient for a good life, rather than to produce luxuries or superfluous abundance. While some large factories would probably remain in order to provide certain materials or hi-tech equipment, small private businesses and worker cooperatives would in most cases replace the mega-corporation, with the local grocer and hardware store returning to Mainstreet, and community owned-and-operated farms providing much of the community’s sustenance (Trainer, 2010).

The greatly reduced level of production and consumption in a sufficiency economy, would allow for reduced working hours for most people, at least in the formal/cash economy. This would create far more time for leisure and the necessary home production.

4.8. *Money, Markets, and Exchange*

The question of what role money, markets, and exchange would play in a sufficiency economy is complex, and cannot be fully addressed here. Nevertheless, some broad comments can be made on these subjects.

First of all, it is worth noting that throughout history, human beings have exchanged goods and services with each other, either by way of barter, gift, or through the use of money. These practices are going to continue although the nature of money, markets, and exchange will have to evolve greatly, as will our attitudes toward them. There will remain ‘markets’ for various goods that cannot be produced within the household, and money will likely remain as the most convenient tool for ‘keeping accounts’, so to speak. But non-monetary forms of exchange, such as gift, barter, and sharing, are likely to become much more prominent modes of economic activity. Since profit-maximisation would not be the aim of market activity in a sufficiency economy, less attention would be given to producing things that fetch the highest price, and more attention would be given to producing what the community most needs.

The fact that markets of some variety would probably still remain in a sufficiency economy implies that some forms of private property are likely to endure, although it is just as likely, and desirable, that more of the economy comes under social control. Although the balance between private and social control of the economy could unfold in an infinite variety of ways – a decision that will rightly be left to the localised democratic communities – a sufficiency economy must be designed so that everyone has enough, and this means taking responsibility for ensuring that the basic needs of all are universally met. This will require a significant degree of social control of the economy, as basic needs would not be adequately met if resource allocation were purely left to market forces. The most important issue would be that everyone had access to land and affordable housing, and communities might have to experiment with how best to ensure this occurred (see, e.g., Alexander, 2011: Ch. 2 and Ch. 5).

In terms of monetary systems, one of the greatest problems today is that money is loaned into existence as debt that accrues interest. For such systems to function they require economic growth in order for the debts *plus* the interest to be paid back (Trainer, 2011). Interest payments therefore imply an expansion of the money supply. A sufficiency economy could not by definition have a monetary system that required growth, so it follows that interest-bearing loans could not be the primary means of creating money. The alternative may have to look something like Ted Trainer’s proposal for community-owned banks that provide zero-interest credit for ventures that have been selected on the basis that they serve community interests (Trainer, 2010).

4.9. *Technology*

In a sufficiency economy, many technological conveniences we know today will largely disappear. Microwaves, vacuum cleaners, electronic kitchen gadgets, mobile phones, etc., may all become relics of history, but without causing much hardship at all. That said, we should also remember that the sufficiency economy may arrive in the wake of industrial civilisation’s deterioration (Greer, 2008). This will mean that vast quantities of industrially produced goods, tools, and materials will already be in existence, and for many decades, perhaps centuries, we would be living in what some have called the ‘salvage economy’ (Greer, 2009). Human beings will doubtless prove to be exceedingly creative in the use and reuse of existing materials. The old ethics of the depression era will return, as people learn to ‘use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without.’

The clothesline will replace the clothes dryer; the bike will largely replace the car; and the television will essentially disappear. I suspect that washing machines and fridges will be the last things we give up, but life would go on even if they became unavailable or unaffordable. Hopefully computers will remain to do some important tasks, although private computers might become much less common. The main thing is for communities to put their mind to the question of what technologies are ‘appropriate’ (Schumacher, 1973).

**6. CONCLUSION**

There are countless other avenues that this analysis could explore, including: what would become of existing health and education systems, or pension schemes? How would people spend their leisure and what art forms might flourish? How would the sufficiency economy differ in urban centres as opposed to rural settings? And how would sufficiency in the global North affect the global South? These are all issues that deserve further attention, but those discussions must be deferred for another occasion.

The sufficiency economy clearly represents a fundamentally different way of life for most people in consumer societies today. This raises the question of how we would transition to such an economy, a question that is also beyond the scope of this chapter but something addressed elsewhere (see, e.g., Alexander, 2015a, Ch. 10). Could the transition be voted in through the mechanisms of parliamentary democracy? Would it require a political revolution and the introduction of some form of eco-socialism? Or would it require grassroots movements to essentially do it themselves, building the new economy underneath the existing economy, without state assistance? My own view is that it would be unwise, at this stage, to commit unconditionally to any one strategy given the future is so uncertain.

I do think, however, that the Transition Movement (Hopkins, 2008), while not homogenous in its approach, currently has something of the right strategic balance here. Adopting what I would call ‘participatory democracy’, the movement basically accepts that change must be driven at the grassroots, community level, while at the same time being prepared to press on governments (mainly local governments) to assist in the transition whenever that seems to be a good use of limited energies. Furthermore, if the Transition Movement were ever to succeed in achieving its ambitious and diverse goals, I believe something resembling the sufficiency economy may well be the result. What is important is that the debate gets drawn away from the question of how to *maintain* the existing system, toward the urgent and necessary question of what new system should *replace* the existing system. In this sense the humble notion of a sufficiency economy can be seen as a revolutionary, but also necessary, project.

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1. There are, however, deeper structural complications underlying the requirement to stop driving as much, which should not be ignored. For many people today driving is the only way of getting to work, so the injunction to ‘get out of your car’ may frustrate those people who would love to drive less but cannot, due to a lack of viable alternatives. Suburbia was built on the basis of cheap oil, which meant that ‘sprawl’ was not seen as much of a problem. But as oil enters the era of scarcity, the long commutes will become increasingly problematic, not only from a cost perspective, but also from an environmental perspective (Alexander, 2015: Ch 8). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)