EU Circular Talks

Sufficiency in the Building Sector

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AGENDA

- **Sufficiency**: what does it mean in the building sector?
- **What do we know about the impacts**: literature and case studies
- **Looking ahead**: conclusions and recommendations

SUFFICIENCY
An important lever to reduce WLC

- EU Commission (DG ENV) project on “Sufficiency in the building sector“ (Dec 23 – April 24)
    - What is sufficiency in the build environment?
    - What are the impacts?

Source: BPIE, Ramboll 2024 (Link)

SUFFICIENCY & CIRCULARITY

Decision pyramid

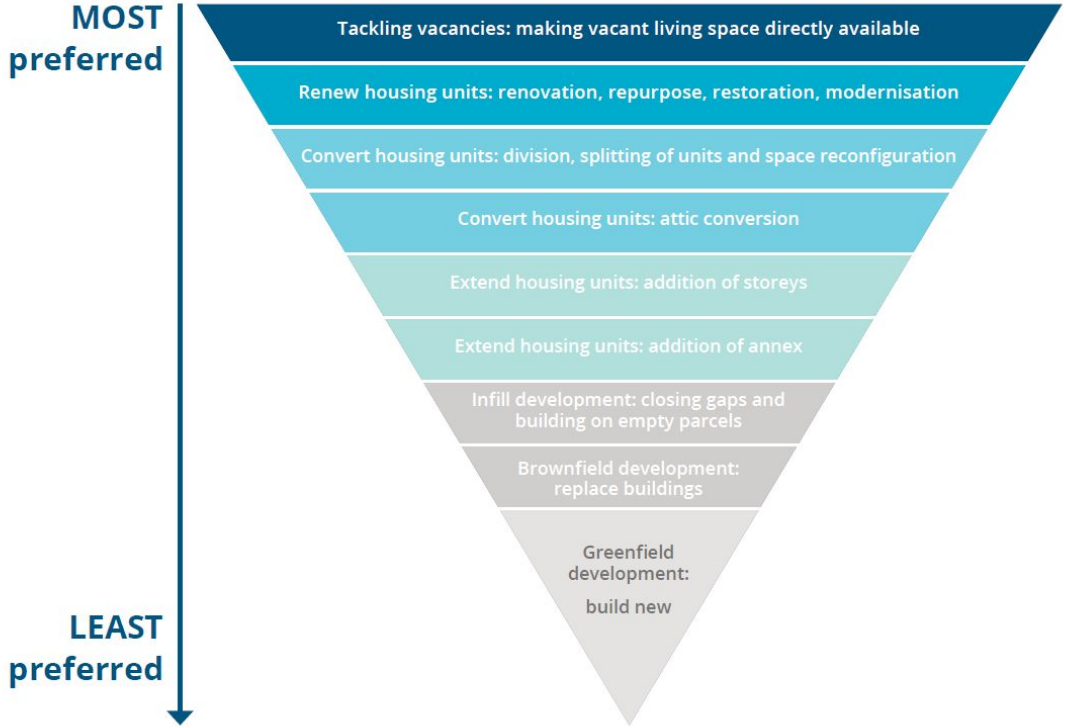
- Many of the priorities and circular strategies for design and construction are well aligned with sufficiency
- Sufficiency provides an additional focus on:
  - Social foundations (needs and well-being)
  - Existing buildings stock

