



**UNIVERSITÉ
DE GENÈVE**

**FACULTÉ DES SCIENCES
DE LA SOCIÉTÉ**



Supporting transformative change: a social practice-based approach to energy sufficiency

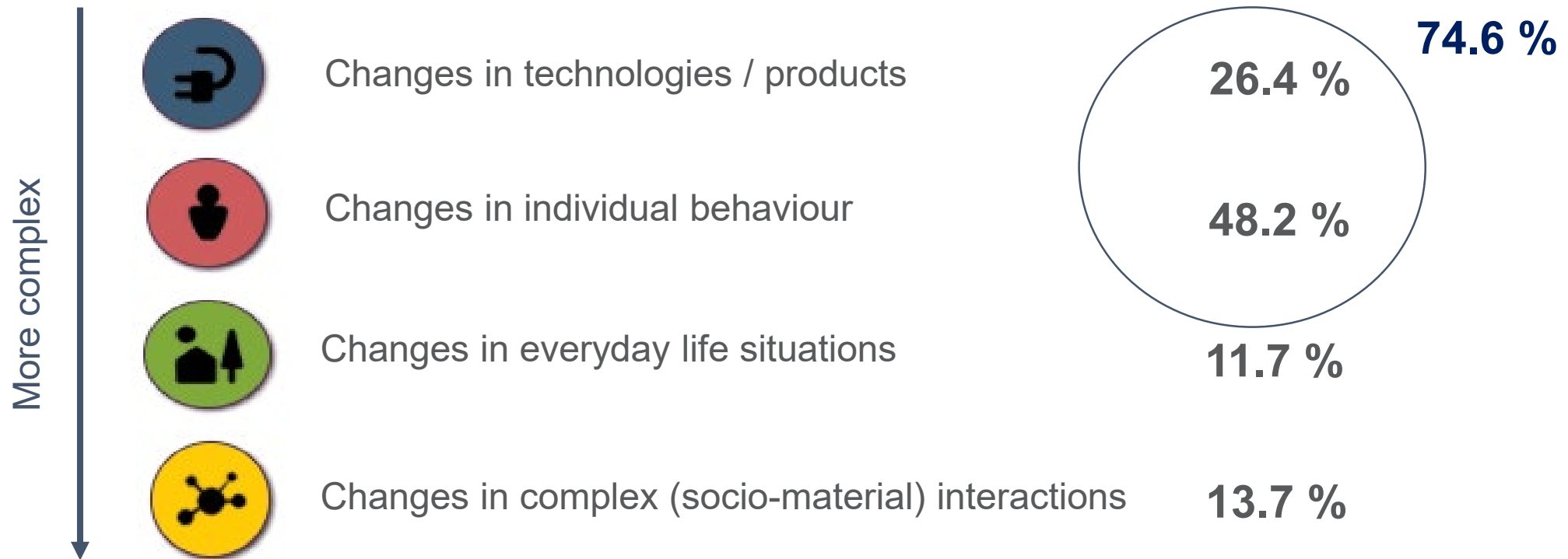
**Prof Marlyne Sahakian, University of Geneva
16 February 2021**

Session 2: The Role of Individuals and Communities in Clean
Energy Transitions

*IEA - CERT thematic discussion: The role of 'Behavioural
aspects' for reaching net zero emissions by 2050*

How to engage everyday people in the energy transition?

A review of over 1,000 European initiatives aimed at changing household energy usage



