



DISCUSSING DEGROWTH CLIMATE UTOPIAS WITH DIVERSE STAKEHOLDERS

LESSONS FROM USING THE BACKCASTING METHOD TO EXPLORE 1.5° PATHWAYS IN 5 EU COUNTRIES

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This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101003880.

- 1. 10-15 Minute Introduction: Backcasting.**
- 2. 10-15 Minute "Vision" exercise.**
- 3. 10 Minute Reflection: Private and pairs.**
- 4. 25 Minute In-depth Presentation from 3 Case Countries.**
- 5. 30 Minutes Q&A and Discussion – how to get people on board with degrowth through backcasting**



1. INTRODUCTION

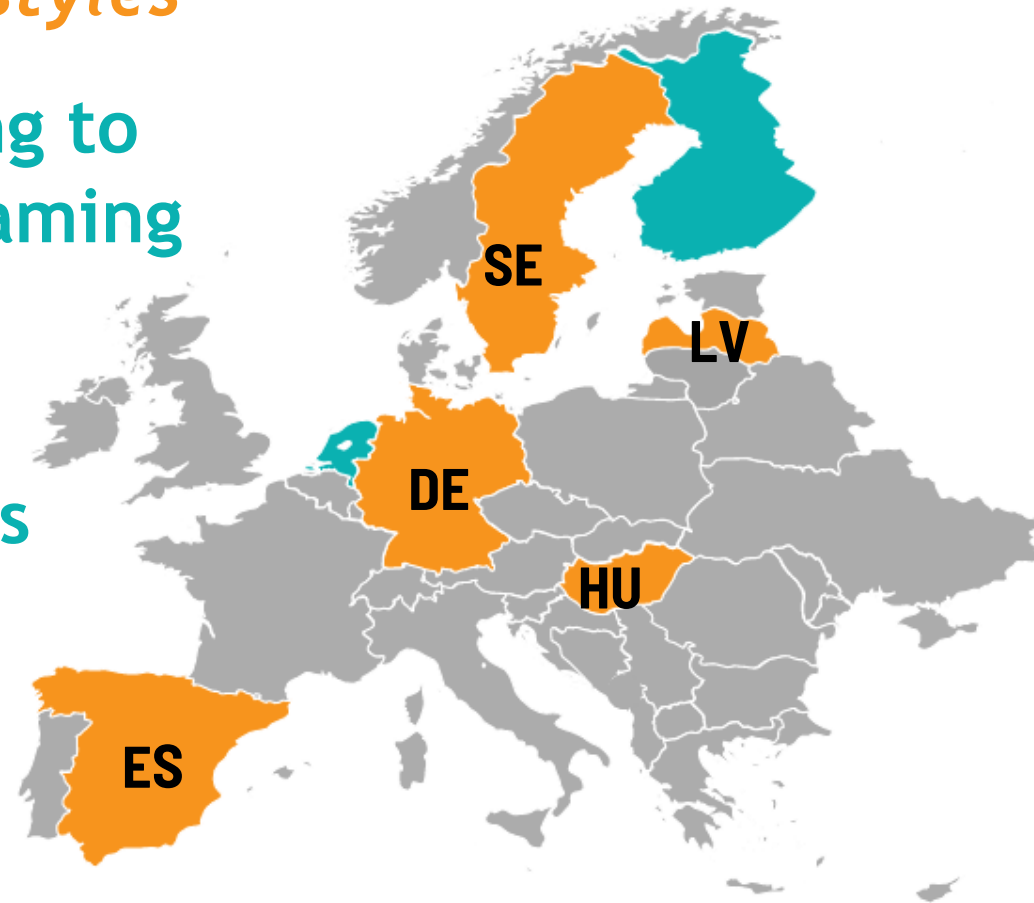


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About the EU 1.5° LIFESTYLES project

Research project on 1.5° lifestyles

- Horizon 2020 project aiming to contribute to the mainstreaming of 1.5° lifestyles in Europe
- 7 partner countries
- 5 Stakeholder Thinking Labs
- The 3 presenters today:



grindependent
Institute



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“The backcasting framework is a very powerful tool opening up space for reflection and imagination and, in turn, allowing alternative futures to emerge... backcasting, by **providing space for normative envisioning, invokes **individual and collective moral reasoning leading to socially engaged, responsible and compassionate thinking.**”**

Köves & Király, 2021

BACKCASTING – NORMATIVE SCENARIO STRATEGISING

“Backcasting is a **scenario-building research method** that uses the envisioned normative future to **identify potential intervention steps that lead current trends towards that desired future.** (...)

