

Co-designing sufficiency pathways between radical change and broad acceptance

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Research on sustainable futures often asks participants to imagine desirable futures, but this is a demanding task. A 15–20-year sufficiency transition requires participants to move between abstract goals, such as well-being within planetary boundaries, systemic reorganization of housing, mobility, provisioning, governance and technology, and the concrete circumstances of people whose everyday lives differ sharply. For non-specialists, even describing such a future is difficult - sequencing credible steps toward it is harder.

This contribution presents and evaluates a structured co-design method developed to make this task feasible in a short group format, tested in three 90-minute co-design workshops. The method builds on prior research on consumption corridors, 8-minute neighborhoods, sufficiency-oriented housing and mobility transformation, and well-being needs. It combines three elements. First, shared framing translates sufficiency from individual choices and lifestyles into the redesign of provisioning systems: how societies organize access to housing, mobility, care, repair, public space and energy services. Second, transformation cards help participants compose and sequence interventions across governance, infrastructure, culture, technology and finance. Third, empirically derived personas, representing different household lifestyles, regional contexts, carbon footprints and attitudes, are used as stress tests: each pathway must be revised in light of how specific people would experience, resist or benefit from it.

We report findings from a series of co-design workshops with researchers, sustainability practitioners, planners, public administrators and citizens. Despite variation across groups, the pathways show a common structure. Participants rarely treat technology as the main driver of transition. They more often give it a supporting role within pathways led by institutional change, localized provisioning, redistribution and shifts in everyday practices. Many pathways center on neighborhood-scale reorganization, including 8-minute access, cooperative infrastructures, repair and sharing systems, and reduced car-dependency. Participants also make political obstacles explicit, especially lobbying, capital allocation, wealth inequality and institutional lock-in.

The main contribution is methodological. The workshop design creates conditions for participants to move quickly from generic preferences to non-trivial transition pathways with explicit assumptions, sequences, and outcomes. It also makes visible that feasibility and acceptance depend on who is affected, and how fairly benefits, burdens and decision power are distributed. The approach can support transdisciplinary research, public deliberation and policy-oriented pathway design where the challenge goes beyond choosing interventions and includes imagining credible forms of future social organization and transition pathways for reaching them.

Session design:

- 10 minutes framing
- 35 minutes transformation card teamwork
- 15 minutes debrief on results and method transferability
- Maximum 50 participants, groups of 6-8 people