Why efficiency must be combined with sufficiency

Trends towards more, bigger, 'better' appliances

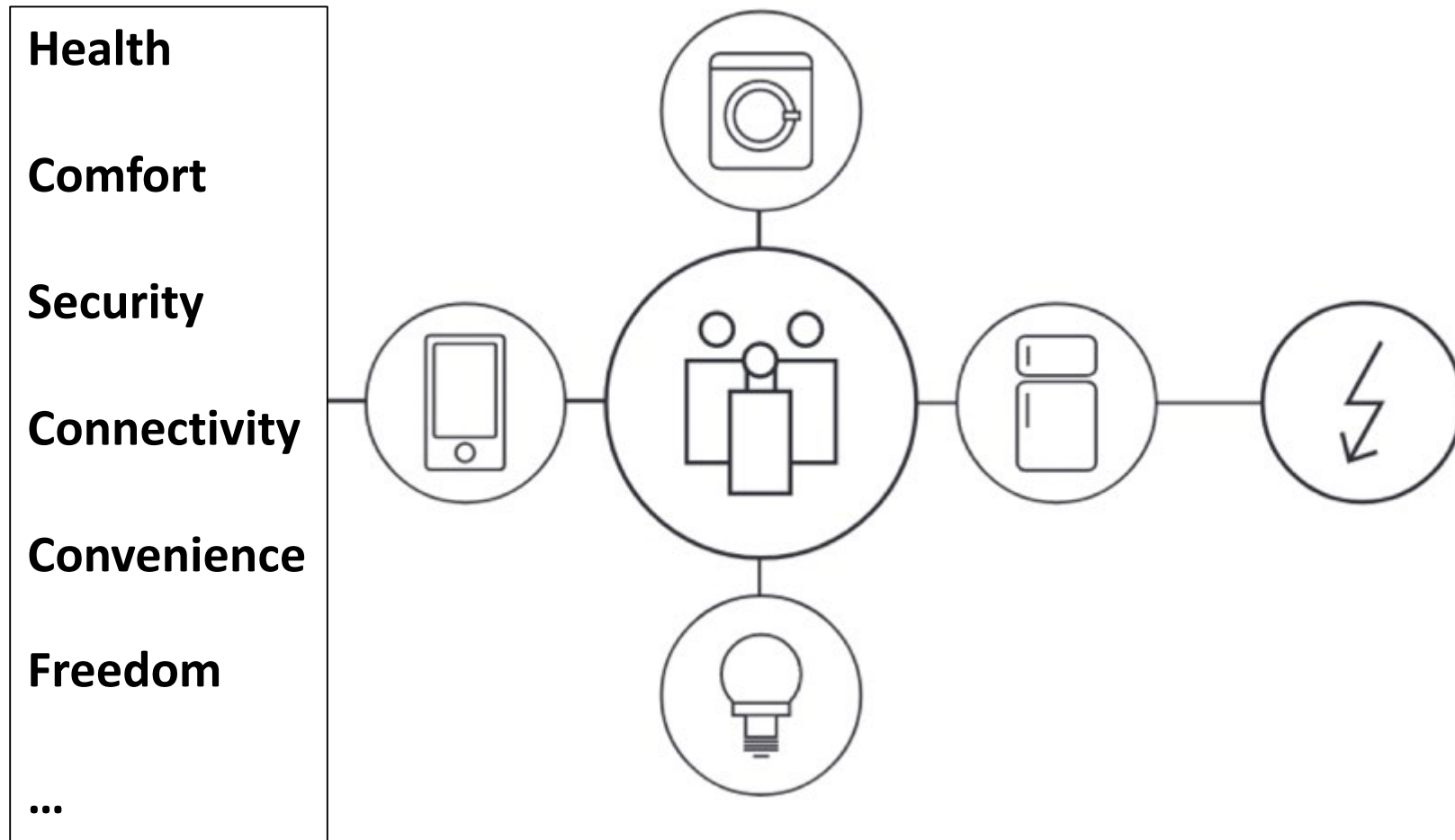


Limits of individual behaviour approach:
Gap between information and act, and between action and impact
Over-individualization of environmental responsibility