Source: Circular Flanders

SUFFICIENCY IN THE BUILDING SECTOR

Decision pyramid

- Applying sufficiency principles to buildings can take many different forms

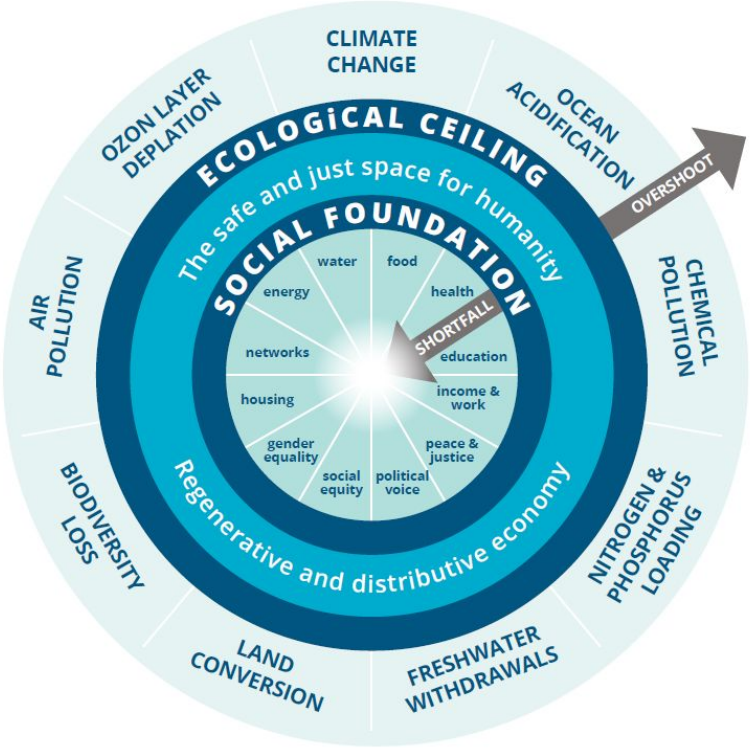


Source: BPIE 2024, adapted from Zimmermann & First (2024), LINK

Sufficiency

“two types of enough”

- Human wellbeing within planetary boundaries
  - Inside: SDGs => social housing, accessibility, affordability
  - Outside: Planetary boundaries
- Sufficiency aligns with a vision that seeks to fulfil the international human right to adequate housing, viewing buildings as vital components of societal well-being



Source: BPIE 2024, based on Doughnut Economics 2019

SUFFICIENCY
The concept

> **While efficiency is about doing things right, sufficiency is about doing the right things.**

SUFFICIENCY - THE EVIDENCE

The potential: What do we know so far?

- GHG savings through using the existing stock instead of building new, while providing enough homes
  - E.g. for Germany (BBSR 2023), for the Netherlands (IEB 2024)
- … along with massive resource savings
  - E.g. - 60% for Germany (BBSR 2023), EU (Zimmermann 2022)
- Huge theoretical housing potential
  - E.g. using under-occupied homes > for 100 million people (Lage et al. 2025)
- What‘s in for investors?
  - 4 trillion investment opportunity in urban regeneration projects (Systemiq 2024)
- Social acceptance higher than one would expect from the outset
  - E.g. analysis of citizens assemblys in 8 EU MS (Lage et al. 2024), WLC experts in public consultation of WLC EU Roadmap
  - E.g. several urveys: 30% of home-owners in Germany: „home is too large“

SUFFICIENCY – CASE STUDIES

The potential: What do we know so far?

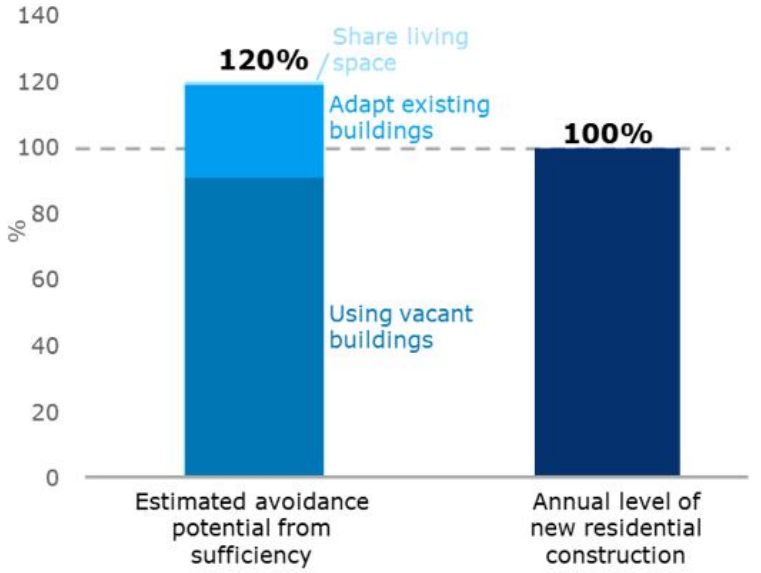
COUNTRY	INITIATIVE	MECHANISM	CURRENT OUTCOMES	ESTIMATED POTENTIAL (max)	
				Avoided new construction	Avoided embodied emissions
	1TOIT2AGES Brussels and Wallonia	Mobilise 'invisible living space'	Facilitated 604 matches in 2023	26.800 m^2	15.000 tCO_2
	Plan lutte contre les logements vacants National	National strategy to map vacancies and making them habitable	1,1 Mio vacant buildings; over 6.000 "exited" vacancy status	20.190.000 m^2	9.500.000 tCO_2
	Aus Alt mach 2 .. Oder mehr Pilot project Ravensburg	Premium for consultation for reconstruction of single-family buildings	A quarter of homeowners considers a reconstruction	23.526.000 m^2	11.200.000 tCO_2
	Empty Spaces for affordable houses National	Mapping vacancies and making them habitable	Estimates of 215.000 usable units after renovation	12.106.000 m^2	5.750.000 tCO_2
	Parkwest Dublin 12 The Plaza Office building in Dublin	Conversion of offices into housing units	86 social housing units created	5.800 m^2	2.759 tCO_2 (- 82% less embodied carbon compared to new built)

Source: BPIE, Ramboll 2024 (Link)

SUFFICIENCY – CASE STUDIES

The potential: What do we know so far?