Unlike predictive forecasts, backcasts are not intended to reveal what the future will likely be, but to indicate the relative feasibility and implications of different policy goals” Robinson, 2003

The method of backcasting is especially suitable “for cases where **complexity and uncertainty is high** and where **stakeholder engagement is necessary.**”

Király et al., 2013



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DIVERSE GROUPS OF PEOPLE COME UP WITH SURPRISINGLY SIMILAR VISIONS OF THE FUTURE...

“given ample space, time and methodological support, **marketing professionals** can turn their feeling of alienation from their industry – where they confront the harmful impact their activities have on society and the environment while wishing to do their job well – into a creative tension that elaborates visions and steps that may lead to a more environmentally and socially conscious future.”

Köves & Király, 2021

**BUT! NEED TO AVOID (NAIVE) TECHNO-OPTIMISM!...
(STRONG TECHNO-BIAS IN MANY BACKCASTING PROJECTS)**



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4 MAIN STAGES OF BACKCASTING

- 1) framing the topic;**
- 2) building a normative future scenario;**
- 3) identifying intervention steps (backcasting them from the future to the present); and**
- 4) finding synergies and controversies between the interventions.**



4 STAGES OF BACKCASTING - OUR METHOD

1) framing the topic;

2) building a normative future scenario;

3) identifying intervention steps (backcasting them from the future to the present); and

4) finding synergies and controversies between the interventions.

PROVIDED BY EU 1.5° TEAM IN LINE WITH SCI. KNOWLEDGE & AVOIDING TECHNO-OPTIMISM IN THE COMMON VISION.

(DIFFERENT FROM PROPOSALS BY ROBINSON, 2003, etc.)



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4 STAGES OF BACKCASTING - BACKCASTING STEPS

1) framing the topic;

2) building a normative future scenario;

3) identifying intervention steps (backcasting them from the future to the present); and

4) finding synergies and controversies between the interventions.

**THE
FOCUS OF
THE 1.5°
BACK-
CASTING
SESSIONS**



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OTHER CONSIDERATIONS - AVOIDANCE OF “NAIVE” THEORIES

11

- Awareness that implicit or explicit “social theories” and “theories of change” underpin how we see society and future possibilities
 - Thinking about the future = thinking about the future in society
 - Need reflection on the nature of social structures or agents, and social change - i.e. reflection on the theoretical basis of backcasting
 - “essential to explicitly reflect upon what constitutes society and what the relationships between society’s constituent parts are” - -> a quick discussion will be included in first part of STL
 - Ice-breaker of “optimist or pessimist” -> then explanation and framing of STL as a normative and “optimist” exercise

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- According to experience, stakeholders need to be shaken out of their own limits about what is possible.
 - Otherwise will only talk about what is wrong.
 - Stakeholders need to get used to the feeling of possibility
- Stakeholders need to be reminded to focus on activity not what state we are in, bring that back to what we are doing and who is doing it.
- Important that stakeholders have time to internalise 1.5° lifestyles vision for backcasting.
 - Self-reflection time after common-vision exercise.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- Synergies and discrepancies stage important to make stakeholders think of problem shifting – important to think of critical points (i.e. e-cars or easy tech solutions).
- Need to make sure that task is not too overwhelming and manageable (cut down into chunks/divisions).