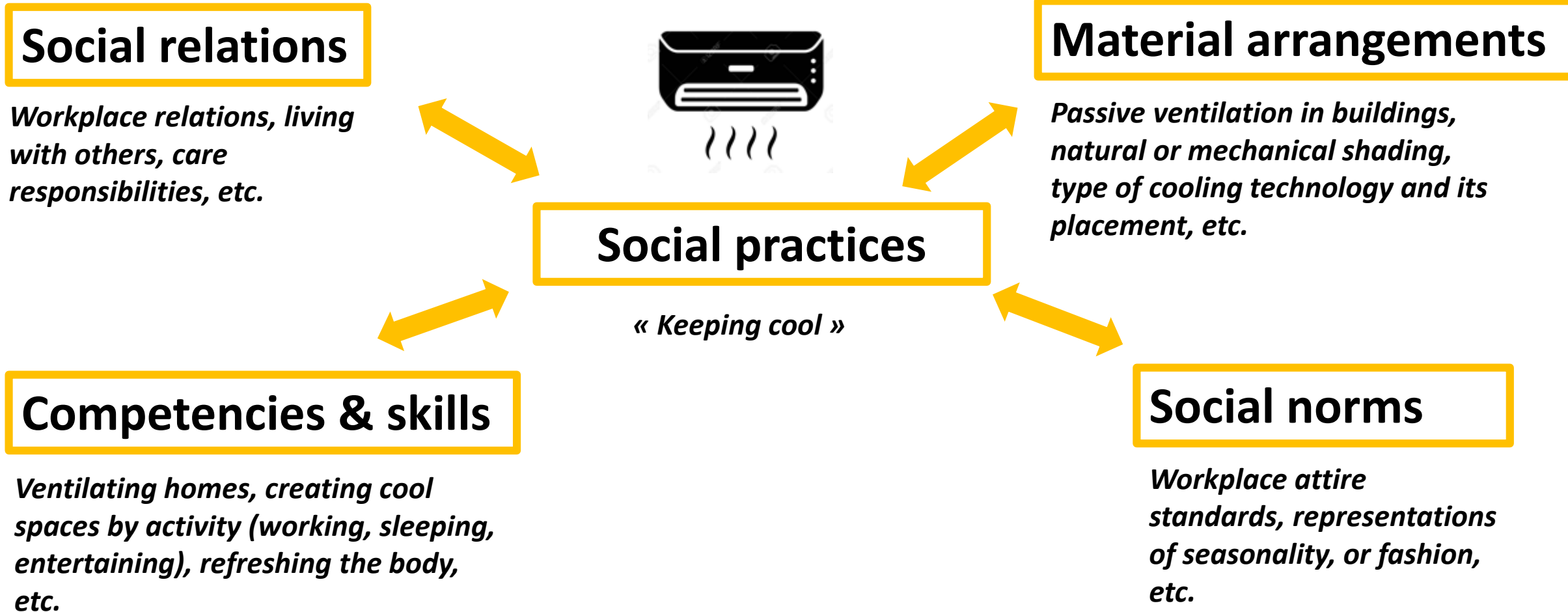
When energy is not meaningful in and of itself

Energy makes everyday life possible and is meaningful in the services it provides



