

What are the Fundamental Human Needs?

Extract from “Transdisciplinary Economics for Sustainability”

Manfred Max-Neef, Economist

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...Here is what I consider probably the most important breakthrough of the theory of Human Scale Development. Because normally when we discuss about needs, people tend to believe that needs tend to be infinite and changing all the time, they are different from yours and yours, they change in different cultures and different historical periods, etc. etc. etc.

Well if that were really so, both for methodological as well as epistemological reasons, it would be very difficult to work with the concept of needs because every study I would make would be a unique case. And then science would try to find certain forms of generalization. But we believe that that assumption, that needs are infinite and changing all the time is a wrong concept – the origin of which is that we don't distinguish what is, on the one hand, what are human needs, and what on the other hand, are *satisfiers* for those human needs. And we call everything ‘needs’.

So we say for instance, ‘food’ is a ‘need’ – no! food is not a need, food is a ‘satisfier’ for the need of *survival*. The need is survival. Food is the satisfier for me to survive. So food is NOT the need.

A ‘need’ is an internal state. It cannot be an outside object. This [he holds the microphone] is not a need, it helps me to communicate – people who want to understand something, they need this understanding, this is an element that helps me to satisfy the need for *understanding*.

So if we clearly separate what are needs on the one hand and satisfiers on the other, the picture becomes much clearer. And then we can even say that:

-fundamental human needs are **finite, very few, and classifiable**.

And not only that, but what is even more solid, is that fundamental human needs are **invariable**. They are the same everywhere, for every person, for every culture, in every historical period, the needs have always been, and are still, the same. What changes is what you do in order to satisfy those needs that are common to everybody.

And we propose that needs can be classified according to 2 criteria: an ontological or existential criteria, where we distinguish the needs for *being, having, doing and interaction*, and from an axiological or value point of view, we propose what we consider the 9 fundamental human needs.

Those 9 fundamental human needs are the needs for:

Subsistence, Protection, Affection (or love), Understanding, Participation, Idleness, Creation, Identity and Freedom.

If we have these 2 classifications, we will get a very interesting system, which I will show. But first of all, let me stress, that when I say – I have to stress here – the concept of **FUNDAMENTAL** human needs. That is important. Why? Because I don't intend to say that these are all the needs that actually exist, we call them 'fundamental' because these are the needs that everybody has and that everybody shares.

There is no-one who can live without affection, without protection, without identity or without freedom or whatever. You may be lacking one of these, but when that happens, you are really in trouble – it may even generate a pathology.

With the 2 classifications, what we get is this matrix, which we call the **Matrix of Fundamental Human Needs**:

NEEDS	Being (qualities)	Having (things)	Doing (actions)	Interacting (settings)
Subsistence	physical, emotional and mental health	food, shelter, work	work, feed, procreate, clothe, rest/sleep	living environment, social setting
Protection	care, adaptability, autonomy	social security, health systems, rights, family, work	Cooperate, plan, prevent, help, cure, take care of	Living space, social environment, dwelling
Affection	respect, tolerance, sense of humor, generosity, sensuality	friendships, family, relationships with nature	share, take care of, make love, express emotions	privacy, intimate space of togetherness
Understanding	critical capacity, receptivity, curiosity, intuition	literature, teachers, educational and communication policies	analyse study, meditate, investigate	schools, families, universities, communities
Participation	adaptability, receptivity, dedication, sense of humor	responsibilities, duties, work, rights, privileges	cooperate, propose, dissent, express opinions	associations, parties, churches, neighborhoods
Idleness	imagination, curiosity, tranquility, sponteneity	games, parties, spectacles, clubs, peace of mind	day-dream, play, remember, relax, have fun	landscapes, intimate spaces, places to be alone, free time
Creation	imagination, boldness, curiosity, inventiveness, autonomy, determination	skills, work, abilities, method, techniques	invent, build, design, work, compose, interpret	spaces for expression, workshops, audiences, cultural groups
Identity	sense of belonging, self-esteem, consistency	symbols, language, religion, values, work, customs, norms, habits, historical memory	get to know oneself, grow, commit oneself, recognize oneself	places on belongs to, everyday settings, maturation stages
Freedom	autonomy, passion, self-esteem, open-mindedness, tolerance	equal rights	dissent, choose, run risks, develop awareness, be different from, disobey	temporal / spatial plasticity (anywhere)

The top row and the left column are invariable. The unbolded cells are what changes. We can define a society by the types of satisfiers it generates or does not generate.