PLAN IN DETAIL - IDENTIFYING INTERVENTION STEPS (1)

14

- 1. After common 1.5° lifestyles vision, participants divided into 4 groups based on consumption fields (nutrition, mobility, housing, leisure)**
- 2. Given short consumption-field-specific input and field-specific vision**
- 3. “In order to achieve this vision in 2040, 7 key structures were overcome or strengthened. How was this done?”**
- 4. Set future goals for 2040 in the specific consumption field – one goal for each structure.**



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PLAN IN DETAIL - IDENTIFYING INTERVENTION STEPS (2)

15

- 4. Set (positive) future goals for 2040 in the specific consumption field - one goal for each structure. Can be formulated as a long sentence.**
- 5. What are the steps to strengthen each structure?**
- 6. Participants should use different coloured large post-it notes for what tools should happen/be used when (i.e. 2040, 2035, 2030)**

RECAP: 4 CONSUMPTION FIELD GROUPS



NUTRITION



MOBILITY



HOUSING



LEISURE

7 MOST IMPACTFUL STRUCTURES ENABLING 1.5° LIFESTYLES



1. Overcoming the economic growth paradigm institutionalised in social relations, political priorities and valuations (creating acceptance for some industries and technologies to vanish or shrink and controlling this transformation)

2. Creating consistent, predictable, integrated policies; where necessary, considering bans/strong disincentives on extremely polluting goods/services and advertising (private jets/space travel, frequent flying, multiple home ownership, SUVs); do not focus on behaviour of individuals alone for lifestyle change



3. Overcoming the systematic influence of vested interests, including fossil-fuel incumbency (backed by powerful political actors/national geopolitical interests and underlying business models), retail corporations (especially in food sector), private media

7 MOST IMPACTFUL STRUCTURES ENABLING 1.5° LIFESTYLES CONT.



4. Giving economic incentives and internalising environmental costs in prices (eco-social taxation/subsidies, e.g. lower tax on labour, higher tax on emissions/energy use); (reliable regulation for) private investment in sustainable solutions