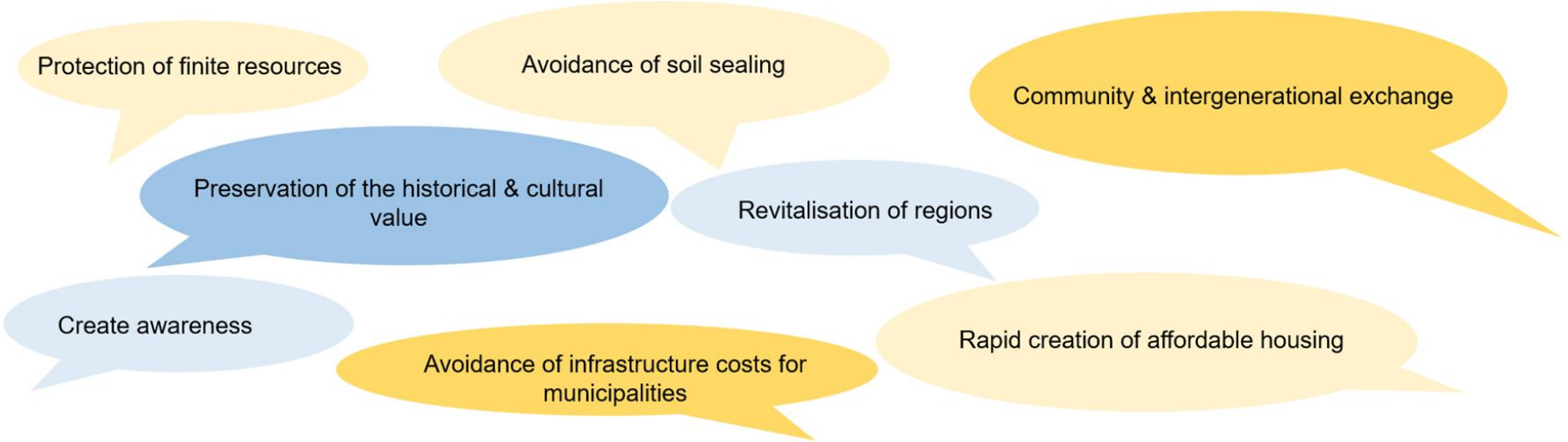
The combined potential of the analysed sufficiency initiatives (BE, FR, DE) in comparison with annual new construction activity in these countries.



Source: BPIE, Ramboll 2024 (Link)

Sufficiency – Case Studies
The potential: What do we know so far?

Harvesting positive social, economic and environmental impact of sufficiency policies:



For further reflection

Do we have the right metrics and KPIs driving building regulation?

Existing building policies have failed to alleviate planetary pressure, inequality and housing shortages, as they rely on a narrow view of carbon and energy intensity metrics. Savings are offset by floor area growth per capita which continues to outpace population growth.

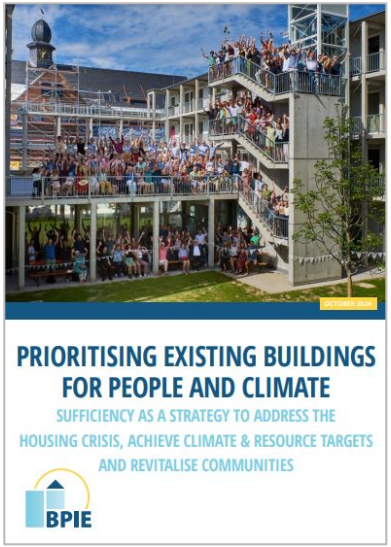
For further reflection

How to create value from doing less?

> **Maximising the potential of existing building stock requires fundamentally rethinking the persistent focus on new construction and traditional building methods. "New" is not always better — there's cultural and historical value in thoughtfully repurposing existing structures.**

Sufficiency in the building sector
Recommendations

1. **Make best use of vacant or underoccupied buildings by collecting data**
2. **Prioritise and incentivise the preservation, repurposing and reuse of the existing building stock ahead of new construction**
3. **Support experimentation of sufficiency initiatives and exchange of experiences and awareness raising**
4. **Use synergies with other policy fields and forge new alliances**
5. **Invest in research on the qualitative and quantitative impacts of sufficiency initiatives**



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