You can have an over consumer and a Buddhist monk. Both have the same needs. But the ways they satisfy them are absolutely different - to satisfy the same needs.

Here you have an example (this is just an example), of what it could be, but in order to make you better understand what the system consists of. What do we mean by the 'being' in relation to each one of these needs?

The '**being**' refers to attributes, characteristics you must have as a person, that will make it easier to satisfy that need.

Here we are in a seminar where we all want to learn, so here we have to do with the need for *Understanding*. Let's see what does the 'being' mean in *Understanding*. If we have, or each one of you has for example, critical capacity, receptivity, curiosity, intuition, discipline etc. Well if you have those attributes, they are very good for satisfying your need for understanding.

There is nothing material here, and that is very important. In this matrix there is nothing material, there are no objects. **Objects are not satisfiers**, we will see that later.

So when we refer to '**having**', we refer like here, to literature, educational policies, communicational policies, etc. etc. This refers to institutions, traditions, norms, laws, etc. **Non-material** having.

The '**doing**' is of course the action, to understand you have to analyze, study, meditate, investigate, do research etc. etc.

And the '**interacting**' refers to environments which may be more inviting or less inviting to the satisfaction. If you are in a university with a beautiful campus, you know, it may be more inviting then if you are in a big building, you know, on the 25th story.

Understanding 'Poverties'

Now this, as I said, is a system: meaning, that anything that happens here affects all the rest. The system allows us to re-conceptualize certain fundamental concepts, the most important of which is the concept of poverty. In human-scale development we don't speak about poverty. We speak about poverties. Plural. In the sense that **any one of these fundamental human needs, deeply unsatisfied, generates a human poverty.**

We are used to dealing just with that one, (*he points to subsistence*) which is what economics tells us is poverty. But we can talk about poverty of protection, because of increase of violence, terrorism, inter-familial violence. Poverty of affection, again, because discrimination of women or children, etc. Or of understanding, the authoritarian classroom, indoctrination instead of true education etc. etc. And you can produce the others: Identity – crisis of identities because of gender discrimination, racial discrimination, religious discrimination, what have you, political discrimination.

In this country you have this experience, in Chile, many of us, including myself, we were exiled during the dictatorship in Chile. And that creates tremendous identity problems.

Now if we talk about poverties. What we can observe is that, whenever any one of these fundamental human needs is deeply unsatisfied, in terms of intensity and duration, it generates pathologies. It makes people sick. Deep lack of affection for instance, may generate a deep depression. No? And depression

you know, can be absolutely disastrous. There are many ways of dying, you know, you don't only die physically, and a deep depression is a way of being dead and affecting everything that is around you.

But the most worrying thing is what you observe today in the world, its no longer individual pathologies but collective pathologies. You find whole sections of society, and sometimes whole societies, that fall into a totally pathological form of behaviour. And if you analyze that case, then you will see that in that society, this matrix is destroyed. Take Chechnya. Take things that happened in the former Yugoslavia. And you will see, you are a Chechnyan, what happens? Or to give a recent example, right now. You are a citizen of the strip of Gaza. Well what happens there, I mean subsistence is a disaster. Protection, none. Any moment, you know, a bulldozer may bulldoze away your house. Affection? Well you already generate hostility. Understanding, well, 'why me?' The same has happened to Jews – 'why me?' I am a Jew, I have to be eliminated? Because I am a Palestine I have to be eliminated? Well, participation, probably the only participation is to defend or to attack. And so on and so forth. Then you see a case where you can explain the forms of behaviour, because this (*he points to the matrix*) is destroyed.

And on the other side, there are a lot of people who have the same fears, who believe that this is destroyed, and act accordingly. And these things are not solved simply with diplomacy, and obviously not with [unclear], I mean, this is absolutely obvious. We really must understand that we must deal with each one of these.

The 5 types of Satisfiers

Now satisfiers can be of a different kind. Five kinds actually. The first one is the **destroyers**. Which, because of the way they pretend to satisfy a need, they end up destroying that same need. If you start an arms race, it's for the purpose of protection, but if it goes beyond a certain limit you start to affect the protection. Exile is also {a destroyer}, a dictator exiles people for protection, and we know how the story ends.