5. Strengthening alternative narratives and measurements of (individual and collective) wellbeing and a good life

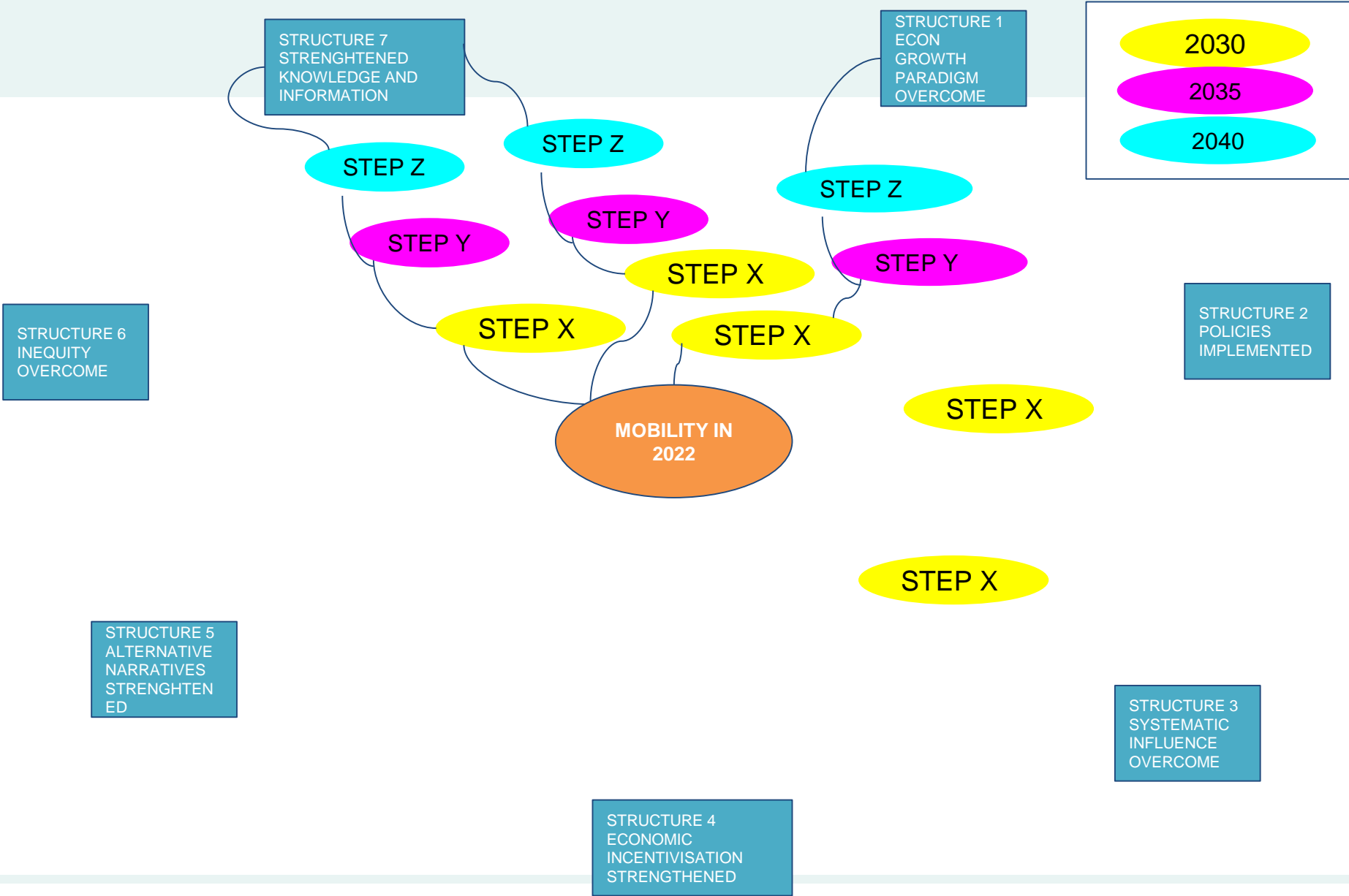


6. Overcoming inequity in resources, resource use and power

7. Integrating information and skills about sustainable lifestyles in school curricula and education



PROPOSED OUTCOME/VISUAL REPRESENTATION



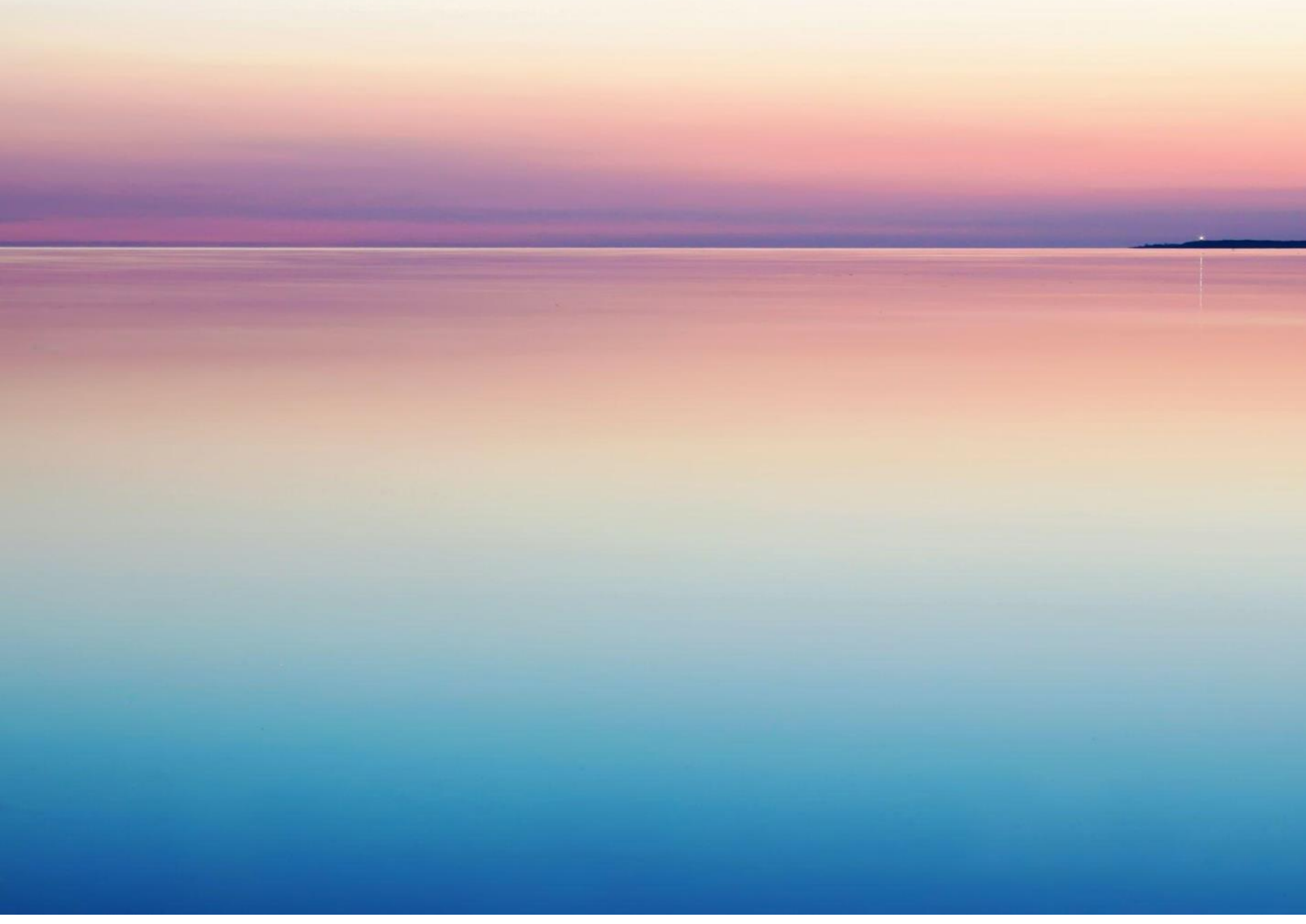


2. VISION EXERCISE (10 minutes)

12:15



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3. REFLECTION

12:30



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PERSONAL REFLECTION

- **We now have a couple of minutes of personal reflection. You can use the post-its and paper handouts to write down your reflections.**
 - **How did this vision make you feel?**
 - **How did you experience this world?**
 - **What do you take with you?**

PAIR REFLECTION

