



THE GOAL HAS TO BE SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES



CONTENTS



JUMP TO
LAST SECTION



JUMP TO
NEXT SECTION



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THE GOAL HAS TO BE SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES

WHAT DOES A TRULY SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLE LOOK LIKE?



MOBILITY



HOME



FOOD

HOW CAN IT BE CONCEIVED IN A RESOURCE-CONSTRAINED FUTURE?



HOW CAN WE INVENT, INNOVATE AND MAINSTREAM SUCH A VISION?



What does a truly sustainable lifestyle look like? How can it be conceived in a resource-constrained future? How can we invent, innovate and mainstream such a vision?

Current levels of consumption are not sustainable; globally we are consuming resources to the equivalent of [1.6 Earths](#), and this consumption is far from equally distributed. With a growing global population, and nearly three billion more people joining the [consuming middle class by 2030](#), pressure on the Earth's resources, ecosystems, economies and societies is only set to increase. Our lifestyles are one of the crucial elements in our ability to create a sustainable society. Companies often overlook this challenge, believing it is beyond their reach – the responsibility of governments or of people themselves, but in reality, all stakeholders have a part to play.

WBCSD President, Peter Bakker, has referred to this as the 'blind spot' of corporate sustainability efforts. Making sustainable lifestyles and wellbeing available to nine billion people within the planetary boundaries will require transformational innovation of products, services and business models. This transformation is brimming with business opportunities.

Current futures exercises tend to remain in the realms of high, macro-level accounts: exploration of the everyday, lifestyle element is often neglected or lacking in [scenario narratives](#). This can lead to an incomplete understanding of how the future is brought about and therefore of the future itself. Trying to imagine future life from the perspective of the individual acknowledges the role of people as agents who actively shape the structures within which they live. The current focus on technological and scientific visions fails to consider the social context (often left implicitly as today's incumbent reality).

However, sustainable lifestyles will almost certainly require social innovation: different social institutions, rules, values and norms. This social aspect must be considered in greater depth if we are to overcome barriers and see how necessary changes can be made and mainstreamed.



CONTENTS



BACK TO TOP



JUMP TO LAST SECTION



JUMP TO NEXT SECTION

Whilst it is important to recognize individuals as actors, we also need to understand that individuals act within a framework of structures, social norms and options provided to them. Business can therefore play a powerful role in enabling more sustainable lifestyles, through either solutions that address sustainability challenges directly, or products and services capable of inspiring a shift in behaviour. By looking to the future, companies can aim to be ahead of people's needs and thus be able to meet and shape them towards increased well-being and sustainability. SC Johnson acknowledged the need to think beyond the trends of consumers in order to instigate more sustainable behaviours. When market research showed that consumers weren't interested in green chemistry, the company decided to shift its product

line to be safer and greener regardless. Over time SC Johnson has been able to educate consumers, creating a dialogue and encouraging lifestyle changes, which have ultimately made the company more trusted and competitive.

Futures can be used to explore in greater depth what a sustainable lifestyle might look like and investigate what that means for everyday life. It can reveal gaps between projected and necessary states, identifying the areas where current practices should be scaled up, where innovation is required and where the greatest impact can be achieved. It could help to ascertain where radical future innovations may face mismatches with existing infrastructure, regulations, habits and aspirations, therefore highlighting some of the complementary measures required

for transformative social and technical progress to succeed. Looking at everyday practices will show how innovations may be adopted and utilized by individuals, how they may impact habits as well as any potential unintended consequences they may cause. Ultimately, the most valuable outcome from these types of investigations will be a better understanding of who might lead and why they may be followed. Identifying successful agents of change will be key in empowering people to experiment with and mainstream sustainable lifestyles.³

³ Neuvonen et al (2014) Low-carbon futures and sustainable lifestyles: A backcasting scenario approach. *Futures*, 58, pp66-76



ABOUT THE VIDEO:

What if... current infrastructure doesn't meet the needs of the future? New York City is rethinking parts of Manhattan's waterfront, showing how new structures could provide flood protection while shaping citizen's lifestyles and the use of common urban spaces.

VIDEO FROM: <https://vimeo.com/175433020>



CONTENTS



BACK TO TOP



JUMP TO LAST SECTION



JUMP TO NEXT SECTION