The **pseudosatisfiers** are those that give a false sensation of satisfaction. Here is a man, lonely, nobody loves me, I need somebody to be nice to me etc. and then he goes to a house of prostitution. And when he leaves the house he feels more miserable than when he went in. This was the wrong way of trying to satisfy the need for affection. But, these are tremendously important. The pseudosatisfiers are a condition for the reproduction of a capitalist system of a neo liberal type of the one we have today. And in this respect, one of the most colossal industries that we have, is the industry of advertisements. Advertising. Why? What is the purpose of advertising? To induce consumption. And in a way, I induce more and more consumption, well, this system can continue reproducing itself.

And how do I do it? Well, trying to convince you that you are satisfying a really fundamental human need. You see, if you use this last blue jean, men will go crazy when they look at you. And you in turn, as a man, you have to use this deodorant or this after shave, and they will jump at you, the girls. And then of course you go and buy it, so on and so forth. So if one morning we all would wake up, absolutely sober, and not consume anything that we don't need, the system collapses in 48 hours. Absolutely.

The **inhibiting** satisfiers are those that, by the way they satisfy the needs, that inhibit the possibility of others. Typical case, I mean, the overprotective parents. Here is little Peter: 'Peter, I don't allow it, Peter don't cross the street, Peter get off that bicycle, it's very dangerous, don't climb the tree, careful with the bowl...' Well that's an overprotected kid. Because of that he's really inhibited to develop adequately.

The **singular** satisfiers are the typical satisfiers of government programs. And this is valid from the local level up to the national level. And they, in this sense, here is one problem, and you address strictly that problem, and they are neutral for all the rest.

And finally you have the most important. Which are the **synergic** satisfiers. Which, because of the way they satisfy a need, contribute at the same time to the satisfaction of other needs. My favorite example is, and coupling this one with the previous, if you have a crib here, and in the crib is the baby. And mama comes with a bottle, that is a singular satisfier, you are satisfying only the subsistence of the baby. But if instead of a bottle, the mother takes her to give her her breast, this will simultaneously satisfy subsistence, protection, affection and identity, in one satisfier.

And for those of you who have studied human needs and know the model of Maslow. This destroys the model of Maslow. Because for Maslow, human needs are a pyramid, and you cannot satisfy superior needs unless you have satisfied inferior needs. But the fact that there exists generic satisfiers, you can't satisfy alone. In fact, by pyramid, if you have synergic satisfiers.

To give you another example comparing these two. The government wants to build social housing. Fine. How does this normally go? I think of my country, and it's probably practically everywhere the same. Well, here we have to construct 500 houses for the lower income people. Well some firm gets the contract and builds the houses. And once they are built, then comes the inauguration, and then comes the housing minister or the governor or whoever, the television is there... And there is an old lady, Doña Maria, and then the minister comes and says 'here are the keys to your house'. And Maria cries, and all this on television, and the minister feels fantastic. But. What happened there? Nothing. It's an absolutely singular thing. With a lot of television, but no transcendence whatsoever.

Alternative number 2: you are going to build 500 houses. Which means that you have 500 lots. And you know the list of the people who are entitled to have those houses. So once you have the lot, you call the people. You call Doña Maria. Doña Maria come here. Your lot is lot 121. Come look. And as they start building Doña Maria is around, and she meets the neighbour. And the other guy, he has a good idea, why don't we do this or that. And then there's the carpenter who's called to put on the window. Instead of putting the window here, why don't you put it here? Como no? Certainly Maria, fine. Instead of opening the door to the inside, I would like to open it to the outside. Of course, no problem whatsoever. Now there you have a whole process going on. People meet each other, have ideas, creativity happens, friendships occur. Etc. Again, there comes the minister. Again he cuts the sign. In the first case he inaugurated 500 houses. In the second case, he inaugurated a community. My God, and that's bloody different. And does a community cost more money? Most probably it costs less. Because of the participation of the people. They themselves laid some bricks, and in the community are some carpenters, electricians, everything, and they contributed. So it's probably less expensive. That's synergy.

- End of clip. Presentation continues within the Transdisciplinary Economics for Sustainability -