- Before we come back to the larger group, you now have a couple of minutes to talk to the person on either side of you and share your experiences.



4. PRESENTATION FROM THE CASE COUNTRIES

SWEDEN, GERMANY AND HUNGARY

12:40



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General outcomes (5 case countries)

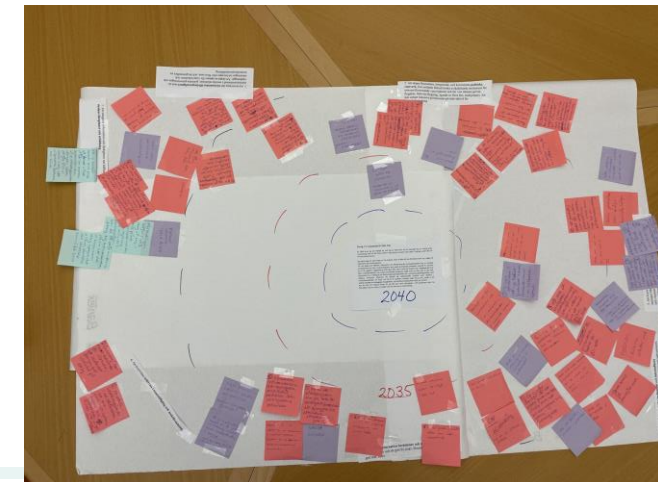
- Stakeholders in the five case countries identified common themes for sustainable consumption.
- Steps involved mostly policy "sticks" (bans, taxes), and policy "carrots" (incentives) incl. better public funding.
- Examples of bans: flying, inner city driving, sugar, advertising.
- Ideas for taxes: empty property, flying, inheritance, living space, pesticides.
- Overcoming narrow policy focus and adopting integrated systems thinking considered crucial - mobility, housing, leisure, nutrition fields intersect and require holistic planning.