Social practices as the locus of change

Example of cooling practices in Metro Manila

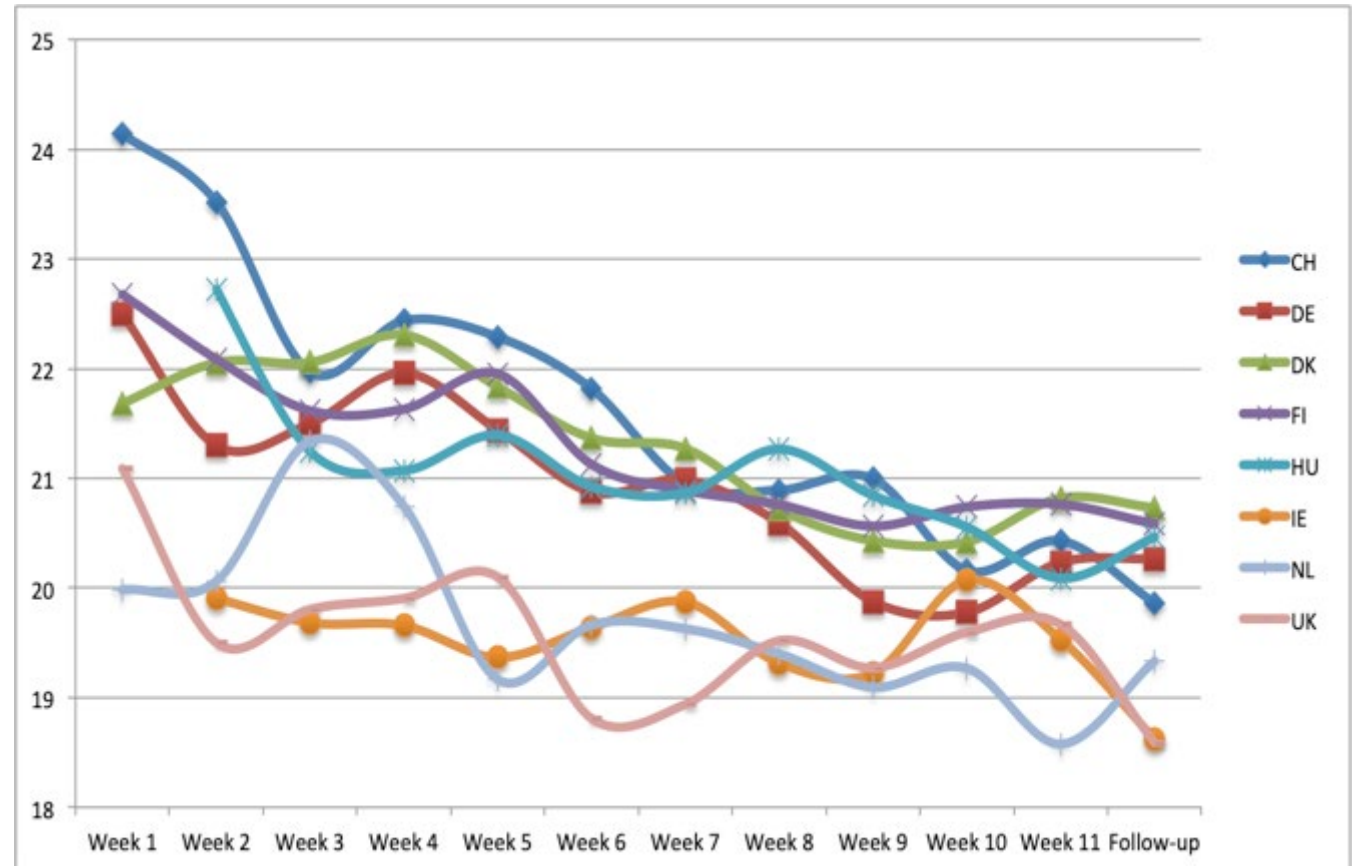


Challenging social norms and encouraging reflexivity through experimentation

300 households engaged in a voluntary practice-inspired change initiative



Reduce indoor temperatures to 19° over 4 weeks



What normative aim? **Sustainable wellbeing**

Focus on how energy sufficiency futures can achieve wellbeing through participatory methods and citizen engagement



To feel safe, to be part of a community, to live in an agreeable environment, to develop as a person, to feel free...

Change practices collectively

Individual behaviour change and techno-fixes alone will not suffice. To achieve energy sufficiency, we must:

- Recognize how **energy relates to everyday life dynamics**, including infrastructures and material things, but also skills and competencies, social norms and standards, and social relations. (problem framing matters)
- Rather than start from environmental constraints, engage with sustainable wellbeing as a normative aim – actively imagining, **what will the good life look like in 2050 at net zero emissions?** (normative aims matter)
- Imposed restrictions may be useful (e.g., covid-19), but forms of self-limitation that come about through **participatory methods that encourage reflexivity** are highly promising. (process matters)

References and project links

Cited references

Fuchs, D., Sahakian, M., Gumbert, T., Di Giulio, A., Maniates, M., Lorek, S., & Graf, A. (2021). *Consumption Corridors: Living Well within Sustainable Limits*. London: Routledge.

Jensen, C. L., Goggins, G., Røpke, I., & Fahy, F. (2019). Achieving sustainability transitions in residential energy use across Europe: The importance of problem framings. *Energy Policy*, 133.

Sahakian, M., Rau, H., Grealis, E., Godin, L., Wallenborn, G., Backhaus, J., . . . Fahy, F. (2021). Challenging social norms to recraft practices: A Living Lab approach to reducing household energy use in eight European countries. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 72, 101881. [doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2020.101881](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2020.101881)

Sahakian, M. (2019). 'More, bigger, better' household appliances: Contesting normativity in practices through emotions. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, first online. [doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540519889983](https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540519889983)

Sahakian, M., & Dobigny, L. (2019). From governing behaviour to transformative change: A typology of household energy initiatives in Switzerland. *Energy Policy*, 129, 1261-1270.

Sahakian, M., & Bertho, B. (2018). Exploring emotions and norms around Swiss household energy usage: when methods inform understandings of the social. *Energy Research and Social Sciences*, 45, 81-90.

Sahakian, M. (2014). *Keeping Cool in Southeast Asia: Energy use and urban air-conditioning*. New York, London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Projects & reports

WEFEL: wellbeing, energy futures and everyday life: <https://www.unige.ch/sciences-societe/socio/fr/recherche/irs/thematiques/sociologie-de-la-consommation-dans-une-perspective-de-durabilite/wefel-wellbeing-energy-futures-and-everyday-life/>

ENERGISE @UNIGE: https://www.unige.ch/sciences-societe/socio/index.php?cID=1148&ctask=check-out&ccm_token=1599408392:c0cb8cf566202b064f788eedbbcd130d
5 minute video: french with english subtitles
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pgacJAvXaQc>

L'électricité au quotidien: Vous êtes-vous déjà demandé à quoi sert l'énergie ?

Brochure in French: <https://www.unige.ch/sciences-societe/socio/fr/recherche/irs/thematiques/sociologie-de-la-consommation-dans-une-perspective-de-durabilite/lelectricite-au-quotidien/>