General outcomes (5 case countries)

- Strong interventions popular - as compared to “norm”.
- Challenges in devising practical strategies for implementing the suggested steps - bridging gap between individual actions and societal structures difficult.
- Emphasis on Government Involvement - but differentiated (i.e. least in nutrition), (industry lobby, households) also recognized as actors for change.
- Some country variations observed - but also due to different stakeholder compositions.
 - SE stakeholders suggested most innovative and far-reaching steps.
 - ES leaned towards market-focused solutions (business presence).
 - HU emphasized political implementation and governance issues.
 - LV, DE focused on municipal-level approaches, (policy presence).

Sweden

- Many stakeholders were already familiar with methods
- Vision was acceptable in terms of content
- Timing challenging
 - Standard policies present but higher or wider ranging e.g. taxes, bans
 - Emphasis on new policies and sufficiency, e.g. building moratoriums, 15 minute city, smaller private areas and larger commons, more sharing
 - Distributive policies targeted at aiding lower income
 - “Multisolving” approaches, e.g. shared housing to also address loneliness
- Pessimism also present and larger structural barriers remained challenging



Germany

- **Very good feedback on “positive break” from polycrisis in terms of the method.**
 - **“Visioning” provided a direct view of a utopian future, which was new for many participants (i.e. trade union representatives) but still enjoyable and peaceful.**
- **Some steps might conflict, like 15-minute settlements vs. green spaces - this was difficult for stakeholders to reflect on.**
- **In the discussion, participants also drew direct connections between the different consumption fields and work and time-use - no transformation of consumption without production + work structures and shapes daily life and unsustainability**
- **Emphasis on state as the provider of basic services in mobility, leisure and housing - but not in nutrition (here individual households & community as provider)**

Hungary

Short video of the Stakeholder Thinking Lab

<https://youtu.be/D8aqYMrjiil>



Hungary

Methodological considerations

- **Adapting to the specific socio-economic and political context is essential ~ currently highly centralised and top-down**
 - **Vision creation was more group-based and a shared process to counteract the “central planning” and very top-down. approach currently in use in HU**
 - **Vision built from Climate Puzzle exercise reduction pathways**
- **Timeline for vision was longer (backcasting from 2050 and not 2040), for 2 reasons:**
 - **Average HU footprint is currently smaller (smallest among 5 countries)**
 - **Political context: enable hope and more time for change to happen**
 - **Suggesting steps was most difficult for 2030**

Hungary

- Participants really valued the innovative and multi-stakeholder methodology
- Most attended to find inspiration and hope, as well as to network and learn
 - Realisation and feeling that we are not alone...
- Main barrier in the country: current (illiberla) government and their policies, expressed very strongly by participants, incl. policy maker participants
 - How is it possible to overcome it, go around it and preserve hope for change when the need for structural change is clearly recognised?

Hungary

- **Multi-stakeholder thinking labs are also a way to provide hope and a positive context, help to connect stakeholders and change-makers**
 - **This was highlighted by the participants themselves**
 - **Can contribute to creating networks for bottom-up change**





5. Q&A & DISCUSSION

13:00



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2 Minutes reflection

- Time to take in what has been discussed
- Think about 3 questions in regards to the discussion...

Our questions to you:

- How can we shift the participants' focus away from technological change as a main enabler to other types of change (e.g., political, cultural)?
- Backcasting often involves setting long-term visions and goals. How do we balance the need for concrete, short-term actions with the aspiration for the distant future? (This was difficult for the participants)
- Transitioning to a degrowth-oriented society involves significant changes in consumption patterns. How can aspects of visioning and backcasting be “upscaled” or “mainstreamed” to the general audience and population?
- Can these visioning exercises be used independently of a specific context and have a similar effect and outcome (e.g. changing the name of a city)?



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